



## Evolutionary Learning: Howden Management Mastery

*PPS International Limited designed Howden's Management Mastery program—a unique, iterative, blended-learning program. PPS International Limited is a global consulting firm specializing in instructional design, leadership development, assessments and assessment centers, skill-based training, coaching services, executive development and global facilitation.*

*Howden designs, engineers and installs air and gas handling equipment in most industries, particularly in the power generation, petrochemical, mining, steelmaking and cement manufacture sectors.*

### Business Conditions & Business Needs

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While the driving needs of the Management Mastery program may be common to many organizations, the approach Howden took to address their needs was unique. Rather than design a revolutionary program, Howden and their learning partner, PPS International Limited, developed an *evolutionary* program. It was evolutionary because:

- From the outset, Howden recognized that their management audience was at different levels of readiness for learning, had varying skill levels, and differed in the amount of systemic support they would receive to implement the learning on-the-job. To implement a singular learning methodology with a static program would likely leave many managers with unmet needs and poor ROI for the investment of time and budget available.
- Howden managers had little experience with learning methodologies other than classroom sessions—yet the HR team knew that approaches such as individual assessments with debriefing, webinars, e-learning, and on-the-job learning would not only be more efficient, but would also develop managers' confidence in handling change and technology, a necessary aspect to growing as an organization.
- Howden's implementation team is very small—one HR Manager and an ever-changing HR intern, who support the corporate-side of the business in hiring, employee relations, terminations and overall performance management.

Training and development that drives manager capability and organizational culture across the organization is only one aspect of the HR Manager's role.

Because of these constraints, Howden developed the Management Mastery program so that it would evolve—putting more responsibility for learning on participants as they completed phases of the program and requiring higher-degrees of participant skills and 'learning pressure' as they completed each stage of the program.

And, most evolutionary of all, Howden evolved the program's design and learning methodology to grow in use of technology, integration of experiential learning, and on-the-job learning from annual cohort to cohort. So, not only do managers evolve in their skills during their participation in the program—the program evolves as Howden's culture and capabilities expand.

Here is a description of the learning program in its evolutionary phases:



From the descriptive diagram, the Howden Management Mastery program shows evolutionary learning both in the participant experience because performance requirements increase as the participant completes activities (the vertical flow) and in the cohort-to-cohort experience, which utilizes more complex and blended learning methodology (the horizontal flow). In this way, Howden's program achieved the goal of increasing managers' skills and increasing learning capability.

## **Design of the Program**

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### Unique Aspect #1: Ongoing Think Tank:

The Management Mastery program was developed using a "Think Tank" approach—executives (including the President and all of his direct reports), the Talent Management group, potential participants and Howden's consulting vendor (PPS International Limited) met in a series of separate and focused offsite sessions and structured interviews to share best practices, identify needs and link those needs to the culture of the organization. The Think Tank aligned the overall development goals to be served by the Management Mastery program with the specific needs of the business.

Periodically, using this Think Tank approach, members of the original groups still meet annually to revise and refresh any content and structure to the overall programs. This ongoing adaptation of the program has resulted in several key improvements since the program's implementation, including addition of management assessments, an overall team-based simulation and integration of e-learning.

Using the Think Tank approach allows such insight and connection to Howden's business goals, that two years after implementing the Management Mastery program in 2010, the organization identified that managers had a lack of project leadership rigor. To address this need, the Management Mastery program was expanded to include a Management Mastery II program, a second, company-specific and executive sponsored project-based workshop that drives the learning both in the classroom and out.

The Think Tank approach involved senior leaders to such a degree that many sponsored projects for the Management Mastery II program, stepping in to facilitate

during webinars and the workshop—and many even participating in very visible coaching of participants.

In addition, during the analysis portion of program development, Howden reviewed data from many sources to be sure that the content of the program would be relevant and practical to the audience and support business goals. Data was drawn and examined from within the organization:

- Employee engagement surveys,
- Succession planning documents,
- Senior leadership offsite,
- Performance appraisal and development plans, and
- Exit interviews

...in order to determine the most appropriate content for the Management Mastery program.

#### Unique Aspect #2: Using On-the-Spot, Live Demonstrations:

In order to structure and sequence the learning methodology for the program, Howden interviewed potential managers about ways of learning and tolerance for various learning methodologies. This allowed the program designers to pair the content to a variety of learning methods, some of which were very new to Howden leaders.

As an example, most Howden managers were very hands-on and visual learners who desired to learn from those with strong competency, high credibility and with levity. For this reason, when teaching a specific skill in a workshop format, Howden designed in live demonstrations whenever an interpersonal skill was being taught. In this way, managers could see 'real people' (facilitators), using participant-derived content (no prebuilt scenarios), on-the-spot in the classroom—a huge credibility-builder. This is a unique aspect of the Management Mastery program that requires the program facilitators to deeply understand Howden's business, while at the same time know the skills being taught at a true expert level.

### Unique Aspect #3: Evolutionary Blended Learning (in an Organization New To with an Audience Unfamiliar with Learning Technology)

Most managers in the Management Mastery program had never used e-learning or participated in virtually facilitated learning. Many had participated in business-meeting conference calls and a small number had participated in business-focused webinars. At the time of the original implementation of Management Mastery, Howden did not have e-learning available and no distance learning was in place.

