Leadership Upskilling at Bayer: IMD Sprints for Scale, Speed and Impact!
Executive summary

Designing and delivering a new leadership development program for 12,000+ global leaders in less than 15 months – impossible? Not when building on a foundation of successful collaboration results in the co-creation of an innovative online executive learning journey able to deliver scale, speed and impact.

When the Bayer Group realized in 2021 that achieving its strategic objectives would entail a transformation of its performance management culture, it launched a program for senior leaders to develop psychological safety and a coaching mindset as well as to learn how to actively manage performance. To amplify the program’s reach, Bayer approached IMD about one of its existing online programs, hoping to deploy at scale the new, expected behaviors to its line managers across the globe as quickly as possible in an impactful way.

IMD boldly recommended an innovative approach that explored alternative pedagogical methods beyond traditional e-learning. Over the years, IMD had developed a trusted relationship with Bayer and tacit knowledge about the company. Hence, Bayer was prepared to test the concept.

The result of this forward-thinking venture? A custom, blended “Sprint.” In record time, IMD and Bayer co-created an intense, five-module, 15-day leadership journey that seamlessly blended with Bayer’s initial senior leader program and delivered on all three essential dimensions – scale, speed and impact (Figure 1).

The engagement effectively drove impact deeper into the organization through multiple levels and resulted in an estimated annual cost savings of €23 million and ROI of 66%, almost three times its target (Figure 2). This conservative calculation of ROI takes into account all program costs but only the cost savings of the cohort that was studied.

Appendix 1 for IMD’s co-creation approach). In the end, IMD launched 29 weekly Sprints that developed 12,826 leaders, with 83% completing the program over a 10-month period (Figure 1).

The top 5 leadership behaviors adopted 6 months post Sprint (Figure 2: Impact on multiple levels)

- Encourage team members to share their thoughts and ideas
- Give feedback to improve performance
- Delegate with necessary power and freedom to make decisions
- Have courageous conversations
- Communicate the reason or goal behind a particular action or decision

Estimated ROI 66%

Top 5 leadership behaviors

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Estimated monetary impact

- +13% Average increase in leadership behaviors
- +15% Average increase in confidence in applying the leadership activities
- 8.2/10 Average self-reported impact (1=irrelevant, 10=very positive)
- €23 million Annual savings = (Benefit – Cost)
- €790k per cohort X 29 cohorts

Intangible benefits:

- Building trust
- Psychological safety
- Active listening
- Collaboration & networking

Figure 1: Lasting impact using scale and speed

Figure 2: Impact on multiple levels

12,826 leaders

More than 2.5 x original target

5 modules

15 days

Blended journey

100% Developed leaders to

- Create psychological safety
- Shift to coaching mindset
- Actively manage performance

80% Synchronous session attendance

83% Completion rate

29 weekly sprints in 10 months

- Alternating synchronous & asynchronous content
- 4 interaction levels
- Bayer senior leaders as facilitators
- 60 to 90 minutes daily time commitment
- Practical micro assignments
- Integrative assignment

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