

Human Resource Development

Case 01

A great place to grow

A culture of speed and agility enables French food company Danone to stay ahead of the competition in fast-changing markets. To achieve this, the company believes in breaking the traditional barriers to business and empowering employees with the freedom to act.

"We are not driven by processes. Our people are always the first consideration. Decisions do not come from the top, allowing each level the opportunity to take responsibility," says Cecile Diversy, VP Human Resource Dairy, Danone Asia Pacific, Middle East & South Africa. The various country business units in Danone are autonomous, empowered to make decisions and share their best practices.

The food giant's main business lines are centred on four areas: dairy, water, ¹early life nutrition, and ²medical nutrition. Attracting and developing talent across these different business lines is one of the key people challenges faced by company. "For example, water is a long shelf-life product whereas a dairy product lasts two weeks. So this creates very different ways of working for the different business units," Diversy explains.

These different styles of working created inefficiencies and control issues that were hampering the company's growth. To address these challenges, Danone embarked on a transformation process to create better synergies in the organisation. It conducted reviews with its business leaders and interviewed people both within and outside of Danone. An important part of this process was both leaders and employees being jointly involved in defining their future actions and directions, says Diversy.

The process also led to the development of ^{people know what they do} Danone's own brand of leadership, expressed through the acronym CODE : Committed, Open, 'Doer', and Empowered. The company hopes that each of its employees will embody these leadership attributes throughout their careers.

Developer of talents

Danone identifies and motivates employees through a variety of training program. The Bo Le program is one such initiative. Named after the legendary god of horses in Chinese mythology, who was known to pick talented horses who can run fast, the program represents Danone's own drive to be a good judge and developer of talents.

One of the aims of the Bo Le program is to develop a strong Asian talent pool specifically, as the company is expanding into high-growth markets in the region, says Diversy.

She cites the example of a marketing talent in Danone's China office who was groomed to become a General Manager in another Country Business Unit. "We gave her a career path where she took on regional roles in marketing across different business lines. Three years later, she is

now the General Manager of our Malaysian office."

think about the
term life & career
↓
career both

Another Singaporean employee based in Thailand was sent to the Spanish office for two years as it was the best place to pick up high-level marketing skills. Currently back in Asia, he is now working for Danone's Indonesia business. "The best way to have insights about yourself is when you go outside of your own culture and expose yourself to different ways of working," says Diversy. She adds that overseas exposure also makes employees more creative and enables them to think outside the box so that they can bring new ideas and better solutions back to their home countries.

Corporate University

The Danone Learning Campus is a "travelling" corporate university that offers learning and networking opportunities to staff from all country business units and functions. Danone's Asia-Pacific offices host three regional campuses a year in countries including China, Indonesia and Thailand. Each campus runs for a week and welcomes 300 employees from various country business units.

The main aim of these regional campuses is to serve as a platform where employees can share and support mobilization and transformation around Danone's strategic goals. Participants attend plenary sessions, group learning parties, training seminars, Q&A sessions with top management, and networking events. Course content is determined by the demands of the participants' individual development plans. Facilitators go through these before each programme to determine the top 18 areas across each cohort, says Diversy.

Danone's Learning Campus is delivered by both external and internal facilitators. The latter are experienced full-time employees. "Top managers have a key role in developing their people. We are very lucky to have managers who are extremely engaged and passionate about sharing their experiences," Diversy says. Internal facilitators are also more in tune to organisational challenges and able to conduct more meaningful sharing sessions.

Life & Diversity
More than 20 nationalities are represented at Danone's Campus events. This makes it an ideal platform not just for competency building but also to build a cohesive company culture, says Diversy.

New generation leadership

While Danone has been experiencing double-digit growth in Asia, it has observed skills gaps among some of its local leadership. To address this concern, it invited high-potential employees to participate in its New Gen program, which focuses on leadership capability building. This program was initially intended for Asia only but has since been rolled out globally.

The six-month long program is divided into two modules. The first looks at areas such as finance, strategy and leadership. The second module requires employees to participate in a business immersion project with colleagues from a different country business unit, as well as a social project. The latter requires employees to working on something that has both economic and social value, says Diversy. "For example, our aqua business produces a lot of waste. In Indonesia, employees work together with waste-pickers and look at ways to better their business,

such as how to split a used plastic bottle and get the most value from each of its components.”

According to Diversy, employees are very proud to be involved in projects like these. “It gives them a sense of purpose in the company that they are working at.”

Building communities

Danone is also bringing employees together through an internal social network. Here, employees can create their own communities based on their interests and start discussions. Diversy says that this has proven to be more effective than email threads as it facilitates continuous discussions where everyone sees the latest updates. Employees are also more easily connected to their colleagues across the globe. As more and more Generation Y staff enter the workforce, social media is becoming the most natural way to communicate, she adds.

In the near future, Danone also hope to create learning communities on social media so that employees can exchange best practices.

At a glance

Total number of employees: 150 in the Singapore regional office, including the R&D centre.
Some 25,000 in the Asia Pacific.

Size of HR: team: 10

Key HR focus areas: Talent attraction, leadership development, coaching for retention.

1.

Critically analyze the ‘Corporate University’ process of Danone as described in the case. Do you think it is applicable in a company like ADNOC/AADC/Al-Ain Municipality/ Al-Futtaim in UAE?

2.

Comment on the ‘New Generation leadership’ initiative of Danone as described in the case. Justify Danone’s effort to build a pool of talented business leaders.

Discipline Knowledge

Category	Excellent(4)	Proficient(3)	Needs Improvement(2)	Unacceptable(1)
Knowledge Breadth ~~~~~	Displays exceptionally broad knowledge of DISCIPLINE topics	Displays relatively broad knowledge of DISCIPLINE topics	Displays limited range in knowledge of DISCIPLINE topics	Displays inferior range in knowledge of DISCIPLINE topics
Knowledge Depth ~~~~~	Displays exceptionally 'deep' knowledge of DISCIPLINE topics	Displays relatively 'deep' knowledge of DISCIPLINE topics	Displays limited depth of knowledge of DISCIPLINE topics	Displays surface knowledge of DISCIPLINE topics
DISCIPLINE Knowledge Integration	Displays exceptional integration of DISCIPLINE knowledge areas	Displays relatively good integration of DISCIPLINE knowledge areas	Displays limited integration of DISCIPLINE knowledge areas	Displays little or no integration of DISCIPLINE knowledge areas
DISCIPLINE/Business Knowledge Integration	Displays exceptional connection of DISCIPLINE knowledge with general business knowledge	Displays relatively good connection of DISCIPLINE knowledge with general business knowledge	Displays difficulty in making connections of DISCIPLINE knowledge with general business knowledge	Displays little or no ability in making connections between DISCIPLINE knowledge and general business knowledge
Knowledge Communication	Communicates general and integrated knowledge in an exceptional manner	Communicates general and integrated knowledge in a relatively good manner	Communicates general and integrated knowledge in a limited manner	Communicates general and integrated knowledge poorly