

Developing international leadership talent and stimulating significant culture change

Royal FrieslandCampina

Fran Montague, Willem van der Lee and Lindsey Masson

Fran Montague is based at Ashridge Business School, Aylesbury, United Kingdom.

Willem van der Lee is based at Talent and Leadership, Royal FrieslandCampina, Zwolle, Netherlands.

Lindsey Masson is based at Ashridge Business School, Berkhamsted, United Kingdom.

FrieslandCampina was formed in 2009 by a merger between Friesland Foods and Campina, creating the second largest dairy co-operative in the world with 21,000 employees, 19,000 member dairy farmers, offices in 28 countries and selling to 100 countries worldwide?

At the time of the merger, a co-created strategy development process confirmed an aligned ambition to create the most successful, professional and attractive dairy co-operative for all its stakeholders – from member dairy farmers and employees to customers, consumers and society. This led to the creation of the FrieslandCampina route2020 strategy, uniquely defined by a strong corporate social responsibility agenda, and its climate-neutral growth aspirations throughout the entire chain, “grass to glass”.

Looming as both a threat and an opportunity – if capitalised – was a powerful external change affecting the organisation’s core business. The European Union’s milk quota, which restricts farmers’ milk production quantities to avoid surpluses, is set to be abolished in 2015, at which time FrieslandCampina will be obliged to take all the milk that member farmers produce.

The pressing leadership challenges facing FrieslandCampina were finding profitable new ways to utilise this milk in a home market already saturated with it in its purest form, growing new markets and working closely with dairy farmers and chain partners across the globe.

- Discovering the context in which we operate and which holds the key to future success and growth.
- Awakening all to our responsibility for working in harmony with the environment and meeting the needs of people across the globe.

Meeting these challenges would require innovation, new thinking and high levels of responsiveness across the entire organisation. As part of the route2020 strategy, three clear leadership and organisation development objectives were established to meet these needs:

1. *To fundamentally change the organisation’s culture to strengthen performance and innovation* – To embrace a culture of collaboration, empowerment, personal responsibility, global thinking and less-hierarchical networked ways of working.
2. *To develop strong, internationally mobile leadership capability* – With much of FrieslandCampina’s leadership currently located in The Netherlands, it was critical that



a sustainable global workforce, willing to work across its many international bases, was established.

3. *To develop a truly global mind-set* – To bring the outside in and develop a first-hand appreciation of international marketplaces, cultural differences and the needs of all stakeholders.

Future leaders – the cornerstone

Addressing these challenges, Willem van der Lee, Global Director of Talent & Leadership Development at FrieslandCampina, explains: “We needed to enable our future leaders to take the lead in growing our organisation and shifting our culture - to deeply understand global forces and take senior leadership positions around the world. Developing our talent pipeline swiftly became a priority for us.”

A partnership with Ashridge Business School, in the UK, was formed in 2010 to co-create an initiative which would specifically address these challenges and work at multiple levels of organisation development, culture change, new learning and talent development.

Developing talent for 2020 programmes

The initiative is a fast-track leadership development process for those selected for FrieslandCampina’s talent pool. Each programme takes place over a 9-18 month period. During this time, participating managers experience multiple workplace development opportunities interweaved with major, catalytic leadership events, setting the scene for on-going learning deep-rooted personal growth and change.

The process was designed to be highly experiential and deeply personal, and to both mirror and stimulate the spirit of the new cultural energy. It blends the development of human potential with real-life experiences of the international nature of FrieslandCampina’s business, customers and stakeholders. Furthermore, there is a structured programme of groundwork and workplace challenges throughout the programme which ensures high levels of learning transfer and supports the change process within the leadership events. This process is illustrated in [Figure 1](#).

Reflecting on how the initiative creates change, Lindsey Masson, Executive Director of Corporate Business Development at Ashridge Business School explains: “The foundation underpinning every element is the personal self-awareness, growth and discovery focus. This creates the **responsive base** onto which all the new learning and experiences are able to stick. It changes people at deep and long-lasting levels, enabling an impact greater than the sum of the parts”.

Recognising the need to move quickly, 270 future leaders have, in just 2.5 years, participated in this process since the initiative began in October 2011, as described in [Figure 2](#).

The catalytic experiences and strategic projects

The catalytic experiences ([Figure 1](#), in blue) range from immersive market inquiries in Shanghai and Ho Chi Min City, to working in an orphanage in Vietnam and milking cows at member dairy farms. These anchor the process.

Describing the rationale behind these experiences, Jaap de Vries, Corporate Director Human Resources (HR) at FrieslandCampina explains:

“Emerging markets are a key focus area of our strategy. A powerful way to challenge assumptions about customers and how a market works is to immerse oneself in someone else’s world. The experiences enable managers to re-think, see their products in a new context and understand cultural differences, dietary preferences and trends”.



