

Story of Impact

Catholic Healthcare Partners

Developing Next-Generation Leaders: Action-Learning Approach

Industry:
Healthcare

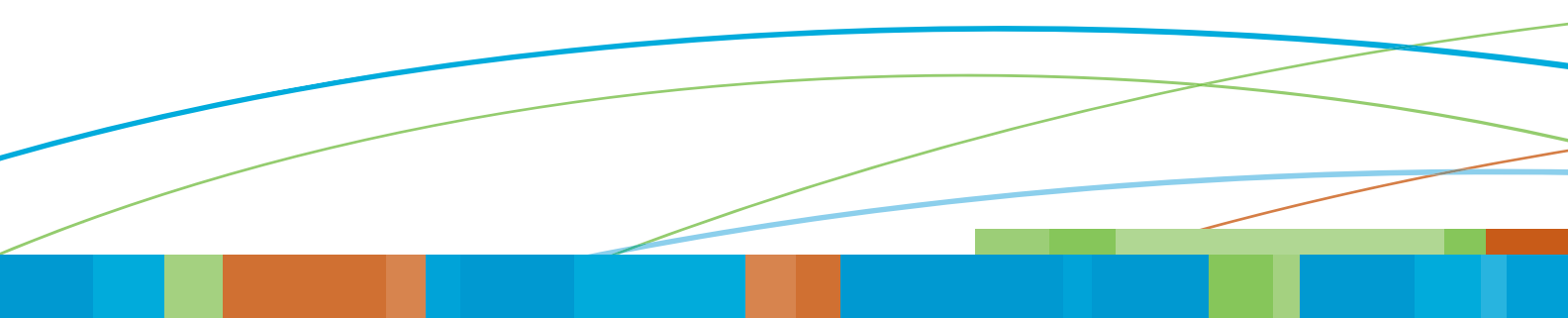
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Six years ago, top executives at Catholic Healthcare Partners (CHP), one of the largest not-for-profit health systems in the U.S.A., were acutely aware that strategic and successful succession planning was crucial for future sustainability. But their efforts ran up against an organizational culture that valued independence and autonomy over the larger organizational mission.

In charting a strategy for ensuring a future generation of leaders, CHP had a vision that went well beyond conventional succession planning. In partnership with the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL®), the organization created a developmental process designed to build a cadre of individuals ready to carry forth the organization's mission and values; able to work across organizational boundaries; and capable of tackling strategic, complex and critical issues.

The CHP Leadership Academy has “delivered results for us – helping us manage change, develop a leadership cadre, and build an organization that grows through continuous learning,” says Jon Abeles, CHP's senior vice president of talent management and diversity. “I think that it is a model program and that key elements can work in other health-care organizations and in other industries.”

THE CHALLENGE

CHP is a religious-based, mission-driven health system comprising 38,000 associates spread throughout 100 corporations in nine regions and five states throughout the Midwest. CHP's history and culture had created a highly independent operating structure and leadership mentality – one that served it well for decades but was preventing the organization from adapting.

CHP needed to find new ways to meet its mission as it expanded, as the number of religious sisters in the organization diminished, and as pressures on healthcare organizations increased. Yet, because the organization had developed over time through various mergers and acquisitions, the mindset of regional management was more competitive than collaborative.

Although it had implemented many efficiencies and systems across the organization, “the idea of looking at talent across the system was still foreign. The instinct at the local level was to develop talent – then protect it,” says Abeles.

“It was clear that to implement succession planning in a meaningful way, we needed to change our vision,” says Abeles. “We had no way to create meaning around systemwide succession planning when our culture was in many ways locally focused.”

THE SOLUTION

The organization identified the need for a state-of-the-art leadership development process that would develop the next generation of leaders at the organization in a way that would encourage and support collaborative, system-wide leadership.

CCL's custom solutions specialists worked with several key contacts including Abeles; Sister Doris Gottemoeller, senior vice president of mission integration; and Mike Connelly, president and CEO.

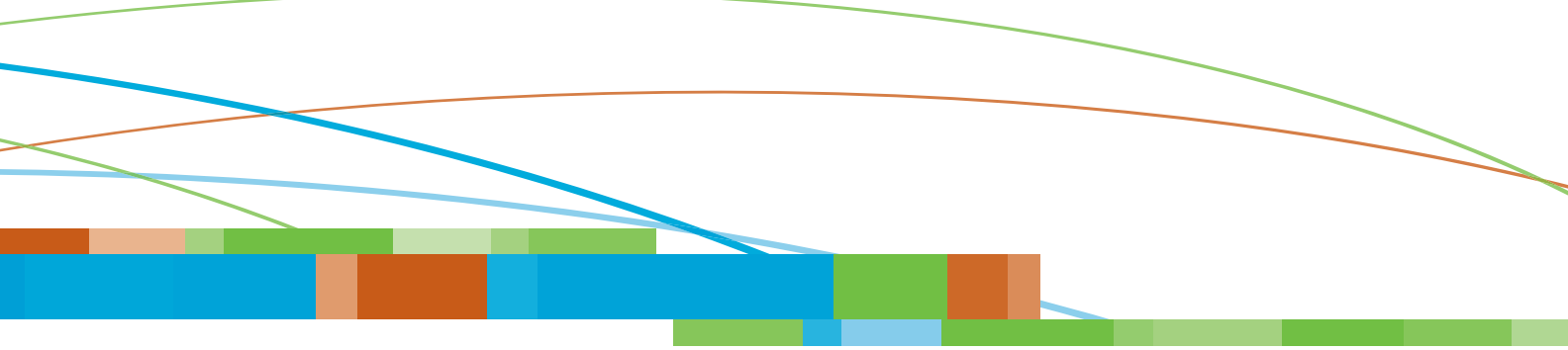
The result was the CHP Leadership Academy, an intensive, experiential 14-month learning and development process for multiple cohorts of 28 high-potential executives from across the different regions of the organization. Participants were selected from among more than 400 regional C-level executives, including chief nursing officers and chief human resources officers; service line leaders; emerging director/vice president-level personnel, and corporate office senior vice presidents.

