The LEGO Group & IMD

Building the Leadership Playground
Executive Summary

In 2017, the LEGO Group’s sales had stalled after more than a decade of strong growth. The challenging external retail environment was expected to continue. Internally there was stagnation stemming from a weakened innovation drive and lack of focused delivery.

Something had to change: The 90-year-old family-owned business needed to empower its people to return to growth. Loren Shuster, Chief People Officer & Head of Corporate Affairs, wanted to completely revamp the company’s complex leadership environment comprising multiple models that had never stuck and were layered upon each other.

In Phase 1, Shuster partnered with IMD to co-create a series of three two-day workshops for a cross-functional Working Group of 15 people also representing all regions and tenures. The group developed an entirely new model based on the company’s strong foundations and beliefs – the Leadership Playground Manifesto. It defined leadership as an act—not a position—in which leaders create the space to energize everybody every day by being more focused, curious and brave. The model spoke directly to the people and the Leadership Playground Manifesto quickly became the third defining document of the LEGO Group, alongside the LEGO Brand® Framework and the LEGO Idea Paper.

Simultaneously, the company spread the Leadership Playground from the middle out through 15 “Playground Builder” events that trained 800 employees to use a specially designed toolset that energized the rest of the organization. There are now 1,800 Playground Builders. Indirectly, the engagement has contributed to driving results; revenue accelerated from single digits to more than 20%, and operating margin recovered to pre-2017 levels.

The partnership between LEGO Group and IMD is ongoing. To prepare for the future, the partners co-created the program Elevate, launched in March 2023, for Panorama and Catalyst alumni, as well as new senior leaders. The Executive Leadership Team (ELT) continues its work with IMD to “get better every day” and deliver on the promise of the Leadership Playground.

The engagement in a nutshell