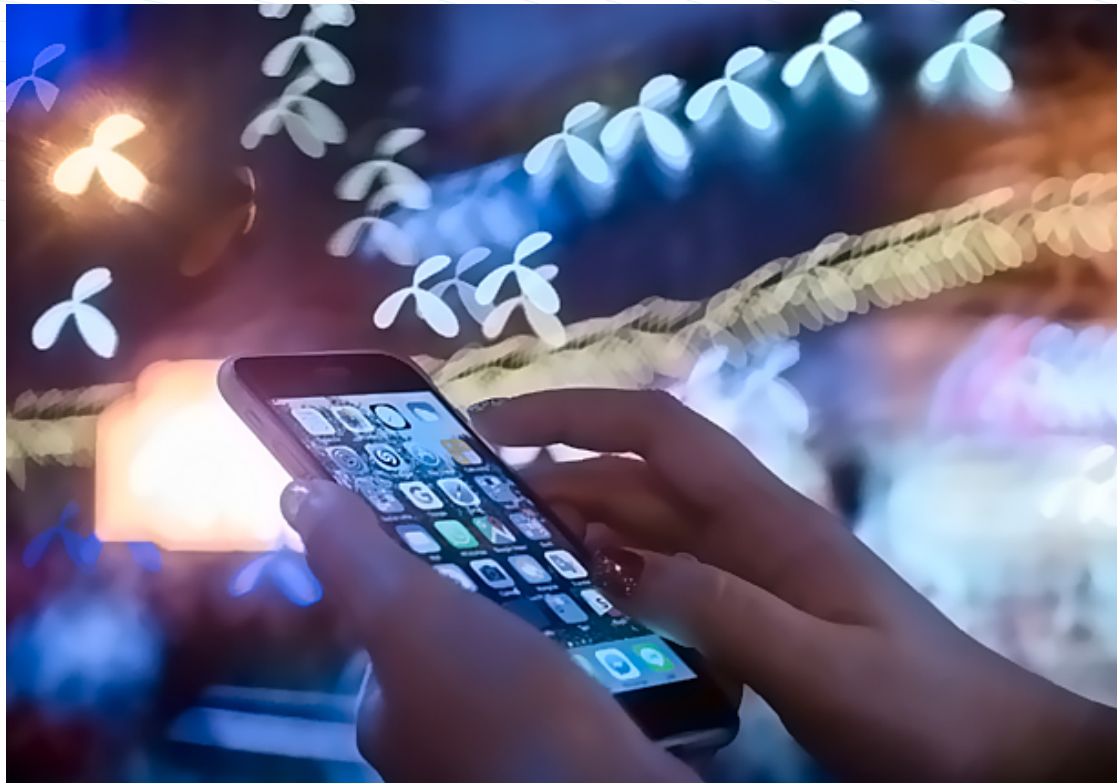


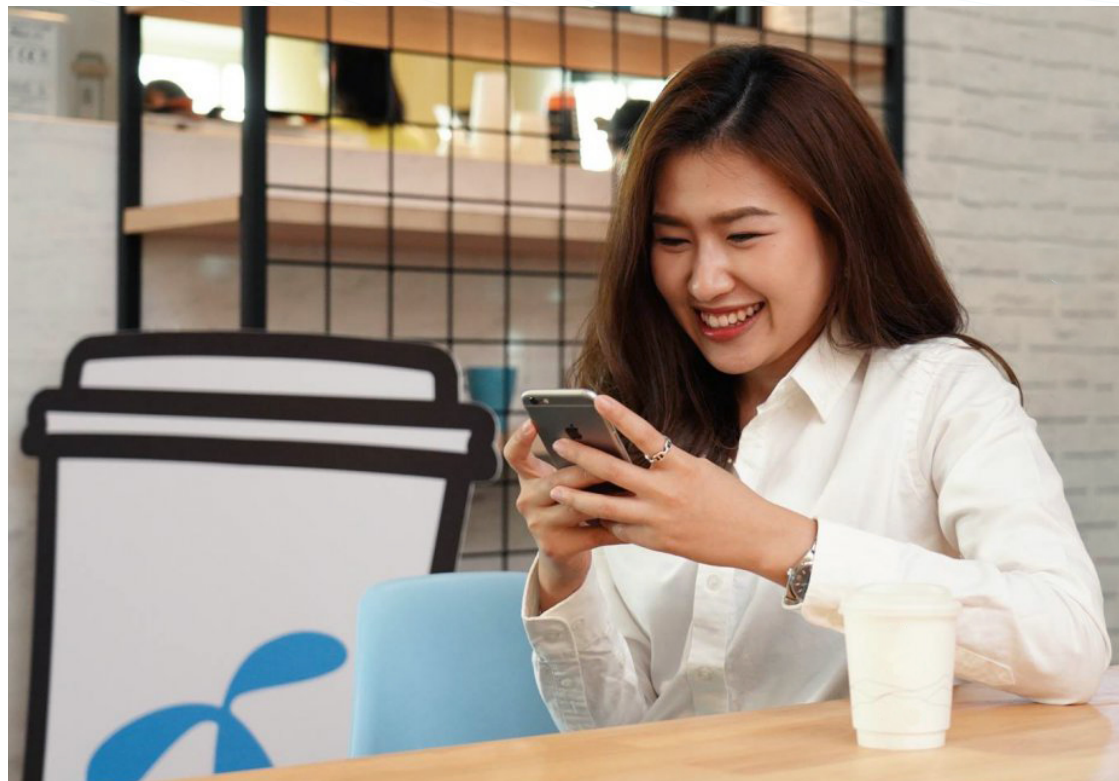
# DTAC & IMD

DEEP CULTURAL CHANGE  
JOURNEYS FOR SENIOR  
INTACT TEAMS



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Total words: 3,357

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

By 2019 dtac, the third largest cellphone operator in Thailand, was beginning to see results from the strategic turnaround it had started the year before. But much remained to be done regarding the culture of the organization to match the strategy. The group needed to shed its command-and-control hierarchical culture and transform itself into an agile enterprise in which employees across the entire company felt empowered to question the status quo and provide fast solutions in response to rapidly changing market conditions.

dtac partnered with IMD to develop and implement a set of highly individualized cultural change journeys each lasting 3 to 4 months for each of the 46 extended management committee (EMC) members and his or her intact team of 5 to 8 people. The objective of each journey was for the EMC members to become more participative and consultative with their intact teams, and for intact team members to step in and become more assertive and enabled leaders. For the first 10 EMC members and their teams, the entire engagement was executed by Singapore-based IMD coaches who flew to Bangkok every 7 to 10 days to hold deep-coaching engagements with the teams. Because every team had a very different starting point and different set of needs, every intact team journey was different. However, all teams followed the same process of trying out new behaviors in a safe coaching space, trying to apply them throughout the week, and then debriefing successes or failures the next week and then try again until real behavioral change happened and became permanent.



Coaches constantly got together to support each other, and examined similarities in their journeys to create a manual that others could use to undertake these highly personalized intact team journeys.

This manual became the basis for the next 10 individualized journeys for EMC members and their intact teams which was executed by the same Singapore-based IMD coaches who were this time shadowed by Bangkok-based dtac-chosen coaches. This allowed IMD coaches to undertake a train-the-trainer program as they were working with dtac executives. After that, Bangkok-based coaches began to execute the next set of journeys on their own.

This continuous learning and application cycle led to significant positive changes in the leadership behaviors of individuals and teams and increased their effectiveness in collaborating across the organization. Although the journey had to be suspended because of COVID-19, IMD and dtac pivoted the experience to a Zoom-based coach-led journey, this time focusing on the eight members of dtac's top management team.

