

British Library

Business challenge: to develop senior leaders within the British Library, helping drive forward organisational change and increase employee engagement.

Background

The British Library is facing a range of competing pressures. It is influenced by the UK Government and is also driven by commercial realities such as increased competition and the fast pace of change surrounding technology and customers' needs. The Library is currently undergoing significant restructuring aimed at reducing costs and increasing efficiency. This will enable it to compete commercially whilst maintaining its historic position as one of the greatest research libraries in the world.

In recent years, the Library has successfully promoted leadership as a continuous developmental journey for its managers. This aimed to help the organisation adapt to the changes and challenges it was facing. A new element was required to supplement the existing programmes in order to specifically align the skills of senior managers in the organisation with the strategic requirements and goals of the British Library. The development was focused on senior managers, as they were considered to be integral in driving forward the delivery of changes needed in the organisation. Additionally, by focusing on the senior management tier, the development and self-awareness they achieved could be cascaded to staff members lower down the organisation.

Solution

OPP® worked closely with the British Library to design and deliver a development programme that would expose participants to leadership challenges that are faced at senior levels in the organisation, in order to test and stretch their current skills. The largest element within this was a series of development centres for senior managers. The development centres were based around a business simulation that was designed to reflect both the organisational culture and the demands of the working environment facing senior leaders at the Library. The simulation centred on a fictional, newly privatised organisation seeking to achieve commercial independence. This was chosen to reflect the culture shift the British Library was facing, whilst being sufficiently different from the British Library to prevent prior experience or knowledge offering an advantage to delegates. The simulation reflected leadership issues including: setting direction and vision for the organisation; working with ambiguity; and managing conflicting stakeholder relationships.

Delegates took on senior management positions in the business simulation and ran the fictional organisation for a day. Following the simulation participants received peer feedback from the other participants about their leadership style and the impact it had on others. OPP consultants also held one-to-one coaching sessions with each manager, in which they discussed that person's leadership style. This drew on observations from the business simulation, the 16PF™ personality questionnaire and a bespoke 360-degree by Design appraisal instrument. This was supplemented by a detailed personal feedback report, which provided the basis for future developmental planning. OPP collated this information at a group level to

provide the British Library with an overview of their senior managers' skills levels in key areas.

Business benefits

The programme has had both individual and organisational benefits. Individually, delegates have been able to take ownership of their own development through increased self-awareness, motivation and drive. This will help them to develop the skills required by the library to meet its future goals. Organisationally, it has promoted an awareness of leadership style and a greater focus on the importance of these behaviours. The group reports have helped the British Library to understand its senior managers' strengths and development needs in more depth. This will directly contribute to strategic decision-making about talent management for the coming years and help to ensure these people are equipped with the skills required to tackle future challenges successfully.

Alistair McIntosh, Organisation Development Manager at the British Library, comments: "While development centres are not unknown in the public sector, they are relatively rare and are a first for the British Library. Slowly but surely they are helping senior managers to appreciate their talents and to provide a framework of support to address their development needs. OPP have played a huge role in making this happen."

For more information about using the 16PF instrument in your organisation for individual, team or leadership development, please contact our Sales Team on +44 (0)1865 404500 or by email at: enquiry@opp.eu.com.