



Case Study: boohoo Leadership Development Programme

The Client

boohoo.com is one of the fastest growing online international retailers, based in Manchester and dealing in great value fashion for Generation Y.

Since its conception in 2006, the e-commerce pioneer has experienced astronomic growth going from employing just three members of staff to over 500 people.

The Challenge

When Learning Cog first started working with boohoo.com in 2014, the company's success led to rapid expansion, drawing both from its own ranks and outside of the company. This 54-strong top shelf consisted of managers with varying degrees of experience in leadership management.

Many of them, like Natasha Hackett, boohoo.com's Head of Brand were newly-promoted and had limited or no experience of leading a large team. Natasha took on her new role when the team consisted of three people - a size she did have previous experience of handling - but in no time it had grown to 10. She felt challenged in terms of how little time she had to spare for each of her team members and could not see how to understand everyone's needs properly.

Others had more leadership experience. David Hare, Head of Financial Reporting and Control, had 27 years of work behind him and so ably led his team, which had further sub teams beyond it.

Given his experience and because he had undertaken various management training courses

"It was all relevant. There wasn't a single part where I could say 'this isn't relevant to me'."

over the years with previous employers, David had far more of an understanding of different management styles and leadership psychology than peers, like Natasha.

This melting pot of experience and knowledge in boohoo.com's new band of senior management meant that there was no standard approach to management and no company structure in place to manage staff performance. The need to bring all members of senior management onto the same page with a shared understanding of what good leadership meant was very apparent and what led boohoo.com to Learning Cog.

The Process

Learning Cog invested a significant amount of time understanding boohoo.com, its culture and the challenges it faced as an ever-expanding company. Working closely with the HR manager ahead of putting together a programme, Learning Cog's Ric Hayden was able to understand the areas that needed attention and develop a highly targeted, bespoke programme to specifically deal with boohoo.com's needs and culture.

Together, they devised a Leadership Development programme that would fall in line with boohoo's unique values and therefore engage its managers as much as possible.

The outcome was a bespoke course that focussed on visual learning and there being plenty opportunity for interaction throughout the programme.

An initial 'Insights' process to understand how

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managers then felt about their roles plus a '360 degree' feedback model implemented throughout the course were just two elements of the proposed programme that led to a unanimous buy-in from boohoo.com's key stakeholders.

These well thought-out delivery methods would go on to bust the preconceptions that some of boohoo.com's managers like Natasha had about professional training being 'dry' or disengaging, as experienced in the past. Instead, she praised Ric from Learning Cog for his "open, informal and anecdotal" style of delivery which she said managed to engage even the biggest of characters in the room.

For David, who had already completed a number of leadership programmes before, there was little expectation of learning anything revolutionary from Learning Cog; he simply hoped the process would open up better interaction between managers.

Yet he, too, was pleasantly surprised to find real substance in what Learning Cog taught, with far greater emphasis on the essential human psychology side of leadership than he had ever previously encountered. He also appreciated that training sessions were never too long and were often broken up with group exercises as this meant the course was highly engaging throughout.

The Immediate Benefits

Most useful to Natasha was the Situational Leadership session, which gave her the tools to get a better understanding of her individual members in her team.

Putting her new knowledge to use straight away, Natasha held a workshop with her team following the session and asked everyone to think about the different aspects of their job role and decide how they felt about each one of them in terms of their level of competence.

In subsequent one-to-one sessions, Natasha discovered that there were areas in which individual team members could benefit from more of her support and also areas where she was over-managing them.

Also of real value was the 360 degree feedback. By encouraging constructive feedback from the people being managed, managers were able to get a more rounded opinion of what was working and what perhaps wasn't in each of their teams,

which helped improve self-awareness. For example, after the initial round of 360 feedback, Natasha learnt that there was a perceived lack of social life in her team and so, ever since, she has arranged monthly lunches for them after pay day.

David felt that the course was excellent at teaching the pros and cons of different management styles and at getting people to recognise which style they naturally followed themselves.

The Longer Term Benefits

The insights gained through the Learning Cog programme have had a profound impact on the overall confidence of boohoo.com's managers in leading their teams well and the programme has levelled all 54 of them out in terms of their knowledge-base. David recognises that, for many, the experience has been an 'eye-opener'.

From Natasha's point of view, she has found the 360 profiles, which every member of her team completed on Learning Cog's recommendation, extremely useful. She said: "The 360 profiles represent a long-term tool that I'm using in an effort to be a better team leader every single day.

"The profiles are brilliant because they detail everything I need to know about each individual - from what motivates them at work to how best to communicate with them. Very soon there'll be five new members joining the team and I plan to have them complete their 360 profiles as soon as possible."

What's more, the programme has been considered such a success that boohoo.com has now developed its own in-house training programme called Stepping Into Management for up-and-coming managers, based on the Learning Cog-developed programme and following similar delivery methods.

The scope and success of the Leadership Development Programme was also recognised at The Training Journal Awards, gaining a special mention in the Best Leadership Development Programme category in 2015.

Upon asking whether he would recommend Learning Cog to other organisations, David said: "Oh yes, it was extremely good. I think that often at the most senior level of management in companies, people don't think or care about what their management style is and those people would greatly benefit from having the Learning Cog mirror turned towards them."