# INTRODUCTION

In 2018, dtac launched a turnaround aimed at regaining the ground that it had lost to aggressive competitors in the Thai mobile telecoms market. As part of this, it launched a three-phase effort to transform the company culture (**Fig. 1**). By mid-2019, it had completed the first two phases – to listen to and gain the trust of its employees and to mobilize them towards a common vision of the firm's future. To launch the third phase, which sought to empower its workforce, dtac partnered with IMD to design and roll out individualized deep cultural change journeys for its 46 EMC members and their intact teams.

1

## Listen and Gain Trust

- Openly share challenges
- Clarify company values
- Set expected behavior

2

## Mobilize

- Own the challenges
- Create a common belief in success
- Give proof points
- Set the right incentives

3

## Empower

- Change the way we work
- Design end-to-end experiences
- Frontline empowerment

**Fig. 1:** Transforming the firm's culture

## ABOUT DTAC

dtac is Thailand's third largest mobile telecoms service provider. Headquartered in Bangkok, it has 3,400 employees and is listed on the Stock Exchange of Thailand. Key shareholders include Telenor and Thailand's Bencharongkul family. The company's turnover in 2020 was THB 78.8 billion (€2.2 billion).

## ABOUT IMD

The Institute for Management Development (IMD) is an independent academic institution with Swiss roots and global reach, founded 75 years ago by business leaders for business leaders. Since its creation, IMD has been a pioneering force in developing leaders who transform organizations and contribute to society. Based in Lausanne (Switzerland) and Singapore, IMD has been ranked in the Top 3 of the annual FT Executive Education Global Ranking for the last nine consecutive years and in the top five for 17 consecutive years. IMD's custom programs are co-created with selected companies to help them build new capabilities and address their most significant business challenges.



# THE CHALLENGE



## BEGINNING THE TRANSFORMATION

When Alexandra Reich took charge as dtac's CEO in August 2018, she faced a challenging situation. The company had lost ground in the Thai market because of network issues and intense competition. Alexandra moved quickly to turn the situation around: dtac resolved its network issues by investing in new spectra and rolling out additional base stations, then began competing more actively. However, much remained to be done regarding the culture of the organization. The group needed to shed its hierarchical culture and transform itself into an agile enterprise in which employees felt empowered to question the status quo and provide fast solutions in response to rapidly changing market conditions.

