

# Action Learning Drives Culture Shift at Ingram Content Group



**“Embracing an innovative mindset is critical to Ingram’s ongoing transformation. What we’ve been able to accomplish through Transformational Leadership is evidence of how taking a fresh look can yield results.”**

—Shawn Morin, CEO, Ingram Content Group

Ingram Content Group, a global distributor of print and digital content, was experiencing rapid change due to many factors, including the evolution of the publishing industry. The executive leadership team, led by then-CEO John Ingram, had established a new vision and set of company values to help prepare for future success.

He and his team were focused on how to keep the more than 50-year-old company relevant and growing. They saw an opportunity to accelerate their strategy by developing their leaders and partnering with them to grow new ideas and address current business challenges.

In doing so, the leaders within the company would equip the enterprise to meet marketplace demands and help facilitate a culture shift.

## TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

The journey began in 2012, when Ingram selected Linkage to develop and facilitate an integrated curriculum known as the Transformational Leadership program. The five-day, instructor-led action learning program was designed

specifically for senior leaders at Ingram. Two dozen individuals were selected to participate in the first year.

The CEO attended the first session to set context for the program and to address the importance of two core topics: innovation and change management. Participants then took part in an interactive classroom experience focused on building core competencies: Strategic Thinking (Day 1), Innovation (Days 2 and 3), Leading Others (Day 4), and Managing Change (Day 5).

Innovation principles from Harvard Business School professor Clayton Christensen were central to the in-class experience. In addition, participants took part in a simulation focused on how to use the design thinker methodology to emulate real-time scenario planning.

This helped lay the groundwork for the next phase, which featured action learning projects focused on solving real business challenges within the company. Participants were divided into small teams, and each team was assigned a project approved by the strategic planning committee and President.

## REAL-TIME LEARNING & APPLICATION

Following the in-class experience, the teams met weekly to move their projects forward. Areas of focus included expanding service offerings at Ingram, streamlining business processes, improving the customer experience, and identifying opportunities for cost reduction.

During this time, an executive sponsor and Linkage coach held monthly sessions to check in on how each leader was applying the tools and techniques from the program to their group projects and individual roles.

The leaders practiced applying the Christensen innovation process in real-time, helping them to focus on the most important pain points and develop multiple potential solutions to the problems they were solving. At the culmination of the project, each team presented their proposed action plan, and what they learned from the action learning process, to the executive committee.

After observing the business impact of the team projects developed during the first year, the senior leadership

team partnered with Linkage to create a condensed, three-day experience designed for a more senior-level audience. The strategic thinking and innovation content remained central to the revised program experience.

In the third and fourth years, the team continued to rotate between the three- and five-day programs with select Vice Presidents and Directors. To date, about 200 leaders have been through this process.

## EQUIPPED FOR THE FUTURE

The Transformational Leadership experiences have helped leaders from across Ingram build a shared vision around core organizational values and a common language and approach to innovating for the future. New products, business process improvements, and cost savings in several areas are only a piece of the story.

Participants are now armed with a more robust business acumen, have formed new alliances across the organization, and are more engaged, creating a stronger, more relevant organization for today and tomorrow.

## TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP CURRICULUM

Day 1: Strategic Thinking	Day 2: Innovation	Day 3: Innovation	Day 4: Leading Others	Day 5: Managing Change
<p><b>Strategic Direction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Executive speaker: business strategy</li> <li>Your role in executing the strategy</li> </ul> <p><b>Have a Clear Picture</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Characteristics of a compelling vision</li> <li>Creating a vision for your team</li> <li>Executing strategy/ action planning</li> <li>Predicting what the competition will do next</li> <li>Your leadership agenda</li> <li>Work profile tool</li> </ul>	<p><b>Design Thinker Simulation (IDEO)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inspire</li> <li>Ideate</li> <li>Implement</li> </ul> <p><b>Innovation Basics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sustaining vs. Disruptive</li> <li>Growth through innovation model</li> <li>Removing customer barriers (SWAT)</li> <li>Jobs-to-be-done (JTBD) Model</li> <li>Recognizing an important JTBD for a key customer</li> </ul>	<p><b>Shaping Solutions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Performance mapping &amp; breaking the rules</li> <li>Brainstorming an innovative idea to solve your customer's JTBD</li> </ul> <p><b>Implementation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifying &amp; testing key assumptions</li> <li>Prioritizing &amp; testing key assumptions</li> <li>Creating an innovation-capable organization</li> <li>Personality poker</li> </ul>	<p><b>Management vs. Leadership</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coaching assessment results/fast feedback</li> <li>Building commitment</li> <li>Coaching pyramid</li> <li>Role playing</li> </ul> <p><b>Leading Teams</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Patrick Lencioni's <i>Five Dysfunctions of a Team</i></li> <li>Assessment/ discussion</li> <li>Characteristics/ building high-performing teams</li> <li>Accelerating results &amp; top 10 accelerators</li> </ul>	<p><b>Managing Transitions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Change vs. transition</li> <li>Three-Phase Transition Model</li> <li>How to identify people in transition</li> <li>Managing transitions</li> </ul> <p><b>Launch Action Learning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Process</li> <li>Team charters</li> <li>Guide/toolkit</li> <li>Key takeaways/ journaling</li> </ul>