

# AUSCOAL Super

*Growth and Complexity  
Demand Better Leadership*



With growth comes complexity. With complexity comes the demand for better leadership. This was the situation facing the executive team at AUSCOAL Superannuation, one of Australia's leading industry superannuation funds.

AUSCOAL Super manages over \$6 billion in funds for people employed in the coal mining industry across Australia. With the mining industry being a key economic player in the commercial fabric of the Australian economy the need to manage, safeguard and grow the retirement savings of thousands of workers for their future livelihoods places enormous demands on the executive team and staff to co-ordinate and deliver outstanding customer service.

The superannuation industry in Australia is a \$1 trillion dollar business and a large investor on the global stage. It is in the context of this environment that the AUSCOAL Super executive team found themselves in the midst of a global financial crisis, merger negotiations, growing human resources needs and the need for a complete change to the IT platform which services members.

## THE CHALLENGE

The Chief Executive Officer, Bruce Watson, seeing the growing complexity in the business commenced a conversation with Leadership Circle. The question was: *"With a smart business strategy and a strong foundation we need to provide solid support to our executive team to build enduring leadership capacity with what we are facing over the next 3 years – can you help us do that?"*

## THE SOLUTION

Never having been challenged on the premises that effective leadership outperforms ineffective leadership every time we set about working with Bruce and his executive leadership team (the "ELT") to examine the effectiveness of their leadership using The Leadership Circle profile. Why was this a key first step? Because effective leadership is directly correlated to business outcomes and we had the hard data to support this proposition and in so doing engage the ELT and support the business case for investment.

Over a period of 2 years the ELT participated in exploring their leadership capabilities and the thinking and behaviours that can derail effective leadership capacity building. Each member of the ELT sought feedback from each other, their teams and people outside the organisation to gain insight and perspective.

The Leadership Circle platform is a world-class cutting edge methodology that supports leaders to explore those aspects of their leadership that can be difficult at first to face and focuses on strengths to be developed whilst attending to the behaviours and thinking that can get in the way of truly stepping into ones full leadership potential.

We conducted a series of one-on-one sessions, ongoing coaching and workshops attending to the need to build the skills for authentic and courageous dialogue and to examine each executives personal purpose as a leader in the business and how this was aligned to the organisational purpose.

*"Before coaching I was stressed, unbalanced and time poor. I knew I could be a better leader but didn't know how. Robust and creative coaching sessions drew on real life, real time issues. Very quickly I began to own and understand my personal strengths and weaknesses. I now have a clear sense of direction, greater passion and improved focus"* says Jennifer McSpadden, Strategic Marketing Manager.

## THE OUTCOME

Over the 2 year period AUSCOAL'S attention to executing on its strategic plan combined with a focus on investing in building the leadership capabilities of its executive team has lead to a number of internal outcomes and external accolades.

Not only did it weather the GFC as one of the highest performing superannuation funds in the country it moved from 50th in the BRW Best Places to Work in Australia to 12th and the CEO was awarded Fund Executive of the Year. It was also nominated for several Australian business awards during 2010.

A key outcome has also been the creation of a common language for the ELT in bringing the undiscussables to the table. It is a high performing team that can have the authentic and courageous dialogue required to surface

the issues that can eat up many a productive hour in finding ways to work around them rather than face them head on for the good of the organisation and team harmony.

*"Our journey has seen us systematically set aside time for deeper reflection on our leadership vision, take on discussions with courageous authenticity and clearly engage others within an environment of empathy and compassion. It has brought real engagement, involvement and openness within our leadership group. It's a wonderful leadership journey adding enormous value",* said Bruce.

The ELT have now embarked upon a program to provide the same opportunity to other leaders in the organisation with the aim of building greater internal capacity for self support as the economic demands of the business continue to bring new challenges and complexity which will invite the organisation to develop its leaders at equal to, or greater than, the pace of change.

*"AUSCOAL Super committed to a long term change strategy with Leadership Circle. Through top team alignment around a smart business strategy as a strong foundation we provided solid support to build enduring leadership capacity and skills and, in the process, we have learnt and proved that developing leaders increases business effectiveness. One doesn't happen without the other. I hold that the work undertaken contributed to AUSCOAL Super moving from 50th in the 2009 BRW Best Places to Work in Australia survey to 12th in 2010 and being nominated in 4 categories of the 2010 BRW/ ANZ Private Business Awards, including Private Business of the Year. I believe that the best thing I have done in my 5 years as CEO has been to introduce the leadership development program into AUSCOAL Super",* Bruce said.