## TRANSFORMING DTAC'S CULTURE

The transformation of dtac's culture was an integral part of its turnaround and was implemented in three phases. Alexandra got the ball rolling by spending her first few weeks as CEO having one-on-one conversations with 300-400 of dtac's

employees to gain a better understanding of the issues the company faced and to gain their trust. On the basis of these interviews, she created a common narrative to ensure the entire workforce understood and stood behind the turnaround strategy. By mid-2019, she felt that this had been achieved. She then sought to empower employees so that they could respond rapidly to market changes. She quickly realized that a fundamental shift was required from a traditional hierarchical top-down culture to one of empowerment, taking responsibility for results and constantly seeking better ways to execute. As Alexandra put it:



*By talking to my employees, I realized the wealth of knowledge and ideas that we had. But these transformative ideas required support, structure and encouragement to actively impact the company. We needed to break silos and hierarchy, to be faster in decision making, to get closer to our customers, and to develop better solutions for their needs.*

## IDENTIFYING THE OBJECTIVES FOR THE CULTURAL CHANGE JOURNEY

Nardrerdee Arj-Harnwongse, dtac's Chief People Officer, led a psychometric assessment of its top 154 leaders in mid-2019, which revealed that they were more likely to use a directive and delegative leadership style than a participative and consultative one (**Fig. 2**). Leaders tended to tell people what to do and were less likely to ask questions, challenge their teams to share ideas or involve them in problem solving or decision making.

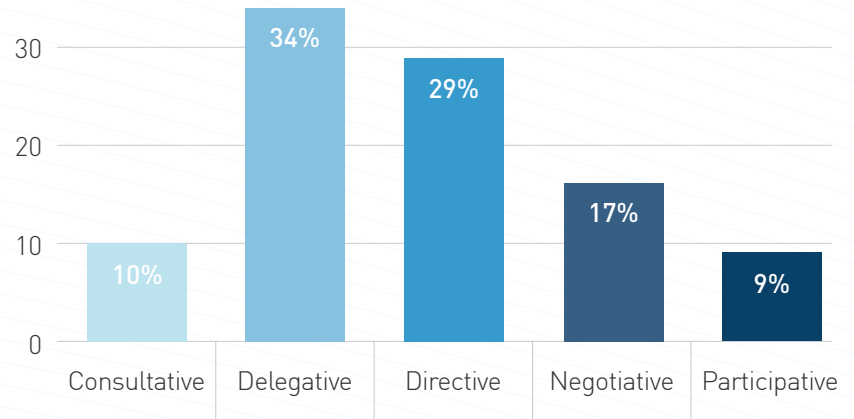


Fig. 2: Leadership styles among dtac's leadership



dtac decided to focus on the 46 heads who were part of the EMC. Changing the leadership style of this very visible group of leaders was key to achieving the cultural transformation essential to the company's future success. Nardrerdee Arj-Harnwongse remarked:



*The leaders are the most critical group of people that can help to drive the change. We wanted to take the top leaders in the organization on a journey that would help them change the way they led their teams.*

## CHOOSING A PARTNER

Nardredee Arj-Harnwongse explained why dtac chose IMD as its partner:

*The reason we selected IMD was that it really understood our needs and challenges. Most of the vendors or partners have a methodology or standard solution. They found it very hard to customize or design a new program for us. IMD was open to co-creating the journey with us.*

Misiek Piskorski, IMD's Dean for Southeast Asia and Oceania, understood that dtac's objectives would only be achieved if the following three criteria were met:



1

The behavioral change dtac was looking for would not happen if executives went through the journey alone – they needed to work together with their respective **intact teams**.

2

Change was only possible over an extended period of time of learning, putting in practice and learning from successes and failures. A deeply **experiential change journey** was required that would provide immediate feedback and ongoing support.

3

Everything about the journey needed to be **deeply embedded in Thai culture**, customs and the way Thai executives thought and worked. dtac believed that Misiek, who was based in Bangkok and would act as the journey leader, understood enough of the culture to be able to push executives to develop without causing them embarrassment.



# THE COMMITMENT

## CO-CREATING THE JOURNEY

dtac and IMD agreed to embark on the developmental journey together, with equal input on the customization process (see **Appendix** on IMD's co-creation process). Interviews with the CEO and the other members of the company's top management confirmed the need to transform the company's hierarchical management culture.

Misiek, Nardrerdee Arj-Harnwongse (dtac's Chief People Officer) and Kanyarat Watanapongvanich (dtac's VP – People Development) worked together for two months to design and develop the program. Because every EMC member and his or her intact team were supposed to go through an individualized journey, IMD and dtac had to tackle a number of issues.

- Each team would be different in how participative and consultative it was, and what other issues it would face, so the treatment had to be specific to the team. dtac and IMD decided to devolve authority to the individual coach who looked after the team. She or he would be the ultimate arbiter of what would happen during the engagement, and be accountable for the results.
- Certain elements of the journey needed to be similar so that the participants shared a common frame of reference. Each coach needed to collaborate with others to ensure that there was agreement around the tools and techniques to be used at each stage of the journey. Coaches were to write a manual documenting these



common tools and techniques, which could be used by any coach joining the engagement.

- While some EMC executives and their teams were fluent in English, others were not. dtac and IMD decided to start with English-speaking Singapore-based IMD coaches, but then train Bangkok-based coaches to deliver the journeys.

