



Overview

Country or Region: Worldwide

Industry: Telecommunications

Customer Profile

From its 1997 founding as a small IP/Ethernet testing house, Ixia (Nasdaq: XXIA) has expanded into one of the fastest-growing providers of world-class network testing, visibility and security solutions. Ixia serves a broad array of customers, including 77 of the Fortune 100 and some of the world's leading carriers and global network equipment manufacturers. Headquartered in Calabasas, Calif., it has a workforce of more than 1,800 employees across Europe, Asia-Pacific, and North and South America. In spring 2017, Ixia was acquired by Keysight Technologies.

Business Situation

Ixia was in a rapid growth-by-acquisition mode. With the need to cultivate a stronger leadership bench of cross-functional roles, the company conceived the Next Generation Leadership Program (NGL) to help develop business acumen and other leadership skills that would complement the deeply technical expertise of its talent pool.

Solution

In 2012, Ixia retained TRI Corporation to supply a business simulation for its NGL program. The overwhelming success of the inaugural simulation has led to its implementation as a cornerstone of the annual NGL program. To date, approximately 120 Ixia directors, senior directors and senior managers have completed the course, providing universally positive reviews of its impact on their overall understanding of the business and their ability to make decisions for optimal business outcomes.

Benefits

- Increased business acumen and financial skills
- Better decision-making under time constraints
- Enhanced ability to build and work as a team
- Greater understanding of all aspects of running a business
- Long-term networking relationships across the organization
- Application of simulation learning into real-world project success

Ixia Taps TRI Business Simulation to Build Cross-Functional Leadership Pipeline



"We've completed three cycles since we began working with TRI Corporation in 2012, and the core simulation has stayed consistent because it's just really well done. On a 10-point scale, participants consistently rate the program a 9 or 10."

**Chris Williams, Senior Vice President
Human Resources
Ixia**

Situation

Ixia was in a period of rapid growth through acquisitions. A deeply technical company, it needed to cultivate a stronger leadership bench from cross-functional roles. Chris Williams, senior vice president, human resources, spearheaded the creation of Ixia's Next Generation Leadership program (NGL) to help future leaders develop business acumen and other skills that complemented their technical expertise. The NGL program would be conducted in three modules over the course of a year. Williams sought a leader in the experiential learning field to provide a business simulation that would form one of the program's cornerstone modules.

Solution

Williams' team researched and identified the top experiential learning providers in the marketplace and, after careful vetting, selected TRI Corporation to create and facilitate a business simulation that would serve as the first leg of Ixia's NGL program. The three-day module, to be conducted at a training site adjacent to Ixia's Calabasas, Calif. headquarters, would be based on TRI's off-the-shelf Leading the Business simulation, with vignettes tailored to the high-tech industry.

An immersive, three-dimensional experiential exercise, Leading the Business tasks participants with managing an enterprise while making critical business decisions to create shareholder value. To drive long-term learning, the program intersperses simulations with lectures, peer and trainer feedback, and debriefs. Using three-dimensional simulation

experiences – traditional economic modeling, inbox/outbox leadership challenges, and one-on-one live role play with faculty – participants work in groups to overcome obstacles and achieve intended goals. They emerge with the tools they need to lead in their real-world roles at Ixia.

For its inaugural simulation in 2012, Ixia brought 30 participants ranging from directors through senior directors and representing a wide range of functions, from technical, functional and engineering to sales and human resources. They came from Ixia locations around the world: India, Romania, China, Japan, the U.K., and the U.S.

The program has been repeated every year since, with a similar mix of participants. "The core simulation has stayed consistent throughout the years because it's just really well done," said Williams. "What we learned from the first year was that participants were in over their heads, so in the second year we added webinars on financial acumen basics for participants to complete before they come to class."

Also ahead of time, each participant identifies an individual project he or she will work on while in residence. At the end of the program, participants take those projects back to their own offices and continue work, applying their learnings from the program, with instructions to provide a progress report in three months.

Participants are grouped into six cross-functional teams of five players each, with three teams in each world. Each participant is assigned a role outside of their real-life expertise.