The Academy was designed to engage participants on many levels: classroom sessions focusing on assessment and development of individual and organizational leadership capacity; team-based action-learning projects related to complex, strategic-level business problems; individual and team coaching; and an extensive evaluation process.

A key component in the planning for the Leadership Academy was to align the organization's strategic priorities with five critical leadership factors needed to meet them: a passion for the mission and values; a commitment to servant leadership; the ability to handle complex mental processes; a bias for action; and the ability to develop others.

The program also focused on developing organizational-level outcomes including a stronger organizational culture; a greater commitment to the organization's mission and values; a deeper pool of leaders grown within the organization; a greater number of promotions from within the organization, indicating retention of good leaders; and more emphasis on innovation.





Just as important as the leadership content was the opportunity for executives to connect with their peers from different regions and functional specialties through action-learning projects. “Our leaders got to know one another, from Scranton to Paducah to Youngstown, and for the first time they saw that they are all smart, all on top of key issues, and that they could and should work together,” Abeles notes.

CCL also included an extensive evaluation process into the design of the Leadership Academy that extended over several years. It explored the effectiveness of the learning and development process, the relevance, execution and impact of the action learning projects; and the overall organizational impact, providing data that helped refine the program in midstream.

OUTCOMES

The positive impact of the Leadership Academy was palpable. The participants began to connect with the overall system and mission of CHP, learned to work across boundaries, and showed an eagerness to tackle strategic, complex and critical issues. And the program set an industry standard, receiving several best practice awards in 2008 from the American Society for Training & Development.

Already viewed as highly skilled, the Academy participants demonstrated improvement on all 18 competencies, most notably in the areas of “seeks and uses feedback,” “risk-taking and innovation,” and “acting systemically.” They also demonstrated significant improvement in their readiness for leadership responsibilities; leadership effectiveness; confidence; ability to work across organizational boundaries; and effectiveness on collaborative projects.

The evaluation demonstrated organizational-level improvement in the ability to work across organizational boundaries and ability to deal with complex challenges since the start of the initiative. Action learning projects have also led to valuable organizational outcomes. CHP saw improvements in clinical effectiveness, patient safety and patient satisfaction as a result of action learning projects focused on the reduction of medical errors, improved performance measures, chronic care, and product standardization, among others.

Another action learning project resulted in a system-wide strategic plan for diversity and inclusion. Progress to date shows continued incremental progress towards increasing diversity in the leadership levels of the organization. The diversity of the strategic leadership team moved from approximately 2.5 percent in 2002 to over 10 percent in 2007 with annual objectives increasing 1 percent per year to 15 percent in 2013. Searches for director-level and above positions with a diverse candidate in the finals increased from 35 percent in 2005 to 45 percent in 2007.

OBJECTIVES

- Identify a pool of high-potential executives with a capacity for higher positions and help them develop their skills in critical leadership areas.
- Build a cadre of leaders committed to carrying on the organization’s mission and values.
- Imbue a greater sense of “systemness” in executives across the different regions of the organization.

OUTCOMES

- Participants gained greater confidence in taking on positions of greater responsibility and visibility.
- Participants developed a deeper connection and commitment to the organization’s mission and values and also to the professional development of people who work for them.
- Participants showed behavioral improvement in all 18 intended developmental areas.
- The development areas showing the most improvement aligned with the five leadership factors CHP considered critical for its leaders.
- Regional organizations improved in their ability to deal with complex challenges; effectiveness; cross-boundary collaboration; work group collaboration; and quality of decision making.
- Participants created and strengthened cross-regional and cross-functional networks, resulting in a deeper understanding of the organization as an interrelated system and provided a venue for the sharing of ideas and best practices.
- Action-learning projects resulted in important organizational-level outcomes, such as a more comprehensive focus on diversity in the workplace and clarity in partnerships with other healthcare facilities.
- Overall, participants advanced 15 key initiatives through the action-learning projects.

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CONCLUSION

By investing in the development of executives across the whole of the organization, CHP sought to gain a pool of people ready to step up to lead in a collaborative, cross-boundary way. And they have succeeded.

Three sessions of the Leadership Academy have been completed; a fourth began in 2008. More than 100 senior executives have participated, and four of CHP's senior vice presidents are graduates of the program. Many more are hospital CEOs and heads of large organizations within the hospitals. Others are gaining experience with expanded responsibility.

"We have created a critical mass of leaders who are connected, collaborative and committed to our mission," says Abeles. "We are working in more system-focused ways and leveraging our strengths in ways we never anticipated."

ACTION LEARNING IMPACT

The Action learning team participants reported learning how to more effectively work in teams. Some of the common insights, lessons learned and key aspects of successful teamwork that emerged from their reports were:

- The importance of creating alignment and generating commitment as part of accomplishing group goals.
- Learning how to enact leadership with a group of peers (as compared to a group of subordinates).
- Understanding team dynamics and strengths.
- Building trust as part of teamwork.
- Learning to understand differing styles as a part of understanding each other.
- Building relationships, which led to more creative processes and more meaningful work.

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