Nardrerdee Arj-Harnwongse commented:



*It was quite a fun experience to co-create the journey. We had the end in mind. We briefed Professor Misiek on our ambition and our problems, where we are and where we want to be. He came up with a solution, then we discussed it and we helped each other to take the design forward.*



# THE L&D INITIATIVE

Five different EMCs and their intact teams were combined into a cohort that started the journey at the same time. After brief individualized introductions to the journey, all teams engaged in the same “All-Team Experience 1,” after which their journeys began to diverge. (Fig. 3).

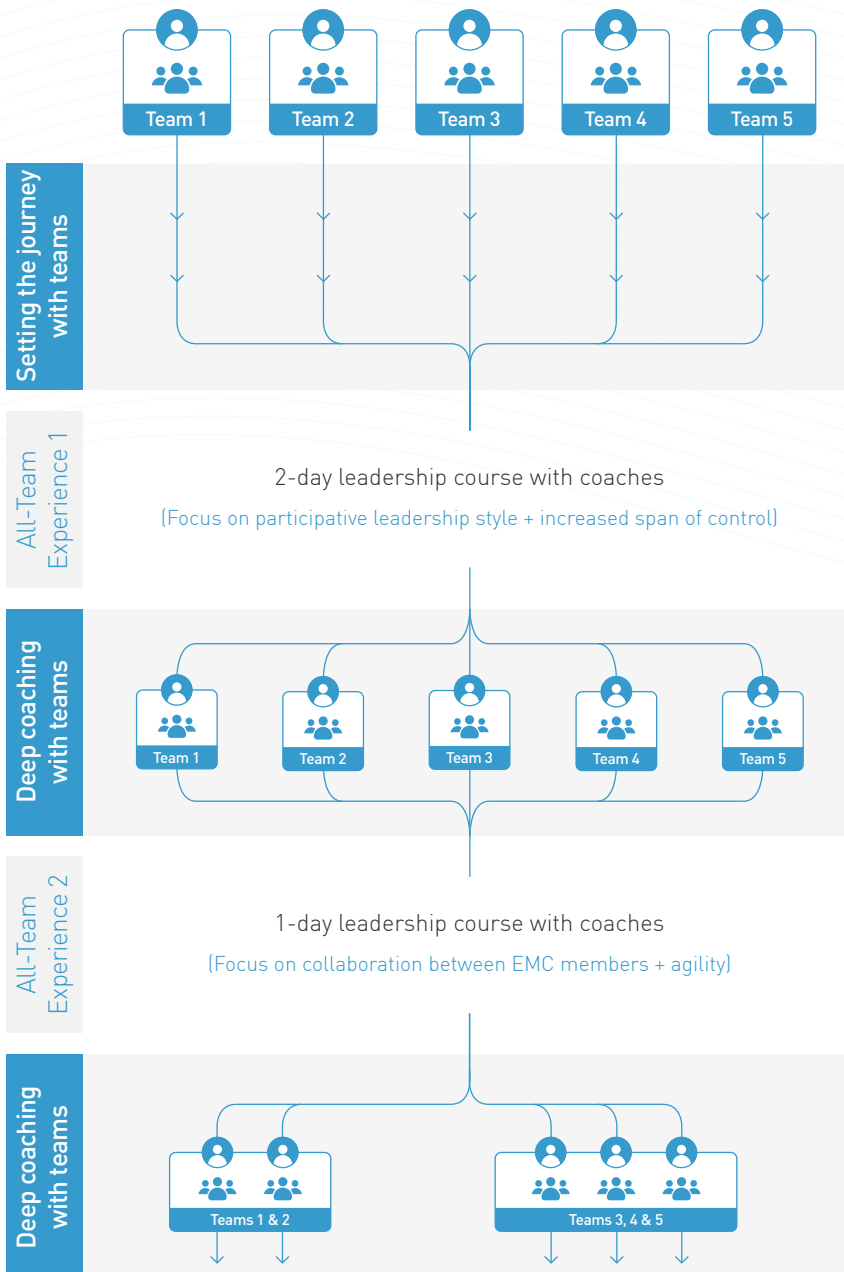


Fig. 3: Elements of the change journey



We designed this journey for the top team but participating together with their intact teams, so you fix the problem in one go. Whatever problems they have in terms of leadership, way of working – they would address it together.

**Nardrerdee Arj-Harnwongse**  
Chief People Officer



This journey is unique in the sense that we used the 70:20:10 approach. The 70 is the experience where the participant would have to work in a project with other team members, the 20 is exposure to the dedicated IMD coach, the 10 is for learning/training, which wouldn't give you much impact by itself because people forget what they have learnt.

**Kanyarat Watanapongvanich**  
VP – People Development

## ALL-TEAM EXPERIENCE 1

The journey began with a two-day level-setting exercise. This experience was designed to help team members get to understand their current leadership style and identify needed changes. On day 1, the teams executed experiential exercises followed by a debrief of the leadership issues exposed and an introduction to tools to help address these. On day 2, the teams worked with their coaches to learn how to speak out and challenge others through coaching. They also discussed what they had learned, chose a concrete project to practice their leadership skills and set development goals.

