

NATO's 'Leadership Journey' refocuses on 'Leading in Turbulent Times'

When top leaders at NATO began "The NATO Leadership Journey" and the associated suite of MCE-facilitated leadership programs in 2008, they confronted a different set of challenges than they face today. Over the years, the program's focus has adapted to the changing environment in which NATO operates.

In 2008, the cornerstone of the journey was "You as a Leader" where people learned about their leadership styles and approaches. The objective was to develop leadership skills among top managers, those who report to NATO ambassadors from the various member countries. They are the equivalent of vice presidents in commercial organizations. They all have years of experience, are international, multi-cultural and professional. The program gave participants the opportunity to acquire key insights about themselves and their leadership styles, update their knowledge with new ideas and themes, and gain an overview of organizational developments within NATO.

Various thematic programs followed: The changing world



and its impact on NATO; leading and innovating in an international public sector organisation; handling complex

change and working across a public sector organisation, to name a few.

Adapting to a changing environment

Since 2008 the world has changed dramatically. The sovereign debt crisis is in the news every day, banking and financial sector problems persist and there are continuing fears of recession in the developed world. In contrast, the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China) continue to flourish albeit at a slightly slower pace than before. The entire global economic system has been 'wounded'. The "Arab Spring" in Northern Africa and citizen demand for reforms in the Gulf Region and in other parts of the world are changing the geo-political landscape in an unprecedented manner. These waves of change have a direct impact on NATO.

The changes in today's global economic and political environment are characterised by:

- The speed of change
- Globalisation and the resulting inter-connectedness between countries
- Unpredictability

Achieving NATO's mission in a volatile environment demands greater:

- Leadership intensity: a deep immersion in the operational details and the outside world
- Leadership agility: flexibility and adaptability of plans and processes
- Doing more with less has also become the mantra for many organisations.

Development of 'Leading in Turbulent Times'

With the foregoing in mind, a May, 2011 workshop with

some of the former participants identified further areas for development in their leadership journey. Their needs were grouped into four linked themes that were given the series title of Leading in Turbulent Times. The themes in the series all built upon the previous workshops.

- **Managing Yourself and Managing Others:** Managing the increasing, changing and often conflicting demands and related stress in periods of crises, turbulence and change. **Objective:** Enable participants to gain the know-how, self-confidence and the necessary support to lead effectively.
- **Making the Most of Structural Changes:** Consolidation, simplification, process changes, etc. during the period of turbulent change.



exercises and discussions about how to deal with the issue in their own roles in NATO. Finally the groups recapped what they had learned for all participants in the workshop. Each session was followed by an extended break to encourage participants to network with each other and share their experiences. The last session each morning was a presentation by one of the NATO senior leaders. The presentation and the issues it raised were discussion topics during lunch.

Woven among the workshop themes were coaching principles, approaches for responding to internal events and how to deal with structural change. Using a format that allocated 70% of the time for group discussion and problem-solving enabled the development of coaching skills and the accumulation of practical, practice-based knowledge. The format also achieved an optimal balance between the quantity of material presented in plenary sessions and the quality of ideas and discussions among participants in their groups.

Objective: Help the leadership understand the strategy, logic and nature of structural change, and how to manage this in order to influence and persuade their stakeholders, particularly the subordinates.

- **Building Agreements in International Organisations with Different Types of Stakeholders:** Political expediency, vested interests, etc.; influencing stakeholders and achieving agreements. **Objective:** How to build the right “influences and coalitions”, which can create space and remove stress for leaders and their teams.
- **Managing your Heterogeneous Workforce:** Nationalities, cultures, age, gender, short term staff, voluntary staff donated by member states, etc. in crises, turbulence and change. **Objective:** Clarify the organisational strategy and change initiatives and influence key stakeholders to build, delegate and motivate our (eclectic) teams to do things differently with the changing times.

The second series began in May 2011 and carried through to 2012. The red thread/unifying theme in the program was again

the participants’ personal style—as assessed by The Platinum Rule—and how to use this to build relationships and to respond effectively to change. To ensure a connected, integrated approach—with distinctive and standalone modules—the lead MCE Senior Associate co-ordinated with other Senior Associates who delivered the respective programs.

Concentrated presentations, discussions and networking

The template for each of the workshops was a one-day highly concentrated workshop that centred on four major themes or critical issues. A typical session began with a short presentation of one of the issues by the MCE Associate. Then, working in groups of four, participants completed

Accommodating differing needs

All the modules were expedient in the short term, so they were delivered with a gap of one or two months between workshops. This approach was designed to bring maximum benefits to those who attended all the programs: they were able to employ the integrated approach quickly. The schedule and format also provided an opportunity to those



who wanted to top up their existing competencies with one or two workshops.

Overall, the style and atmosphere of the workshops was very similar to an executive MBA programme. MCE developed a strong, trusting relationship with the programme sponsors, which made it possible to respond to the organization's changing strategic needs. Participants were exposed to the newest and latest thinking to complement their current situation and to expand their exploration of new ideas. In summary, NATO leaders were able to engage in a strategically transformational conversation facilitated and supported by MCE.

Talk to MCE about Managing Change

Organizations today face change on all fronts – economic, regulatory, and political; stakeholder demands, and access to resources. Consequently, everyone is adjusting to change. The realization of your objectives depends on your people – will they be able to implement change initiatives and achieve mission-critical goals?

If you are a leader at any level, your people look to you for guidance on what needs to be done, and how.

The hard part is getting your people to implement the critical actions in your change initiative, and that is where MCE can help you.

Talk to MCE today about how we can help you manage the communication and talent management issues associated with change management in your organization.

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