ASHRIDGE
business school

Figure 1 The FrieslandCampina talent development process



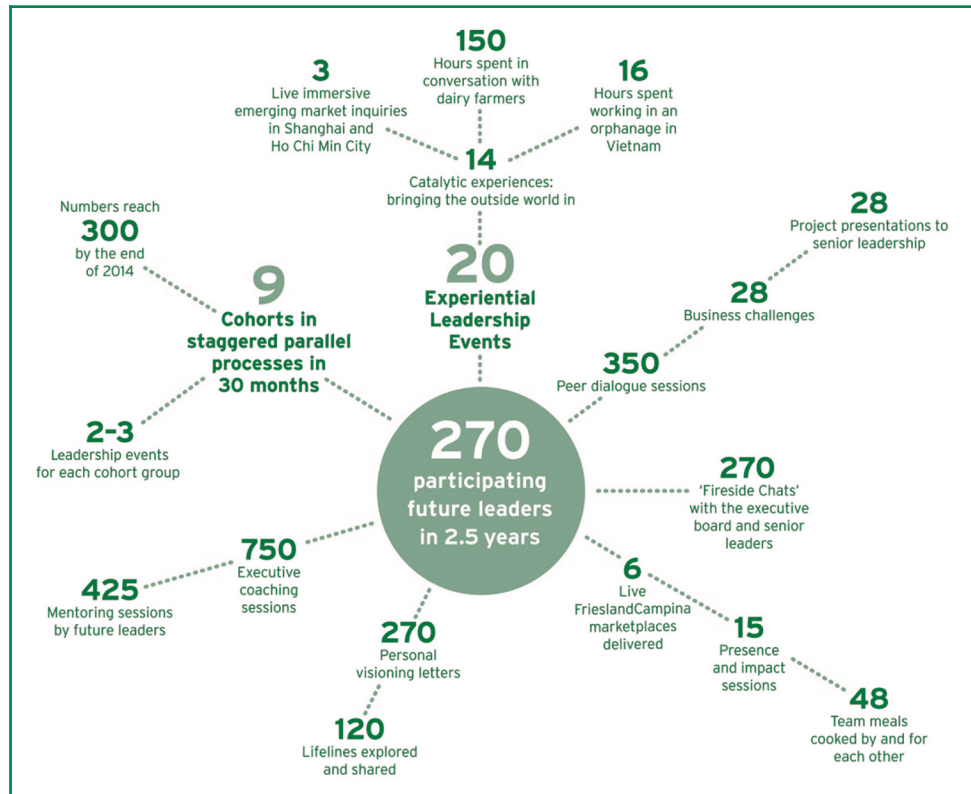
In the business-to-customer (B2C) market inquiries future leaders immerse themselves in experiencing life first-hand, meeting customers and competitors, and talking to consumers. They receive an immediate reality check, breaking down pre-conceived ideas about a markets potential. In one of the inquiries in Vietnam, having met with a local head-teacher and ascertained that the region's largest school was using a competitor's milk product, the group secured a new customer with the school switching its allegiance to FrieslandCampina.

The work in the orphanage for abandoned and disfigured children is particularly moving. It has compelled participants to seek answers to questions around what more they can do to ensure that their work – and the products FrieslandCampina produces – meets needs beyond those immediate and local, and how to ensure this mind-set sits firmly at the heart of their organisation. The experience also strengthens the belief in the goodness and nutritional value of dairy for children and the role FrieslandCampina plays in society and world health.

Strategic challenges throughout the process increase participants' ability to take a more strategic, global view and drive through change. In one project, unexpected findings from research and focus groups in Saudi Arabia revealed that the desire for personal connectivity and expression was manifested with women spending more time online than any other country and having a second mobile device – significantly, both without their husbands' knowledge. This resulted in the identification of a brand-new route to market for infant formula milk in Saudi that takes the form of an online community-based Web site, chat-space, blog and direct-buying channel for mothers.



Figure 2 Snap-shot of volume and range of elements in the process



Talent development for business growth and change

"We set out to enable the talent we have in our organisation to be the change we seek. To create a process which would be an accelerator of change, to achieve our ambition even faster. To change the way we work with each other, create unshakeable leadership capability and secure our long term future – for us, for our member farmers and for our customers." Cees 't Hart, CEO, FrieslandCampina.

This talent development process has been an ambitious and strategically important initiative for FrieslandCampina. It has led to significant changes at the organisation, critical for their future. It has successfully grown their talent pipeline and leadership capability, developing a cadre of talented individuals who have the necessary global mind-set and who are internationally mobile. It has developed future leaders' understanding of their customers, shareholders and teams and of what it takes to work successfully across boundaries to achieve the organisation's goals. It has stimulated culture change by creating multiple networks, bringing to life new ways of working which are non-hierarchical and empowering and enabling future leaders to influence senior leadership, innovate and play their part in addressing the leadership challenges at FrieslandCampina.

Willem van der Lee expands: "Future leaders, for the first time for many, deeply feel their responsibility. They have connected to their future role and its potential impact, and started working out for themselves how they must now develop and grow to meet the challenge. They have also emerged greater advocates of the organisation, our values, members and products".

As the process moves forward, future leaders have continued to be placed in pivotal positions across the organisation and are making vertical career moves, all designed to expand the scope of their responsibilities and fast track them to future leadership roles.

At the time of writing, some 30 months into the programme, some key stand-out talent pipeline facts include:

- 47 per cent of the future leaders have moved into new roles;
- 13 future leaders are already in senior management positions; and
- 50 per cent of participants are undertaking either new assignments or jobs abroad.

The talent development programmes play a critical part in the delivery of FrieslandCampina's strategy and growth ambitions, and in the preparation of the fast-approaching 2015 European milk quota abolishment. They leave the organisation stronger, more innovative, responsive and future-proofed.

Keywords:

Leadership,
Innovation,
Strategy,
Talent management,
Corporate and social
responsibility (CSR)

Comment

This review is of "Talent Development for 2020" by Willem van der Lee (FrieslandCampina), Lindsey Masson and Fran Montague (Ashridge Business School). The paper was an award winner in the Talent Development category of the European Foundation for Management Development's Excellence in Practice Awards in 2014.

Corresponding author

Fran Montague can be contacted at: franmontague72@gmail.com

To purchase reprints of this article please e-mail: reprints@emeraldinsight.com
Or visit our web site for further details: www.emeraldinsight.com/reprints

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.