

## Excellence in Practice 2022



DNB / IMD

# Designing for collaboration

**T**he future is co-created – and in the financial services industry, so is the present. Customers demand that service providers offer end-to-end solutions grounded in real-time data, trust, convenience and additional user benefits. A phone in the pocket is all it takes to keep a customer covered for the rest of their financial life. Of course, such solutions can only be developed by cross-functional, customer-centric, highly collaborative teams.

## DNB's Race 4 the future

In mid-2020, at the height of the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Norway's largest bank DNB launched its new corporate strategy, titled RACE 4 THE FUTURE (RACE4TF). The path forward involved picking up the pace of innovation, maintaining a vibrant technology platform, and thinking and acting like a tech company in terms of customer experience, automation, working methodology, new business models, third-party collaboration, use of data and obtaining the right skills mix. Meanwhile, the health crisis accelerated the current trends of digitisation and new ways of working. The only way to deliver on RACE4TF was to pull together as one company. According to Kjerstin Braathen, DNB's Group CEO: "As One DNB, we are stronger than the sum of our functions and business lines. To meet customer expectations, we already work as teams, not as individuals. Our next challenge is to tear down the walls between departments, business units and hierarchies."

RACE4TF put forward three values that would support its execution:

- Curious: continuously learning from one's experiences
- Bold: the conviction that the best ideas and solutions are within reach
- Responsible: proving capable of change. Creating value in a sustainable way.

Making customer experience and technology an integral part of the organisation and embracing its core values meant that DNB had to find new ways to learn and work together. In a tech-driven bank, cross-functional teams – whose members included marketers, data analysts and security specialists – had to operate with speed, agility and richness of customer insight. Collaboration, transparency and sharing needed to become the teams' lifeblood.

## Action learning through simultaneous shadowing, at scale

DNB teamed up with IMD, a business school with whom the group had a strong history of co-designing and delivering tailored and impactful programmes. From the outset, the two partners recognised that *telling* people to collaborate was doomed to failure. Instead, the approach they agreed on was to *design* for collaboration, which was to take place simultaneously and at a robust scale. Thus, DNB and IMD launched 40 small coaching groups in a single, massive learning cohort of 230 leaders. The goal was to accelerate the programme's momentum, but also to ensure that all participants were in step with each other and spoke the same language – which is often a challenge in a cohort-by-cohort approach.





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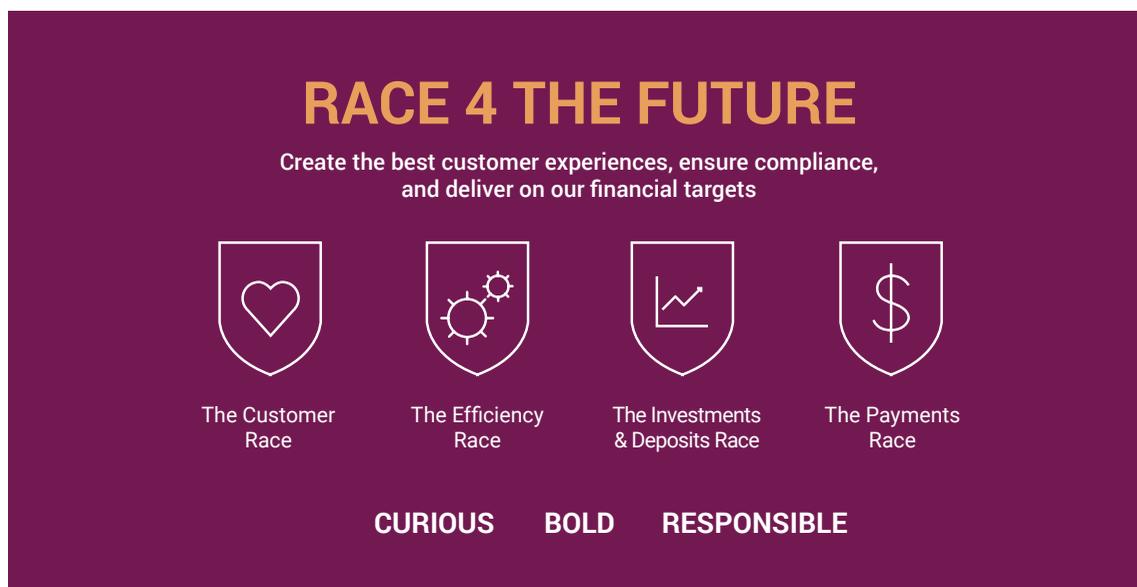


Fig 1

Pair shadowing – a technique of quietly observing, listening and providing feedback to a colleague across business units – was chosen as the programme’s central vehicle of delivery.

Participants shadowed a peer from another department for half a day. Unfamiliarity (with another person’s function) served as a strength, as it yielded insights into patterns of organisational behaviour. Although conducted online rather than face to face, because of COVID-19 restrictions, the exercise was enriched with a trust-building pre-shadowing call as well as subsequent debriefs, shadowing journals and coaching. Ultimately, it empowered learners to tackle four main collaboration barriers:

- Practicing silent listening
- Building empathy for other functions’ challenges
- Freely giving and receiving feedback
- Crafting win-win solutions, rather than zero-sum arrangements.