Knowing that managers needed to become more comfortable with technology, while at the same time recognizing that too much 'new' methodology could become a learning distraction, Howden crafted a very user-friendly blended learning approach:

- The Management Mastery program was first designed with self-paced, linear videos, and later evolved to include online learning modules as the management audience became more accustomed to and receptive of online learning. This phased approach meant that Howden invested multiple times in program development—an unusual undertaking for a small organization with limited resources for training—but addressed their commitment to the managers who would attend by respecting their learning comfort.
- As a blended, phased learning approach was also new to the participant audience, the learning process was kicked off with a webinar—the major purpose being to allow managers to 'play with' distance learning. During the webinar, participants practice using webinar tools (chatting, polling, annotations, etc.). To address the need for simplicity, Howden created an overall Learning Package, which included every assignment, activity and outcome needed from start to finish in the program. While low-tech, this one-stop package meant that everything the manager needed to navigate the program could be easily found in a hard-copy (and e-copy) document, which appealed to their practical nature.

## Delivery of the Program

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Howden's Management Mastery program was implemented beginning in 2010, with the first iteration of the evolutionary process. Because one of the goals was to create alignment across the organization, helping to integrate merged organizations into One Howden, the Senior Management and Senior Leadership Teams (SMT and SLT) first participated in an independent alignment workshop, then in the full, initial offering of the Management Mastery program. This created visible support for the overall program and ensured that those most senior in the organization could demonstrate the skills and use the technology that was introduced throughout the program.

Later iterations of the program could then be supported with SMT and SLT-members acting as guest speakers during webinars and the summits and as executive sponsors for the Management Mastery II Learning Projects. This addressed many challenges including:

- Creating top-down support for implementation of skills, with coaching happening at every level of the organization.
- Securing visible support from key influencers in the organization for implementing a company-wide program.
- Improving the chances that the program would continue to be funded at a level to both address individual manager needs but also evolve the program as technology availability and manager comfort with different learning methods improved.

Because the Management Mastery program was intended to change and evolve from year-to-year, change management was an important consideration. Howden was concerned that managers would be supporters of the program in the version they went through—not newer, later versions, with methodology unfamiliar to them. In addition, Howden wanted to be sure that managers of earlier versions of the program didn't 'feel left out' of experiences that were added later as the program evolved.

To address these concerns, Howden enlisted managers who participated in earlier versions of the Management Mastery program to be champions of the program through peer coaching. Regardless of which version of the program a manager participated in, as a participant, the manager benefitted—the program addressed their needs as a manager using learning methodology that appealed to them at that point in

time. As the program evolved, managers from earlier cohorts supported sending their direct reports through for this reason alone and to a surprising degree their reactions to the Management Mastery program was consistent from iteration to iteration and cohort to cohort, precisely because of the changes made each year. To date, the program boasts an average overall program rating of 94%.

## **Measurable Benefits**

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The Howden Management Mastery program is five years into its evolution as a best-in-class management development program. Nearly 229 individual managers across all aspects of the business have participated in the various iterations of the program. As a result, Howden has:

- Increased the specific skills of managers attending. Managers now complete a pre and post-self-assessment of skills and anonymous results from the last cohort show a nearly 39% improvement in confidence to use the skills on the job.
- Implemented several significant projects to improve Howden's business culture. As the Management Mastery II program is focused on using real-time business projects, the organization has benefited from having cross-functional teams use just-in-time skills to manage projects that addressed cross-functional business teams for key accounts and implementation of business processes.
- Implemented standard skill processes for topics such as setting clear agreements with staff and handling meetings (both virtual and in-person). These standardized business practices have improved the management culture of Howden and provided a clear expectation and supportive alignment to Howden's leadership competencies.

Participants also note more personal outcomes for them as individuals including:

- Increased confidence to handle performance issues with staff members;
- Greater understanding of how various changes in the Howden organization can be supported through individual manager actions;
- Improved use of time and project management tools, increasing personal productivity;
- Greater senior manager alignment.

## Overall

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Over the five years that Howden has offered the Management Mastery program, they have learned that it is possible, with limited resources, to truly meet their participants 'where they are' and design a program that grows with the needs and abilities of an ever-evolving management population and organization. The initial investment to create the Management Mastery program set the groundwork for its later iterations, which met the needs of the participants given their existing learning tolerance and grew as their comfort with self-paced learning, technology and on-the-job learning advanced.

As the Management Mastery program continues to evolve, Howden foresees:

- A 2016 evolution of the program that will increase the expectation and involvement of participants' managers' in giving pre-program feedback and post-program implementation support. Howden knows that an even greater return on training investment can be achieved if managers of participants provide even more support for skill use on the job. Since all Howden's managers are all 'working managers' with significant responsibilities and projects, the next iteration of the Management Mastery program will need to bridge the divide between lack of available manager time and the best-practice of providing on-the-job support to program participants in the form of coaching. The Think Tank is currently creating options for this for 2016 programs, which launch in early summer.
- Using the Management Mastery program and its evolutionary approach to now bridge the organization-to-organization differences in management style with Howden's parent company, Colfax. In February 2016, plans began to implement the Management Mastery program across Colfax's other companies led by Colfax's version of the development ThinkTank (a business-to-business cross-functional team that spans the US and Mexico and UK).

Howden's Management Mastery program is unique in that it continues to respect the individual learner with learning methodologies that are both familiar and challenging—and each program evolves in what is expected from those participating. This *evolutionary* approach is revolutionary in a field that often chooses the latest-and-greatest learning technology, in spite of its usability and functionality.



Contact us to learn more about how we can help  
with your instructional design project.



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