



How a FMCG business navigates a disruptive market

One minute summary

This soft drinks manufacturer, experiencing significant disruption to their business model, called upon MDV to work closely with them to design a leadership programme. This would be for multiple cohorts of the senior leaders tasked with shaping the business. The objective was to build capacity to navigate their volatile business challenges by thinking, relating and acting in more sophisticated and expansive ways rather than just doing what they had done before. The programme aimed to achieve this by developmental practices used alongside business challenges and embedding learning through peer group work and safe to fail experimentation.

Significant individual and organisational outcomes have been seen over the four years, which include: leaders thinking and responding in different ways when approaching their challenges, increased collaboration and valuing of diverse opinions, and awareness of the company's challenges within a wider environmental system.

"This is a highly professional, well-structured, thought-provoking, fun programme which really challenges you to think in a different way."

Disruption in the soft drinks market

Like many clients, this soft drinks brand first came to MDV Consulting because they were experiencing disruption to their business model. The initial stimulus was regulatory change, but in each of the four years MDV have been working with this organisation, new challenges have emerged, including: sugar tax, addressing plastics use, Brexit-induced labour pinch points, Covid, HGV driver shortages, and CO2 supply disruption. The impacts have been felt across the organisation. A changing external landscape, particularly with regard to sugar and sustainability, led the company's CEO to remark that *"the algorithm is broken"* - the way they had done things in the past required a radical rethink for the future.

MDV collaboratively designed a development programme for the leaders within the company who had responsibility

for shaping the business. Two leadership cohorts have been facilitated over a two-year period and we are now working with the Supply Chain leadership team in a third wave. Transformational change is at the heart, with interventions developing the capabilities of leaders to quickly navigate volatile challenges, with agility, in order to drive business performance.

Our approach

MDV develops leadership to navigate complexity, growing capacity to think, relate and act in more expansive ways.

Research from fields including adult development, leadership, and neuroscience all suggest that the adult capacity for deep change is greater than we ever imagined. As world-leading author Jennifer Garvey-Berger says, *"These fields are not just showing us that it's possible for adults to change, to be able to be more sophisticated, more empathic, more wise, but they are showing us the mechanisms by which the development happens."* This is exactly what we have codified in our series of practices.

The solution

For this organisation, we started with a diagnostic to focus attention on those practices which would target the 'developmental edge'. Each individual's leadership development journey started with a 'vertical assessment' using the Harthill Leadership Development Profile (LDP) combined with the Cognadev Cognitive Process Profile (CPP). These provide measures of an individual's developmental maturity, and insight into the particular ways a person constructs their reality, and thinks about the world around them.

The programme was designed to apply capacity building practices to real-life business issues. The aim was to create positively challenging and supportive learning environments, and experiences at the edge of the individual's discomfort zone. Doing this well, maximises development impact while ensuring the individual will comfortably achieve elevated sense-making from the experience.



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Practices we included in the thinking domain:

- Applying the Cynefin sense-making framework.
- Conducting 'safe to fail' experiments.
- Systems mapping.
- Navigating polarities.

In the relating or interpersonal domain:

- See issues through others' perspectives.
- Consider collaboration versus competition.
- Deal with conflict.

And in the self-management domain:

- Self-awareness.
- Manage their own emotional selves.
- Immunity to change.

A crucial programme inclusion was the opportunity for participants to embed the formalised learning elements through small peer coaching groups. For this, they each selected their own leadership challenge on which to conduct 'safe to fail experiments', so they could apply their learning and gain peer feedback.

Outcomes

Participants have been enthusiastic about the individual and organisational results from their involvement which include:

- Thinking more clearly about how Complicated or Complex a challenge is and the different sorts of responses they should use for each situation.
- Increased collaboration through stronger relationships across the group.
- Greater trust between colleagues, enabling a more open and honest conversation such as having the confidence to say, 'I don't know'.
- Empowering their teams.
- Building the ability to pause, step back and reflect.
- Being more deliberate about what each individual gets involved in.
- Greater clarity about their role of "me as a leader" and their accountability across the business.
- Increased self-awareness.

The programme's value in helping participants think differently and change their day-to-day behaviours is explained by the company's Business Unit Controller:

"The programme challenges the notion that 'the same old practices, or ways of working, will continue to work in the same way...' I found particular value in challenging myself to really understand how complicated or complex issues really are, instead of just applying the same reaction to every situation. Which, having left the programme, is something I still utilise today.

"The programme really challenged me to consider how well I make decisions based on those I collaborate with. It encouraged breaking away from 'group think' and valuing the importance of diverse opinion.

"My leadership focus is now on what I can do to improve the issues and blockages within my organisation's system and to stop looking upward or outward at others."

Their Company Secretary commented on how she believes the programme led to applied learning:

"Useful tools and practices help to consolidate the learnings and provide a framework for ongoing change and development, both for the business and at an individual level."

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