### Session Summary for Intact Team Experiences

- What did we set out to do last week, what did we implement well and what do we need to do better?
- Identify behaviors that did not go well last week and practice them again through role play.
- Introduce new skills related to participative leadership and role plays.
- Prepare goals and commitments for the next 7-10 days.

**Fig. 4:** Sample coaching session summary

## INTACT TEAM EXPERIENCES: FIRST FIVE MEETINGS

Two-hour team coaching sessions were conducted every 7-10 days in Bangkok, either in person or remotely. Team sessions were often complemented by one-on-ones with individual leaders. Every meeting was different depending on the situation of the team. However, for most of the sessions, the coaches sought to follow up on personal and team goals and determine what was required to progress on these (**Fig. 4**).



## ALL-TEAM EXPERIENCE 2

The objective of this experience was to focus the intact teams on cross-team collaboration. They began the day by working on a collaboration exercise that uncovered typical issues related to collaboration. Post-exercise debriefs enabled the teams and their coaches to discuss ways in which teams could improve collaboration with each other.

The second half of the day was used to identify another team to work with, agree on a real project (*see Fig. 5 for examples*) and decide what the project goals should be and how the teams would work together to achieve them.

### Sample inter-team projects

- Postpaid Marketing and Indirect Channels collaborate to ensure that agreements with key distribution partners are well structured
- Finance Operations and Treasury collaborate to standardize data formats allowing for seamless information sharing
- SME and Networking collaborate to facilitate network rollout and ensure that appropriate sales resources are put in place to support this
- HR and Communications collaborate to increase employee engagement in the company

## INTACT TEAM EXPERIENCES: NEXT FIVE MEETINGS

Two-hour coaching sessions took place every 7-10 days and focused on individual development goals, intra-team performance and inter-team collaboration. The meetings now featured two different teams sitting together to discuss their inter-team collaboration while coaches observed and provided feedback. Towards the end of the journey, the coaches reviewed the progress of both individuals and teams and provided constructive feedback and guidance as to how they could continue their journey to become more effective leaders.



Fig. 5: Sample inter-team projects



## HOW THE LEARNING TOOK PLACE

### Setting personalized development objectives

Team members set their own development objectives through a dialogue with each other and with the coach. This required developing awareness of where they were at the beginning of the journey and determining where they wanted to get to. This was challenging for the teams, who often wanted to be told what to do or how to do it. However, IMD and its coaches wanted the team to own the learning process. Misiek clarified:

*The feedback we got at the beginning of the journey was, “Tell us what you want us to learn, and we will do it.” Our response was, “No, we cannot do that. We are modeling participative and consultative behaviors. So targets will be negotiated with you, and then we will help you execute them.”*

### Moving forward at their own pace

Just as expected, the teams quickly understood that they were at very different places – some had adopted the agile methodology and were operating as scrum teams while others were dysfunctional and had intra-team issues that needed to be addressed before they could focus on learning participative leadership style.

As per design, instead of having to follow a standard path, each team started from where it was and moved forward at its own pace. Some teams spent the entire three-month period working on intra-team effectiveness while others moved forward to work on becoming more effective in collaborating across teams.

Alexandra Hope, IMD coach, observed:

*I loved the way we didn't assume that everyone was starting at the same point. It made the learning more relevant because we weren't all starting from A and going to Z. We were all working with teams where they were at and taking them and stretching them to the next level.*

### Constant learning cycle for full impact

As teams learned and practiced new behaviors in their coaching sessions, they were expected to practice them during the week. Team members attempted to put them into practice, but often did not do so well, which led to debriefs and another cycle of learning during the next coaching session. Christophe Grimont, IMD Coach added:

*What was unique about this journey was that it was done over a period of time. We went back to see the teams again and again. The frequency of follow-up and the top-of-mind presence of what we were trying to achieve with them was there in a way that I haven't seen before.*

One EMC Member, Sasitorn Khoopatanakul, described:

*In each session, we have things to focus on and which we get to practice, and in the next session, the coach will ask, have you done this, if not how can you get yourself to do this. If yes, what do you feel, what is your feedback?*



With the coach following up for the three-month period, you had a much more structured way of following up and of discussing what was happening. That helped to get momentum. Otherwise, with a lot of these trainings, you go in, attend, go out, and then you don't apply a lot of these things.

**Arslan Javed**  
EMC member





## TURNING CHALLENGES INTO LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

A number of challenges emerged as the journey was implemented. These included interpersonal issues between coaches and teams, the impact of a reorganization during the journey and lower levels of English fluency among some participants. Because the journey dealt with the reality facing each team, these became learning opportunities rather than barriers to success (see the example in **Fig. 6**).

### Interpersonal issues between a coach and her team

- One of the coaches was seen as being too much an authority figure which was creating an issue. Team leader's feedback: "My team is very open and free spoken and, in the beginning sessions, they were not. They were not very vocal, they were not participating, and I think this had to do with the coach and how she came across."
- The team leader met with the program director to request that the coach be changed, but was told that he needed to address the issue with the coach.
- In the next coaching session, the team brought up the issue. The coach thanked them for this and asked them to coach her by using the coaching techniques they had learnt, which they did after hesitating initially. At first they were surprised with the approach ("But you are the coach!"). But soon they understood this as an opportunity to practice the techniques of participative and negotiated leadership style.
- The coach followed up by leading a discussion around how to respond differently to people of authority and how they could develop their own authority. The team requested that the coach stay for the rest of the engagement.

