

CASE STUDY

**A WINNING FORMULA: ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP
CAPABILITY IN AN F1 MOTOR RACING TEAM**

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Agile Strategy

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A winning formula: adaptive leadership capability in a Formula 1 motor racing team

The challenge and issues

Formula 1 motor-racing teams have traditionally been built around revered experts to whom people readily defer, with decision-making concentrated in a small group of senior managers, or indeed the team principal. In 2014 one such team re-formed with new backing under the more enlightened leadership of an F1 enthusiast and entrepreneur who saw in *The Art of Action* a way of creating a more creative and resilient high-performance culture.

Work began with a series of leading through intent workshops for the top management team. Once its principles were understood and began to be applied, they were reinforced in annual offsites in which a core agenda item was crafting the intent for the year ahead.

Whilst from the outside, the intent for any F1 team might seem obvious, but the intent changed every year, taking account of regulatory change and the competitive landscape. Discussions were detailed and intense, with the result that a common shared understanding was built among the top 20-30 people. This had a profound effect on operations and resource allocation decisions throughout the year.

Further work was done on long-term investments and culture, and every year each department head unpacked the implications of the high-level intent for the next level down until the spirit and practices of leading through intent had penetrated every level of management. Leaders soon reported that decision-making was faster, more consistent, and that innovation was beginning to be bottom-up as well as top-down.

However, the team noticed that many of the more junior people were not willing to accept the autonomy available to them and in extreme cases still expected to be told exactly what to do. They decided to address this.

A first-class ILM accredited management development programme was already underway, so the practices of leading through intent needed to be integrated into it.

The purpose of this next piece of work was to:

- ☑ Develop and implement a programme to equip managers at all levels with the core knowledge, skills and behaviours required to perform effectively as leaders
- ☑ Embed intent-based leadership principles at project and working team level
- ☑ Establish greater consistency in leadership behaviours to reinforce a common leadership culture
- ☑ Find a way to ensure alignment to the team's overall intent was maintained throughout the organisation



I'm very interested in all kind of theories and developments around management culture. The Art of Action teaches lessons from 19th-century military strategy for business today. Each member of the team got that book.

Team Principal & CEO

Solutions

Annual strategy offsites for the senior management team developed a team intent for the year ahead. The outputs from these sessions included a concise expression of goals and the rationale behind them to provide a unifying purpose for the team. This team statement of intent identified strategic priorities from which departments developed their intent statements to be used as direction throughout the organisation. We provided supporting materials, guidance, and feedback on the departmental intent statements as they were developed.

We designed and delivered an ILM accredited management development programme based on Leading Through Intent, piloted the workshop with a group of managers, then incorporated their feedback to ensure it resonated strongly with the target group and was closely integrated it with the team's behavioural framework.

We delivered the workshop module to 100+ managers at focused workshop sessions using experiential content to bring the techniques and behaviours to life and integrated Leading Through Intent into two strategic business-critical digital transformation programs.

We designed a reliable way to validate and measure the impact of Leading Through Intent using the company's existing engagement survey.

The outcomes were:

- A redesigned operating and governance model supporting accountability and empowerment
- Everyone in the company, not just the managers, understood what success looked like
- Decision-making was delegated to the key project teams
- Everyone in the company was aligned to common values and behaviours

Results

Team intent was discussed and developed at every level of leadership. Consequently, senior leaders reported greater strategic alignment and confidence throughout the Team.

For two years running, the team's engagement scores measured by an independently conducted benchmark survey, increased over the previous year baseline to an overall average of 80% against the subset of KPIs agreed in advance as a measure of impact.

In addition, 14 out of 19 important engagement survey scores also exceeded global benchmarks, and the remainder all showed improvement on previous years.

The acid test in motor-racing, however, is not judged by detailed KPIs but whether the development 'makes the car go faster'. The consistent and sustained team results in every season since 2014 evidence that Leading through Intent, combined with other cultural and organisational development initiatives, made a positive impact on team performance.



We validated the impact of Leading Through Intent by looking at individual leader performance reviews including peer leadership ratings. They correlated closely, so we knew immediately that this stuff works!

Senior L&D Manager