

# Making Bold Moves with Leadership Development at Cognizant



CLIENT  
SUCCESS  
STORY



## Cognizant

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Cognizant is a leading global business and technology consultancy serving many Global 2000 clients. In a rapidly accelerating digital landscape, the company is executing a bold agenda and helping clients use technology to improve everyday lives.

Cognizant's Global Leadership Development organization plays a central role in empowering its leaders to accelerate transformation through collaboration, inclusivity, and innovative thinking. Its LEAD@Cognizant program for high-potential middle managers has been in place for several years. Working with Harvard Business Publishing, Cognizant reimagined the learning journey as a virtual experience in order to supercharge this group of influential leaders to lead and thrive in the digital economy.

“To credibly transform organizations, leaders must credibly transform themselves and their teams.”

BECKY SCHMITT,  
CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER,  
COGNIZANT

**BUSINESS CHALLENGE**

- > Accelerate leadership capabilities for the digital age

**AUDIENCE**

- > High-potential middle managers

**SOLUTION**

- > Virtual blended learning experience

**IMPACT**

- > Increased confidence to lead
- > More effective collaboration
- > More inclusive teams
- > Stronger innovation culture, leading to new revenue

## Virtual Learning That Engages and Inspires

Cognizant's collaborative partnership with Harvard Business Publishing created a rich and powerful learning experience that reflects Cognizant's unique culture, purpose, and values. The three-module curriculum aligns with the organization's leadership themes: Lead Boldly, Partner Powerfully, and Inspire Performance. The organization reinforced its commitment to on-demand learning by delivering this exclusive program virtually.

A cohort of 200 emerging leaders took part in the prestigious LEAD@Cognizant program, a high-touch learning journey that gave them the opportunity to develop in-demand leadership capabilities and skills. Small breakout pods of five participants plus a mentor were formed with the aim of achieving the greatest possible diversity in each group. Connecting with peers from across functions and geographies allowed the participants to leverage the breadth of Cognizant knowledge and fostered accountability, inclusivity, and engagement.

The program unfolded over four and a half months, which afforded participants ample time to incorporate learning into their time-pressured schedules. Key components included expert sessions with Harvard faculty and Cognizant business leaders, simulations, and the Leadership Capstone Challenge.

Involvement by senior leaders was an essential success factor. They provided context, connecting the material to current Cognizant strategy and business issues. They served as mentors, which helped participants stay on track. And they ensured the capstone projects were business relevant.

## Revitalizing the Talent Pipeline

Harvard Business Publishing and Cognizant applied design thinking to unlock the potential of mid-level talent.

They interviewed employees who had completed other mid-level programs, their supervisors, and senior leaders. Through data analysis and a series of systematic questions, the design-thinking process uncovered what leaders at this level need in terms of capabilities, skills, and career path options.

What's more, it revealed the need for added support in terms of mentoring and built-in reflection, as well as change management due to the accelerated pace of transformation across the industry.

In particular, supervisors were asked, "What would you like your second-in-command to do more of?" Their answers—"grow the business" and "take on talent responsibilities"—became the themes for the Leadership Capstone Challenge.

Through this effort, Cognizant is building a stronger pipeline for promoting high-performing talent.

## Confidence to Lead

With LEAD@Cognizant, Cognizant is achieving its goal of creating a community of people-centered, results-driven leaders equipped to deliver the company's bold agenda. All participants said they had significantly greater confidence to lead as a result of the experience.

Participants and their supervisors noted new capabilities including being able to break down barriers to innovation, apply smart collaboration to daily work problems, and tackle complex problems collectively. Senior leaders recognized the impact that their involvement has had on the participants as well as on Cognizant's talent management process. By getting to know this cohort, senior leaders have visibility to consider them for other positions across the company.

## Leaving a Lasting Impact

The capstone projects exceeded expectations. As part of graduation, the pods presented their projects to handpicked evaluation panelists composed of HR business partners and business unit leaders. This event gave all participants visibility with top company leaders. The outcomes of the projects were positive as well. One of the pods helped win a million-dollar deal with innovation in pricing strategies. Other pods embraced experimentation to solve complex customer problems, while many individual participants changed their view of failures.



**“We are channeling the energy of our mid-level leaders into capabilities that create sustainable value. Our associates can accelerate their career growth and in turn make Cognizant the best place to work.”**

**GANESH KALYANARAMAN,  
SVP & GLOBAL DELIVERY HEAD,  
PRODUCTS & RESOURCES,  
COGNIZANT**