



Accenture is a global management consulting, technology services and outsourcing company. It collaborates with its clients to help them become high-performance businesses and governments.

Accenture has undergone vast change following its rebranding and restructuring and since its floatation on the stock market, its performance has been under increasing scrutiny by the City. Through this process of change, the question of how to best assess employees on their suitability to become Senior Executives has been raised. Historically, promotion to Senior Executive was frequently based on networking and self-promotion, rather than a formal assessment. The business recognised that the assessment process needed to be improved.

Mark Robertson, Senior Executive of the UK Insurance Practice looked to tackle the problem when he joined. "I had two primary observations that led me to implement the Development Centres. Every year when discussing promotions to Senior Executive, we didn't know all the candidates. We knew a few who worked in our area, but felt there was a need to know a broader group. Secondly, I felt we had ceased to develop people at senior management level. There were obviously training courses available to them, but fundamentally we weren't developing people to equip them to become Senior Executives. Some people were heavily sponsored, some had very good counsellors and coaches, but it wasn't a systematic form of development as it should be," explains Mark.

The Solution

Mark talked to Hunter Roberts about how to improve its assessment of potential Senior Executives. Susy Roberts, Director at Hunter Roberts, comments: "Accenture wanted to use an external partner because its internal Human Resources function was more specialised in delivering process change, and it particularly values external views and concepts – it's part of the Accenture culture."

Susy adds: "The feedback we've had from Accenture has shown that they chose to work with us because we are commercially-focused as well as specialists in behaviour (rather than purely processes). In addition, Hunter Roberts' consultants are experts in behavioural change, and used to working with Chief Executives and Chief Operating Officers."



The Development Centre

Hunter Roberts felt a Development Centre process would raise the information levels about candidates at an earlier stage, as well as helping employees understand which areas of performance they need to develop to reach Senior Executive level.

Hunter Roberts proposed a two-day Development Centre. The first day would focus on issues such as relating to customers, preparing internal business cases for accepting new projects, working with senior management within clients and liaising with internal colleagues to create sales pitches. This first day was critical because often potential Senior Executives would not have the opportunity to run a new business meeting, for example. Many senior managers would not have an opportunity to experience this prior to being made a Senior Executive. The Development Centre would ensure all candidates have a good understanding of this important Accenture process.

The second day would include coaching skills, particularly around the issue of diversity. Diversity is a particular drive for Accenture – in the past it has not had a high proportion of female Senior Executives, for example. With its new high profile within the City, Accenture has recognised that it needs to focus on and promote diversity. Case studies based on work life balance, and an employee returning from maternity/paternity leave would be used. In addition, commercial case studies would be introduced on day two.

Finally, the Development Centre includes a number of diagnostic tools such as Hay McBer's management and influencing styles and a political analysis tool.

This Development Centre was significantly different to others due to its high ratio of Hunter Roberts' consultants to delegates (1:2). Susy explains: "This allowed significant time for one-to-one sessions and feedback, as well as full support to produce development plans for all delegates.

In addition, the reports on each of the delegates would be highly detailed. We involved existing Senior Executives in the case studies, asking them to role play Chief Executives, Chief Operating Officers and Procurement Specialists.

As well as ensuring that the role plays were realistic and appropriate for Accenture and its culture, it enables the Senior Executives to get to know candidates at an early stage, gathering large amounts of information on them and increasing the effectiveness of future decision making."

Each Development Centre is followed up with a further one-to-one half-day coaching session with a Hunter Roberts consultant. Susy explains: "This additional coaching session ensures the key principles from the Development Centre are fully embedded. In addition, many delegates have questions and concerns about their career development they have felt able to discuss in the group forum of a Development Centre. The coaching session enables a truly open and confidential opportunity for candidates."



Measuring Success

Accenture has been extremely pleased with the Development Centres:

Comments have highlighted that Hunter Roberts has created a forum where direct feedback enables candidates to have open conversations about their performance and careers. This has often been the first opportunity many Accenture employees have to learn about their strengths and areas for development. Delegates have really valued the behavioural feedback and development. The existing project based structure, with limited line management contact, has fed the poor decision making at Senior Executive level, and explains why many decisions are based purely on intuition. Hunter Roberts has enabled delegates to understand their development needs, as well as highlighting what they have to do to improve on these areas.

Accenture has asked Hunter Roberts to run two to three centres every year to maintain a high level of employee development.

A number of Development Centre delegates have requested further coaching support from Hunter Roberts' consultants.

Mark comments: "Senior managers feel that we are investing in them. They leave the Centres with specific actions. They are taking it really seriously."