

“We aspire to make Network Rail truly world-class and if we are to do that we want some of the very best people in the world developing all aspects of our business. CHPD is one of the best people in the business.”

Iain Coucher

Chief Executive Officer, Network Rail

CHPD case studies



Network Rail fast-tracks its leadership

Network Rail is right on track as a result of its successful partnership with the Centre *for* High Performance Development.

The challenge

When Network Rail was formed following the dismantlement of RailTrak in 2002, it was quickly recognised that a new organisational leadership was needed.

Iain Coucher, chief executive officer, reflects on the challenges Network Rail faced seven years ago: “We came in and found a whole gamut of leaders and managers who in our opinion were underdeveloped and wanted real leadership and guidance. This gap was a real obstacle to the company moving forward.

“We also had a real problem in the depth of our talent pool. It was very shallow. Normally, we would like to see at least two candidates for every senior management position. In reality, it was the other way around.”

The solution

The Centre *for* High Performance Development was appointed by Network Rail to help make their vision of being world-class a reality.

Rachel Woolf, senior client director for CHPD recalls her first impressions of Network Rail, “They had a very clear strategy and a very clear vision of what they wanted to achieve. By entering into this partnership, we were able to guide, develop and identify their world-class leaders and help them on their path.

“We began by working with their leadership team to really understand what they wanted to achieve. We then turned this thinking into a comprehensive leadership model that would guide them into the future.

At CHPD, we have spent the last thirty years researching and understanding high performance leadership and have been able to identify and validate the behaviours of successful leaders. The leadership framework we designed for Network Rail is based on these behaviours and is now used to inform all leadership development, performance management and talent management across their organisation.”

To assist Network Rail understand the extent of their senior management talent pool, CHPD designed a series of development centres. One hundred and fifty candidates were taken through a two-day business simulation to measure their future performance against the new Network Rail leadership framework.

“The development centre I attended was very informative. It was very good networking with people that I hadn’t met before. But what was most valuable was finding out a lot about myself,” is how one of the candidates described her experience.

Woolf explains: “At the end of a development centre, we sit down with each candidate and talk through the leadership behaviours we observed during the business simulation. We identify the levels of leadership we saw and talk about the implications of these for a person’s performance in their current role but also future ones.

“We also do a number of psychometric tests that give us insight into a person’s leadership preferences and career motivations. This gives us additional insight into how people behave. These discussions are incredibly rewarding for the people involved, as it is a real opportunity for them to explore their leadership strengths but also their limitations and how these can be addressed.”

The results of CHPD development centres also provided validated data on talent pools. Organisations can then assess the performance of individuals against their peers and make decisions about development and promotion, succession planning and recruitment.

Woolf explains: “Our work is supported by a database of thousands of leaders across industries and different countries. We can map an organisation’s leaders against these profiles to understand how strong they are and how they need to develop. We are able to provide data that benchmarks their people against the world’s best.”

The future

Five years on and with an industry award from *Personnel Today* for talent management, Network Rail is on track to becoming a world-class organisation. There have been quantifiable improvements in staff engagement through Q12 surveys. The results of which have surpassed Network Rail expectations.

The transformation of Network Rail is not only a successful leadership story but one of a successful partnership between Network Rail and the Centre *for* High Performance Development.

*This case study is based on a transcript of a conversation between Network Rail, Centre *for* High Performance Development and Warwick University.*

Further information

To speak to one of our consultants about talent management or any other of our leadership solutions, please contact us at info@chpd.com or 020 7940 5120.