Continued

Solution (continued)

After a pre-course introduction that lays out the simulation ground rules and introduces the economic model, teams then progress through six simulation rounds. Each round represents a fiscal quarter, with different challenges and opportunities introduced along the way. The simulation provides real-business scenarios in which participants experience the basic elements of a competitive strategy, putting into play Porter's Five Forces: supplier power, buyer power, competitive rivalry, threat of substitution, and threat of new entry. It also encapsulates the 4 Ps of Marketing: production, price, promotion, and place.

Participants are encouraged to select a simulation role that does not fall within their current expertise, and are expected to coach each other in their own proficiencies. Operating outside of their comfort zone, they are forced to rely on their creativity and ingenuity and the knowledge of their team. As each round progresses, the team has a limited number of calls to any character in the simulation case – customers, suppliers, quality team leaders, marketing, operations, etc. These roles are played by TRI facilitators who are manning phones in a nearby “control room.” The calls give the team economic advantage, providing access to knowledge that they might not normally have in another form. They also allow the team to practice negotiation and influence skills that are part of the other NGL program modules.

“Teams are working in a pressure-filled environment. It requires a great deal of effort, and teams see the results of their decisions each quarter,” said Williams.

At the end of two rounds of play, a panel of senior leaders from Ixia meets privately with each team to discuss performance and reinforce the importance of aligning decisions with strategy to ensure a positive outcome. A second business review at the end of the simulation puts teams together in an open session with their competitors and a senior executive panel. Both of these sessions serve as mini-assessment centers, giving Ixia leaders an opportunity to see key talent in action.

A debrief follows the final business review, in which the full group convenes to discuss the performance of each team. Participants compare and contrast leadership approaches and how they impact the competitive landscape and business outcomes. The top-performing teams are then

announced. Participants then discuss together how they plan to apply their simulation learning to their real-world roles. They leave with an agreement to create an ongoing support network, through which they hold informal post-program meetings to check on each other's progress.

Over the next three months, participants cement their simulation learning as they continue the real-world individual projects they launched at the program's start. They are encouraged to reach out to TRI faculty for coaching by phone or email as needed and, at the end of the three-month period, they report out to their senior leadership team on the successful conclusion of their projects. The TRI team helps coordinate and participates in those project reviews, which consist of verbal pitches with slide presentations, conducted either on site or virtually.

Benefits

After completing the TRI simulation, participants have a deeper understanding of all the aspects that go into running a business. The relationships they build with their cross-functional peers continue long after they return to their real-world roles at Ixia. “Sales directors will tell me they were able to close deals because they reached out to other participants for help,” he said.

To date, about 90 Ixia directors, senior directors and senior managers have either completed or are completing the program. Past participants report a wide range of key learnings, including:

- How to work outside of their comfort zone
- The implications and importance of different functions, from finance to HR
- The impact of neglecting certain aspects of the business
- How to evaluate and make tough decisions quickly
- How to strategize and work as a team within a very short time frame to achieve the best outcomes
- The importance of critical conversations and appropriately giving and seeking feedback to maintain a strong performing team

Alumni have universally given the TRI simulation great reviews, rating it 9 and 10 on a 10-point scale. A full 100 percent of participants said it was well worth the time they invested in

it and would recommend the program to their peers, according to Ixia's own post-program survey.

Asked if the workshop expanded their understanding of the critical factors that influence success or failure in the business, 94 percent of participants either “agreed” or “strongly agreed.” As many as 95 percent said the issues dealt with in the simulation were relevant to their current job, and the same percentage believe it has influenced the way in which they lead.

Participant Feedback

“It was the most valuable training I have had in the last 20 years. The first three days has given me the knowledge to understand and appreciate what goes on behind the scenes of running a company. I can now appreciate in more detail the impact of getting your forecasting correct and I will be reiterating this throughout the sales organization. I know my team is going to benefit so much from me attending.”

“Simply put, one of the most valuable professional learning experiences I have had in my career. I have been to other leadership development programs, have learned a lot from them, but none beat the [TRI] simulation.”

“Best training I've ever had. Period.”

For More Information

To learn about how TRI Corporation experiential learning services can benefit your organization, visit www.tri-sim.com, or email TRIContact@tri-sim.com.

For more information about Ixia, visit www.ixia.com.