**Fig. 6:** Interpersonal issues between a coach and her team

Misiek explained:



*We agreed that if problems arise between the coach and the team, we will engage in a process for the team and the coach to work things out to deepen their engagement. I had explicitly told coaches that I would not tell them what to do. I will point out the issue to them and empower them to do the right thing.*

## JOURNEY EXECUTION

### 1<sup>st</sup> Run

September  
2019



**Two cohorts of five EMC members**  
with their intact teams

Executed with the help of IMD coaches from Singapore. The IMD coaches wrote a train-the-trainer manual to capture standardizable parts of their journeys.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Run

November  
2019



**Two cohorts of five EMC members**  
with their intact teams

Executed with the help of IMD coaches as well as Bangkok-based coaches who were identified and recruited by dtac. IMD coaches took the lead in this run with the Bangkok-based coaches shadowing and assisting them so they could familiarize themselves with the way the journey was run. They also use the train-the-trainer manual.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Run

February  
2020



**One cohort of five EMC members**  
with their intact teams

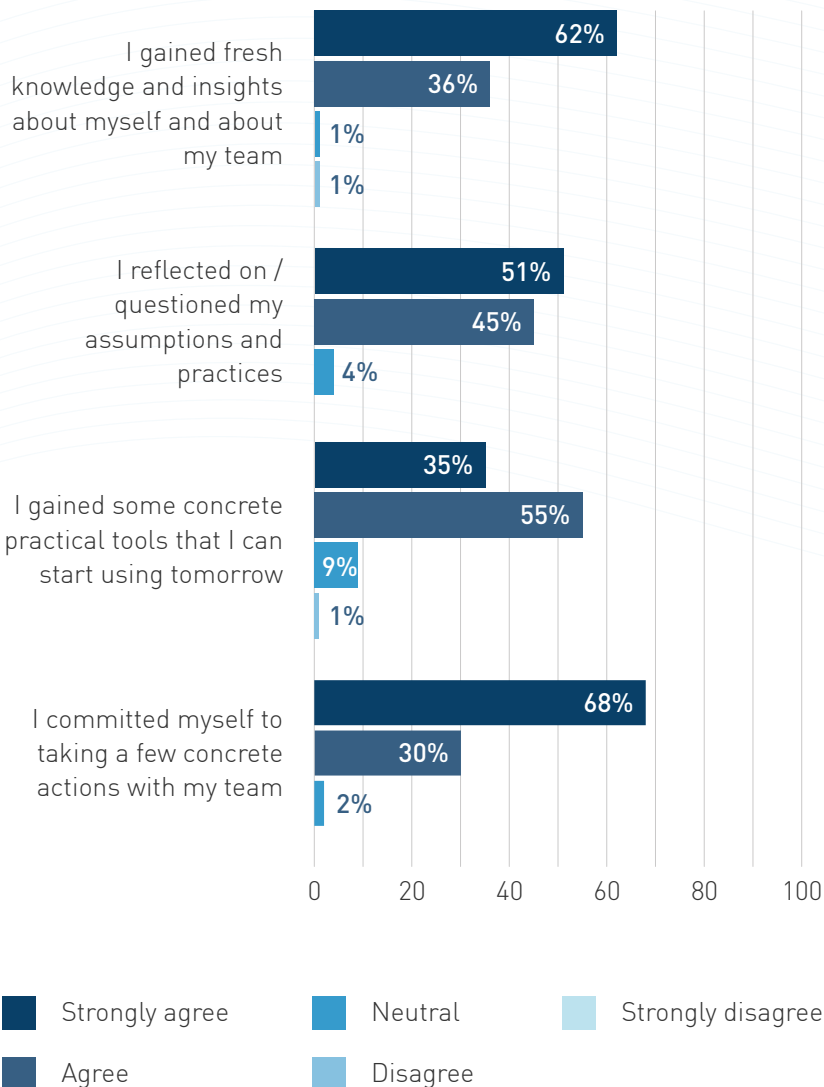
Executed by Bangkok-based coaches using the train-the-trainer manual with IMD coaches providing constant support remotely. This cohort completed the first half of the journey but could not proceed to the second half because of the impact of COVID-19.

Equipping the Bangkok-based coaches to take over the execution of the journey was challenging, as each journey had to be tailored for each team. This is why it was very important for the IMD coaches to write up the train-the-trainer manual to document the techniques to diagnose the team, understand its needs, and adjust the journey for them. It was equally important for the Bangkok-based coaches to try out the methods with their IMD counterparts. The train-the-trainer journey was challenging, but ultimately successful. **Participant ratings on the third run of the journey, which the Bangkok-based coaches ran independently, were as good as for the first two runs with IMD coaches.**

# THE IMPACT

## IMPACT ON INDIVIDUAL EFFECTIVENESS

A survey conducted among journey participants illustrated how their individual effectiveness had improved as a result of their participation in the journey (**Fig. 7**).



**Fig. 7:** Journey participant survey results



I learnt a lot – how to listen more, how to manage people, how to work with others in the team. I try to listen to everyone more and I don't judge people.

