

Umicore in-company programme

Entrepreneurs for tomorrow

Managers who work in an international environment – rapidly becoming the norm nowadays – are required to have more and more skills. International growth also brings operational changes in many companies. To respond to this changing business ethos, Umicore has put together a tailor-made course for managers with leadership potential, enlisting Vlerick's expertise to hammer out the details. We spoke to Mark Dolfyn, Umicore's Human Resources Development Manager.

New philosophy

With industrial operations on every continent and 17,000 employees worldwide, Umicore is a top-class international player. The company used to be known as a metal producer, but in recent years it has expanded its core business to include special materials. In 2003 Umicore's international ambitions were given another hefty boost with the acquisition of the German Precious Metal Group. The company's changing business strategy and the focus on internationalisation prompted the Umicore management to develop an international in-company programme for managers with leadership potential. "They are key players when it comes to disseminating the new philosophy," explains Mark Dolfyn. "The new skills and mindset they need to do this, form the basis of the course entitled 'Entrepreneurs for tomorrow',

innovation and entrepreneurship being core elements in our strategy."

International cross-fertilisation

'Entrepreneurs for tomorrow' is a key programme within Umicore and brings together managers from all corners of the globe. "The participants have an average of 5-10 years' experience in the company and already have considerable operational responsibility," comments Dolfyn. "Besides passing on theoretical insights and practical skills, our aim was to stimulate productive interaction between managers from different countries and different business units. The programme also provided the perfect opportunity to bring Umicore's talented staff in touch with senior management. These are things that are not so easy to achieve with our decentralised structure. To underline the internationalisation dimension, we decided to organise the three modules in three different locations. In Belgium this was combined with a meeting with senior management, in China we developed the theme of intercultural management with a visit to a Chinese factory, and in Canada our managers drew inspiration from a visit to our most efficient plant."

Exercise in leadership

With a clear idea in mind, Umicore approached Vlerick. "We've been making use of the School's academic expertise for the past ten years now," explains Dolfyn. "They suggested constructing the programme around three specific areas: business mastery, personal mastery and organisational mastery. All three are inextricably interlinked to help us achieve our business goals." Umicore also had two special requirements. Firstly, the international character of both the programme and the participants demanded an international teaching team and, secondly, the School was to organise the course

together with the American Centre for Sports Psychology, which specialises in leadership skills. Dolfyn looks back on the partnership with a great deal of satisfaction: "Vlerick responded very positively to our demands".

Self-confidence boosted

The whole exercise has been a very constructive experience for the participants. The leadership coaches who attended each session made sure that personal development was a leitmotif in each of the three modules. "The programme is certainly not for free-wheelers," according to Dolfyn. "Each participant had to prepare a specific project beforehand, focusing on one aspect of their current job in which they wanted to make a breakthrough. The project themes, such as strategy, operations and change management, to give just a few examples, were split between the modules in order to explore them in greater depth. Some themes were dealt with by the class as a whole, while others were worked on in small groups. This enabled the participants to focus on practising their coaching skills." The next programme is scheduled to get under way in the autumn. "We don't know for sure how many more times it will be run," adds Dolfyn, "but news about the programme's formidable reputation is spreading like wildfire among potential candidates. Not only are previous participants more than satisfied with the quality of the course material, their self-confidence has also been given an enormous boost and they have been able to lay the foundation for a close-knit network." ■



Mark Dolfyn, HR Development Manager, Umicore