Combining individuals’ self-awareness of collaboration strengths (“I”) with these pair observations (“You”) and big-picture discussions conducted within larger groups (“We”), DNB and IMD worked to assemble these perspectives into a shared view of One DNB. In this final phase, the partners sought to embed the learnings within the organisational fabric and processes.

#### **Delivering on the collaborative promise of action learning**

According to IMD’s impact survey, administered 11 months after the programme’s completion, 72% of respondents believed that the programme’s organisational impact was high. In the words of Katrine Kalelic, DNB’s SVP of Leadership & Talent Development: “The programme has helped us build a leadership culture that amplifies our energy and potential, all in the service of customers. We are now in it together, as One DNB.”





72%

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To date, the impact has included, first and foremost, the rise of a shared understanding of how I, You and We fit together as One DNB. It has broken down barriers between different functions and business units. It dispelled misconceptions about other functions' roles and work practices. Throughout, the programme stimulated participants to live the values underpinning DNB's RACE4TF strategy:

- **Curious:** asking questions (both of themselves and to peers outside their function); examining how questions are formulated; observing how managers apply different leadership styles in different contexts
- **Bold:** giving and receiving candid feedback, thereby encouraging learning across organisational boundaries; asking for and offering help; piecing together a variety of perspectives
- **Responsible:** recording and absorbing learnings and making sense of them in one's own environment; committing to roadmaps and action plans aimed at process optimisation; modifying behaviours and creating long-term habits for oneself, for the team and for the entire company.

Since the programme's completion, many participants have been going the extra mile: Shadowing a coworker for more than half a day; shadowing more than one colleague; agreeing to shadow on a regular basis; and going for "walks and talks", where possible, to prepare or to debrief. As one of the participants described:

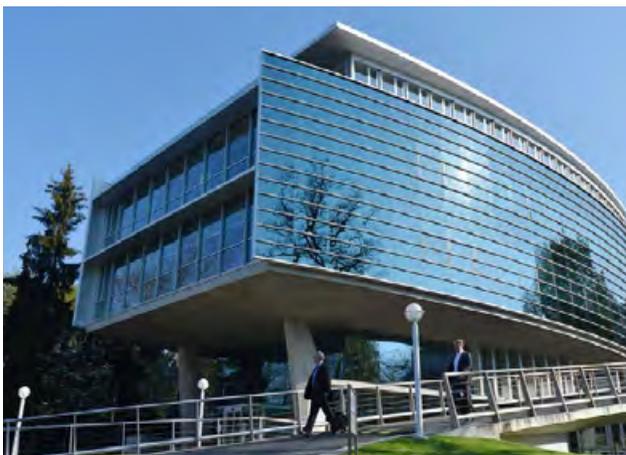


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Level		Focal Point	Learning	Objectives
I		230 Individual leaders	Self-awareness on collaboration habits & routines	Change starts with one; Change starts with ME
YOU		115 Cross-functional pairs	Depth (Insight into a particular function / BU)	Cross-over to another leader's life and return with a fresh perspective; Practice listening; Practice feedback; Generate cross-functional empathy
WE		40 Cross-functional groups	Breadth (Exchange of multiple perspectives)	Identify patterns to barriers in collaboration; Synthesise learnings at a meta - and big-picture organisational level
ONE DNB		Embedding in the organisation	Amplification	Build a culture of collaborative learning

Fig 2

“These colleagues are all from different business units. I can share with them my issues, problems, and thoughts. This will be the group that I can draw on as my personal safe space for the rest of my career with DNB.”

**Lessons learnt**

Action learning creates high impact, but it also comes with risks and tradeoffs. Compared with other learning and development methods, it can be costly and time-consuming. Particularly when executed at scale, as DNB and IMD did, the importance of factors such as a well-thought-out design, systematic feedback, leveraging coaches, and clearly framing the difference between satisfaction and impact becomes enormous. This is because the margin of error in misjudging an audience or making last-minute adjustments is virtually nil.





PHOTO COURTESY DNB / IMD

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To mitigate some of these tradeoffs, it is important that learning providers address issues of real significance to the organisation; secure longer-term commitment from individual leaders as well as from the company; and understand that meaningful change and growth are unlikely to occur without initial pain and resistance. The shadowing technique would never have taken root within the company if one or both of the learning partners had given in to the initial anxiety among participants, accustomed to many years of formal, functional training. Through interventions from the coaching team and individual conversations with each participant, the ambivalence and concerns gradually gave way to a sense of curiosity and excitement about the shadowing method.

Today, 91% of participants see that the programme has strengthened the way they collaborate across DNB, and 86% report that they have applied and transferred the learnings to their own working context. As IMD Professor Ina Toegel says, “DNB made a bold choice by opting for an unconventional learning design. It made the learning journey more challenging but ultimately much more impactful.”

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