**Chanaisuda Singhara Na Ayudhya**  
Intact team member



I am more open and I am able to balance between being polite and being objective driven. Now I understand that being objective driven doesn't mean that I have to be aggressive.

**Penpa-Nga Suddhimondala**  
Intact team member



I think the way I lead my team and I work with others, even my peers, has changed. The feedback that I got was that you have to pace yourself, so I also try to make sure that my team is not too overwhelmed.

**Ploy Jatukanyaprateep**  
Intact team member



We listen more, we ask more, we try not to talk too much over each other. We are more conscious about letting the junior people talk first.

**Sasitorn Khoopatanakul**  
EMC Member

## IMPACT ON TEAM EFFECTIVENESS

Feedback from participants clearly suggests that the journey also made the teams more effective, in large part because their leadership style changed.



Through some of the exercises and the discussions we had, we were able to improve the openness of the communication within our team, being open and direct. Ultimately, this created more confidence and trust in each other, and helped improve efficiency.

**Magnus Muller**  
EMC member



Some of the sessions that the coach conducted – for example, the lifeline, where you have to tell your story, what are the high and low points of your life journey – touched our emotions. After that, I feel the level of trust among our team has become better and better, and this has helped us to collaborate.

**Samak Simpa**  
EMC member



Our team is six people and we are all about the same rank. Through this journey, we understood that not all people need to think the same way. If we were all the same, we would not be as effective.

**Chanaisuda Singhara Na Ayudhya**  
Journey participant (Intact team member)



We were able to open up about strengths and weaknesses, to ask for advice, and to share experience. My direct reports were able to know each other much more.

**Thibaut Loup Simon Girard**  
EMC member



I think the team works better. They are not just waiting for you to say something and then they run and do it. I am starting to hear a lot more questions coming from my team.

**Sasitorn Khoopatanakul**  
EMC member





## IMPACT ON INTER-TEAM COLLABORATION

Most teams felt that they had made progress in collaborating more effectively with other parts of the organization.



We initiated a regular bi-weekly forum with the other team where we went through opportunities and challenges. And there was an ongoing project where we said, OK, let's see if we can improve things.

**Arslan Javed**  
Journey participant (EMC Member)



We collaborated with a team in [hardware] networking. We understood where the network rollout was happening and followed with sales resources. We helped the network team to gain access to landowners to be able to put up new towers. There was a mutual benefit.

**Magnus Muller**  
Journey participant (EMC member)



We tried to listen more and we didn't have as much ego. Everyone was focusing on completing the same target – not like in the past where we feel that this half is mine and that half is yours, so I will only complete my half.

**Chanaisuda Singhara Na Ayudhya**  
Journey participant (Intact team member)



### IMPACT ON dtac

The journey has helped dtac to move forward to transform its culture and truly empower its employees. While there is still much to be done, there is a greater emphasis on participative leadership, speedy decision-making and working across organizational silos. The company's ability to continue operating successfully in 2020 in the face of COVID-19 can be partly attributed to this.

Following the success of this journey, dtac and IMD are now working together on a group coaching and team-building journey for dtac's management committee with a view to enabling the company's CXOs to be good role models for the EMC.

# REFLECTIONS

## **We need to think more broadly about how to have impact on organizations.**

Traditionally, this has meant classroom-based courses on our campuses and experiential exercises in the classroom, but these have limited long-lasting impact. Educators need to support executives in their practice in the workplace to have real impact.

## **Organizations and educators must be willing to accept greater uncertainty.**

Classroom-based education is easy to control and levels of uncertainty are low. Development journeys in the real world are messy, unpredictable and require educators to be flexible and open to feedback.

## **We need to think of the context in which executives operate.**

Executives are embedded in organizations and are effective through the people they work with. Increasing their effectiveness requires increasing the effectiveness of their peers and supporting teams.

## **The role of faculty and coaches will need to change.**

In development journeys, the faculty is no longer the main figure holding forth in the classroom. Coaches have a much more prominent role with faculty providing support and cover. Building trust between coaches and faculty is essential.

## **Real impact requires sustained support over a period of time.**

The typical executive education program does not have much impact because there is little or no support after the program. Ongoing support over a period of time while executives try things out in real life is key to success.

## **Participants will need to play a more active role in their learning.**

The traditional role of executive education participants is passive. Their role in development journeys needs to be much more active and self-directed.

# IMD TEAM



**MISIEK  
PISKORSKI**

IMD Professor of Strategy and Innovation & Dean of IMD Southeast Asia and Oceania

[→ more info](#)



