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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 wider 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, however it wasn't a systematic form of development as it should be," explains Mark.

The solution

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The second day included coaching skills, particularly around the issue of performance. In addition, commercial case studies were introduced on day two.

Finally, the Development Centre included 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 were 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, this degree of involvement enabled the Senior Executives to get to know candidates at an early stage, gathering increased information about them and increasing the effectiveness of future decision making." Each Development Centre was followed up with a one-to-one half-day coaching session with a Hunter Roberts consultant. Susy explains: "This additional coaching session ensured the key principles from the Development Centre are fully embedded. The coaching session ensures an open and confidential opportunity for candidates to discuss and review their development."

Measuring Success

Comments from participants highlighted the benefits of a forum where direct feedback encouraged candidates to have open conversations about their performance and careers. In many cases this seems to have been the first opportunity some Accenture employees have to learn about their strengths and areas for development.

Delegates say they have really valued the behavioural feedback and development received at the development centres. The existing project- based structure, with relatively remote line management contact, has contributed to the quality of decision making at Senior Executive level. Hunter Roberts has enabled delegates to understand their development needs, and has highlighted 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."