Carrefour Coaching Program Aims to Strengthen Company’s Global Competitiveness
Executive Summary

Carrefour is a global retailer, based in France, with almost 12,000 stores in more than 30 countries, including a significant presence across Europe, Latin America, and Asia. It is the second-largest retailer in the world and the largest in Europe. Though the company has been very successful, the competitive landscape for retailers—and especially for large, global retailing companies like Carrefour—is changing rapidly.

E-commerce has become very important, and traditional retailers face a significant competitive threat from pure e-commerce companies, such as Amazon and Alibaba in China. The millennial generation is driving all companies to reconsider how it interacts with customers and how it hires, manages, and develops new employees. Finally, advances in technology and logistics, and changes in manufacturing and sourcing, have created a more dynamic, faster-paced global marketplace.

In 2012, under a new CEO, Carrefour began a corporate turnaround strategy to deliver higher shareholder value. This included shifting investments to growth markets, growing its e-commerce business and reinforcing its multi-format, omnichannel strategy.

To support those strategic shifts, in 2013 the company began increasing its investment in corporate training and development programs. This aligned with Carrefour’s goal to strengthen the constructive, collaborative mindset of employees and increase their ability to change quickly in the face of a dynamic global economy.
Carrefour’s Challenge: Traditional Management Style, New Pressures

Carrefour leaders and managers adhere to a traditional, hierarchical management style, which is reflected by company culture. Employees frequently expect their managers to not only tell them what to do, but to also solve problems and answer questions that arise during the course of business. Even very tactical decisions, such as how to display goods in its stores, are often made at high levels in the company.

This hierarchical culture has created challenges for the company, including:

- Managers and leaders aren’t always able to take advantage of ideas or feedback from frontline employees. As a result, they aren’t able to fully realize the value of those employees.
- Decision making can take a long time, as information and decisions must move up the company’s organizational chart and then down again. Slow decision-making can make the company less competitive in a fast-changing marketplace.
- Managers may spend more time addressing matters that their direct reports are able to handle just as well, or perhaps better. They may spend less time on more strategic priorities.
- Millennial employees often don’t appreciate the company’s hierarchical style, leading to increased worker dissatisfaction and higher turn-over rates among the ranks of young employees. This includes the cohort that will become the next generation of corporate leadership. This style is not motivating employees and is not preventing employees’ dissatisfaction and higher turn-over rates.

An internal survey also found that Carrefour’s managers were not performing well in terms of people development.

Carrefour’s corporate culture and management style, with its focus on hierarchy and its almost parental attitude toward employees, is a prototypically French trait. Among other things, this culture has helped the company attract and retain a very loyal, engaged workforce. However, as competitive pressures have increased, the company realized it needed to find ways to fully access ideas, talent, and energy from all employees.

Despite its traditional culture, Carrefour has proven very adept at adapting to cultures in other countries. The company has successfully expanded into other parts of Europe, Latin America, and Asia. This suggests that Carrefour’s culture, though traditional, is also capable of changing to meet new marketplace demands.
The Solution: Coaching for Development

Carrefour executives decided that a key initiative was to find ways to solicit more input from employees and teach employees to make more decisions on their own.

Because of Carrefour’s traditional top-down approach, company leaders knew that any culture change would also have to come from the top down. That is, leaders and managers needed to learn how to manage people in different ways, and they needed to be able to model those practices for direct reports to ensure that a change in approach spread throughout the company.

The solution: Training managers in coaching skills.

This realization led to the creation of Carrefour’s Coaching for Development (CFD) program, as part of its Université Carrefour. The goal of the program was to train managers in coaching skills so they could then apply those skills to their direct reports.

Carrefour turned to the Center for Creative Leadership to be its training and development partner in the new program. Given its decades of experience and global prominence, CCL was a logical and highly credible choice. Its reputation would help company leaders and managers accept coaching, even when it ran counter to their decades of individual management experience.

In addition, CCL was able to provide facilitators with materials (such as assessments) in most of the languages used by Carrefour managers—English and French, of course, but also Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Chinese, and potentially other languages.

At Carrefour’s request, CCL developed the 4½-day CFD program.

Before participants arrive, they complete a 360 assessment and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). During the first day, participants get to know one another, learn some of the research about how leaders develop and grow, and learn about the MBTI.
During the second day, coaches arrive so the group can be broken into smaller subgroups. Frequently, larger group training was conducted in English, but smaller group sessions were facilitated in the native language of the group members—French, Spanish, Italian, or another language.

During the third day, they learn about the 360 assessment and managers are introduced to the RACSR model of coaching: relationship, assessment, challenge, support, results. They get a chance to practice assessment with a coach and learn how to leverage MBTI.

During day four, participants start to put all the content together. They learn about the coaching continuum—from short-term performance to long-term development—and how to move along that continuum. They also learn to be more comfortable asking questions rather than delivering answers.

On the last day they provide feedback to one another, develop action plans, and use each other as consultants to develop better, more specific plans.

After returning to work, participants also have three hours of follow-up coaching they can use in the months following the CFD program. The coaching allows participants to address challenges they might encounter in their workplaces as they work to implement what they’ve learned.

After nearly three years, a total of 122 managers spread across seven cohorts have gone through the program. During those first seven cohorts, CFD was delivered at Sophia Antipolis, a leading European technology park in Nice, one of France’s most dynamic and innovative cities. In the fall of 2016, a CFD program was delivered in China to executives there, the first such program delivered in a Carrefour regional office instead of at its corporate offices.
CCL Coaching Framework

**Assessment**
Creates Awareness
Evokes Discovery and Insight

**Support**
Listens for Understanding
Facilitates Engagement

**Relationship**
Establishes Boundaries
Builds Trust

**Challenge**
Challenges Thinking and Assumptions
Promotes Practice

**Results**
Sets Goals

**Relationship**
Sets Goals
Establishes Boundaries
Builds Trust
When I returned from this training, I was also equipped with a lot of useful “small” tools for day-by-day activities. In particular, I prepared the performance appraisals of four of my direct reports with a tool we used during the training for this purpose. When I had the appraisal meetings, it went very well: For the first time I succeeded staying on schedule (before, it took me longer) and my direct reports were very impressed.

If I were to give advice for those who are tempted to live this unique experience, I would say “Go for it, play the game, and you will learn a lot in a very short period of time.” The feedback from your peers is so rich and so useful for yourself and for your colleagues. It will help you developing and achieving results in a much more constructive, efficient, and pleasant way.

[It was] simply a great experience that helped me better understand the priorities in our daily work, better understand our people and ourselves, our points of strength, and weakness to better lead our teams and be proud of ourselves . . . Moreover, this is a program where you feel the Carrefour International essence, where exchanging and networking can allow all of us to become stronger in terms of company identity.

Additional Participant Comments

To learn more about this topic or the Center for Creative Leadership's programs and products, please contact our Client Services team.

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