**SUSAN  
CHANG**

IMD Coach



**TARA  
KIMBRELL COLE**

IMD Coach



**CHRISTOPHE  
GRIMONT**

IMD Coach



**ALEX  
HOPE**

IMD Coach



**ROBYN  
WILSON**

IMD Coach



# APPENDIX

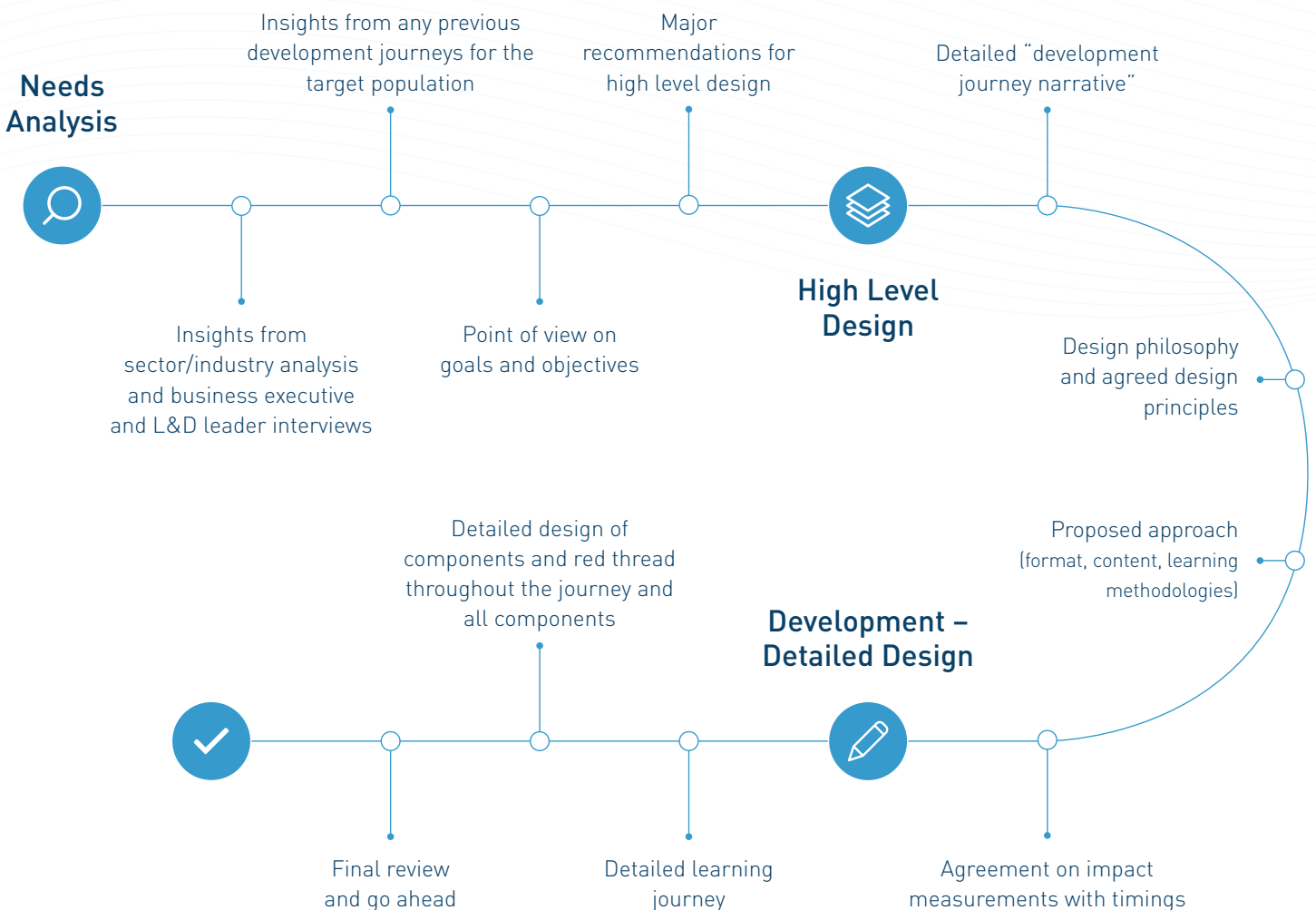
## THE IMD CO-CREATION PROCESS

### OUR “BLANK-SLATE” APPROACH

When designing a development journey, we apply our blank-slate approach. IMD’s strong reputation for custom development journey design and delivery is the result of this approach.

We design each phase of the development journey based on company priorities and the organizational context within which the learning takes place. The final development journey design comes together through a creative, iterative process.

As a consequence, the design of the development journey evolves during a structured engagement and development process.



## OUR DESIGN PRINCIPLES



### CLIENT FOCUS

In-depth diagnosis of client and participant needs (expressed and unexpressed)



### CONTENT & THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Up-to-date/relevant/rigorous and applicable content, tailored to client needs



### JOURNEY DURATION & FORMAT

Multiple modules, systematic follow-up

Bringing in a rich variety of pedagogical tools, leverage up-to-date digital learning formats, gamification, etc.



### FREQUENCY OF INTERVENTION

Regular touchpoints to provide continuous input and challenge



### EMOTIONAL MOMENTS

Deliberate strategies for creating powerful emotional moments to anchor learning and support change



### MOTIVATION OF PARTICIPANTS

Integration of motivational elements (rewards, constructive competition, peer pressure, etc.)



### BONDING

Cultivating bonds and deepening trust between participants, as well as with the delivery team



### REAL WORLD APPLICATION

Application integrated into program design (e.g. action learning, experiential learning activities)



### FEEDBACK

Multiple sources: Peer-to-peer, 360- or 180-feedback, faculty, coaches, etc



### EXCHANGE & SUPPORT

Peer learning within teams, organizational support