

Excellence in Practice 2022



Atos / Harvard Business Publishing

Developing Managers to Lead Confidently Through Transformation

Atos, a global leader in digital transformation, helps its clients navigate through all aspects of digitalisation, including cybersecurity, cloud and high-performance computing, and decarbonisation initiatives.

In 2018, Atos launched a complex dual transformation strategy. The company began transforming its own internal processes and competencies through digital technology while simultaneously guiding customers through the same changes.

Atos recognised that managers are a strategic lever for change and transformation. However, most managers came into the role based on technical skills and had received little to no training on how to lead individuals and teams. As a result, teams generally lacked confidence, avoided risk, and resisted change.

1500

The fully virtual, in-role LIDA programme reached the entire population of approximately 1,500 managers through large, globally mixed cohorts

To overcome these challenges, Atos focused its transformation on two key areas. One, its global workforce needed to rapidly upskill on the most in-demand technical skills. Two, its managerial ranks needed a broader range of leadership competencies than had previously been required.

Managers are a Strategic Lever for Change

Atos partnered with Harvard Business Publishing (HBP) to co-create Leading in the Digital Age (LIDA), a global initiative that dramatically strengthened this population's leadership capabilities. Through development, Atos managers better understood the disruptive environment in which they operate and how to lead strategic initiatives accordingly. They developed the skills to become more consultative partners to their clients, to inspire and motivate diverse individuals and teams, and to improve team collaboration and employee engagement overall.





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Developing Mindset and Skillsets

HBP's best-in-class design approach created a learning experience that addressed Atos' most urgent priorities. A comprehensive needs assessment identified the need to address both mindset and leadership competencies. While culture change was not part of the original scope of the initiative, it emerged as a key theme of the needs analysis.

Empowering managers to evolve the culture of the organisation became a central aspect of LIDA. Specifically, LIDA delivered the tools managers need to embrace a new way of leadership – to become more inspirational, more compassionate, and more engaged with their teams.

Speed and Scale

The fully virtual, in-role LIDA programme reached the entire population of approximately 1,500 managers through large, globally mixed cohorts. To encourage participation in all of its regions, Atos implemented an equitable cost model that made LIDA more affordable to low-cost countries. Between September 2018 – April 2022, eight cohorts of 200 participants each reached leaders representing all functions in 60 countries.

**Leading in the Digital Age**

LIDA unfolded as three virtual modules aligned to Atos' behaviours, strategic plan, and thought leadership.

The three modules – Personal Leadership, Leading Strategy, Inspiring Talent & Teams – were delivered virtually using state-of-the-art learning technologies, with compelling content aligned to Atos, and HBP facilitators.

Managers are extremely pressed for time, so it was critical to keep LIDA content immediately applicable to their roles. LIDA required a total effort of 42 to 48 hours (14 – 16 hours per module) spanning a duration of six to nine months.



The experience was driven by discussion, case discussions, and exercises. Participants committed to “Courageous Contribution,” fully engaging throughout the programme by sharing opinions, encouraging diverse ideas, and respectfully challenging group-think. They completed application exercises and reflections in the flow of work, which helped them to apply the learnings to current challenges. Small group work gave them even greater perspectives on how a lesson applied at Atos.

Top Atos leaders played a central role in LIDA. Two top leaders served as executive sponsors, while senior leaders shared the internal Atos perspective in module sessions. Sessions with Harvard Business School faculty and industry leaders delivered external perspectives.

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At every phase of the journey, the dedicated HBP moderator drew out insights. Whether conducting formal debriefs of simulations or case studies or analysing discussion boards and chat logs, she served as the red thread that helped to maximise the learning.

This approach enabled managers to develop a more strategic mindset. By understanding Atos' strategy and market thought leadership, they improved their decision-making and communications abilities. Through increased self-awareness, these managers became more accountable for their own behaviours and decisions. In turn, they held others more accountable. Through this expanded perspective, they took on a greater responsibility for shaping Atos into a flatter, more caring, agile, and collaborative culture.

Trusted Partnership

The Atos HBP partnership was built on shared values of transparent communication, agile mindset, and commitment to impact discussions.

After each cohort, the Atos HBP team evaluated performance and made design or content changes for the next cohort. From module to module, LIDA was continually refreshed to reflect updates to Atos thought leadership and/or strategy, newly published external thought leadership, and feedback from participants and their managers. This attention to excellence generated the highest engagement rates Atos has ever seen in a virtual programme: 88%. Furthermore, because After Action Reviews were built into the partnership, LIDA did not suffer setbacks during either the pandemic or a CEO change.

**The Impact Exceeded Expectations**

The exceptional results of LIDA are a function of a programme design that clearly defined strategic priorities and delivered outsised impact.

Atos managers developed the leadership capabilities required to lead through digital disruption, impacting their direct reports, their teams, and their clients. At Atos today, alumni are demonstrating more confident, strategic behaviours to lead Atos into the digital future.

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In terms of talent management measures, 23% of LIDA alumni have earned promotions, through the first six cohorts. This change is particularly noteworthy given that LIDA was not a high potential talent programme. Attrition among LIDA alumni is 6 percent as compared to 16.55% organisation-wide. And the gender ratio is 6% more than the overall Atos ratio.

Before embarking on the LIDA journey, each participant identified one or two changes that they needed to make to become the leader that they wanted to be. Nearly three-quarters (74.6%) made behaviour changes in one or both areas.

Managers of participants unanimously felt strongly that LIDA was beneficial and that participants had made progress across the areas addressed by the programme. A majority saw positive behaviour change in how their direct reports were thinking and working.

The quality of participation (89%), attendance (88%) and satisfaction (4.3/5.0) has remained consistent from cohort to cohort, which is a testament to positive awareness of the programme and exceptional relevance.

The Long Game of Culture Change

While the LIDA programme does not take sole credit for wider organisational shifts, it contributed to the improved leadership index through the Great Place to Work survey. Over three years, the global leadership score improved 13 points, with a 10 point improvement in “My manager” scores.

LIDA was conceived as a way to support dual digital transformation. Through its success, it became a key part of Atos’ talent offerings. Because alumni of LIDA were leading and showing up in a different way, LIDA became a core part of the organisation’s talent portfolio.

In addition, the framework and structural topics of LIDA have been applied to other internal leadership and managerial programmes such as ‘Team Leader Curriculum’ for first-time managers.

Culture change is a long-term process. LIDA set in motion a shift in culture that is enabling Atos to succeed through transformation.