

IESE & ORACLE: A UNIQUE ALLIANCE



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Senior Vice-President of
Core Technology Business
Oracle EMEA

IESE Business School teamed up with Cranfield School of Management to design an innovative executive education program for Oracle. One of the mechanisms that made the program different was that the software giant’s high-potential managers were interviewed on camera individually and filmed collectively throughout the program. The filming process helped participants crystallize what they planned to do to drive change within Oracle.

ORACLE 4SIGHT

One of the meanings of “oracle” is “a person of wise counsel.” For the participants of the Oracle 4Sight program offered by IESE’s international executive education team in partnership with Cranfield School of Management, each member is his or her own oracle. The 4Sight program challenges participants to rethink their behaviors to unlock their ability to lead high-performance teams within the integrated enterprise software company.

“The aim is really to take some of our most talented people and give them the opportunity and the space to reflect on some things that they may not normally have the opportunity to think about and then turn that into their own personal agendas,” according to David Callaghan, vice president for channels and solutions at Oracle United Kingdom and Ireland.

One of the innovative mechanisms that help participants make these discoveries is the use of filmed interviews throughout the program, led by BBC-trained technicians. At the beginning of the first module, each participant responds to a series of probing, pre-prepared, customized questions, as well as a generic set of questions focused on identifying two goals to be achieved before the second session.

The aim of the filmed interview is to support participants in articulating the main components of their “learning contract.” This learning contract is prepared prior to module one via an online questionnaire completed by the participant, his or her manager, and selected colleagues. The questionnaire helps identify the gaps in the participant’s knowledge or expertise prior to entering the program. Each participant shares the learning contract with mentor, nominated by Oracle.

For Chris Baker, SVP of Core Technology Business at Oracle EMEA, who led a session in the first module of the 4Sight program in Barcelona, the filmed interview process is key to pinpoint what needs to change so the participant’s entrepreneurial and leadership abilities can be unleashed.

“I love the fact that these guys are being pushed hard [by the interviewer] about their beliefs ... there are boundaries that are illusionary,” Baker said. “It is very important for senior managers to get that chance for a context check and realize that if you are brave, sensible and creative enough, you can do whatever you want at Oracle,” the SVP added.



Participants can share the recording of their module-one interview with whomever they choose – fellow program participants, their team within Oracle or their managers – on a specially designed online platform.

The process of sharing the film with fellow participants helps build a team spirit, as well as heighten each participant's commitment and determination to improve their own performance. "The first two modules of 4Sight created an atmosphere that generated good synergy among ourselves but also the will to help each other," said Monica Marinucci, a graduate of Oracle 4Sight and R&D director in the firm.

This in turn builds trust, another ingredient that is essential to fostering the kind of sharing that will drive the leadership agenda within Oracle, and all within a safe environment. "I see [the program] as a training ground ... It is not easy to be very, very open and to let other people really see you," said Stephan Gamm, another Oracle 4Sight graduate.

The program consists of three residential modules; the first is held on IESE's Barcelona campus, the second at Bled in Slovenia and the final portion is delivered at Cranfield. Faculty members and Oracle business leaders work together to align content and objectives to jointly deliver the program. The contribution of Oracle "faculty members" aims to put themes into context, i.e., to explain how they impact on Oracle's business.

In the first module, participants broaden their knowledge and understanding of the IT industry from a macroeconomic context. IESE Prof. Josep Valor is the program's academic director. Other IESE faculty involved in the 4Sight program are Profs. Pedro Videla, Fabrizio Ferraro and Pablo Cardona.

In the second module, participants strengthen their understanding of Oracle's strategy. In the final chunk of the program, held at Cranfield's campus in the U.K., participants get down to the nuts and bolts of how they are going to lead teams and drive change on an individual level.

Participants sit down in front of the camera again at the end of the program for an "exit" interview. This allows them to reflect on how they see themselves now, what has changed, the main take-aways, and what they will do differently going forward. To support them in this, participants follow a personal development program via the web platform.

"And my hope," said Andrew Sutherland, vice president of technology for Oracle EMEA, "is that we will create a generation of managers that will be able to cope with the level of ambiguity and complex problem solving that is going to be central for us to increase our lead in this industry."

This article, titled "Speak to the Camera," originally appeared in IESE's Alumni Magazine.