

## **Building leadership 'bench strength' in Middle East**

### *The Situation*

Two major global corporations formed a new joint venture in the chemical industry in the Middle East. The leadership was drawn primarily from high-potential local managers, plus some from central and east Asia. The objective was to increase the overall 'bench strength' of this developing leadership. They must form a highly competent team, able to operate effectively both in leading the home business and as part of the wider international business community.

### *The Analysis*

Discussions with the senior OD staff of the business established that the target population for this development process are mostly in their 30s, and culturally drawn from 'generation Google' – though underpinned by strong foundations of national culture. Most have 5 years' plus leadership experience.

The cultural environment for this intervention was complex. The two joint venture partners come from opposite sides of the globe and with very different traditions and work styles. The start-up must develop a leadership style and culture which honoured both 'parent' heritages, but also has a distinctive character suited to the new business. The context of this start-up, like any in similar circumstances, requires leaders to possess a nuanced political awareness, strong entrepreneurial insight and sophisticated influencing skills with people from a variety of backgrounds.

### *The Solution*

The leaders involved had already been exposed to behavioural skills training and to coaching, using professional actors to provide authentic interactions. What was needed was a broader business situation that would challenge the developing leaders to apply skills in a complex and ambiguous business context.

The decision was made that Richard Smith Associates would develop a 'live' business simulation – an immersive case study setting in which the leaders would participate together in taking a new business forward.

A business start-up context was designed which would require teams to manage upward relationships with multiple equity stakeholders in the business, all having very different agendas. Working in four separate but mutually-dependent teams, the simulation participants would encounter a range of stakeholders, potential clients and potential takeover targets, while addressing internal organizational issues. There would be business opportunities embedded in the context which more astute participants might draw out, creating commercial as well as behavioural learning opportunities.

All roles would be played by actors, carefully briefed to generate a variety of realistic behaviours, and the resulting encounters observed by professional coaches drawn from a major business school. This meant that individual and team reviews the following day, enhanced by feedback videos created by the actors, could offer highly individual learning for all the leaders involved.

Live facilitation of the process, which would last a full day, allowed opportunity for the scenario to respond authentically to decisions made by participants and teams.

### *The Outcomes*

The participants in the first use of this simulation ended the day saying that they had lived through several months of learning in the single day. The client OD team were delighted with the quality of the team and individual feedback, which was rich and personal. It led to clear 'back home' development plans for participants.

Follow-up of this group is planned after three months, and a further use of the simulation is planned later in the year.