

How an Innovation Leadership Programme aims to take industry to the next level

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Failure to innovate can mean anything from missing out on profits to being left behind by competitors. Rail Business Daily talks to some of the people behind a ground-breaking Innovation Leadership Programme designed to push manufacturers and the industry they serve to the next level.

The Black Country Innovative Manufacturing Organisation (BCIMO) exists to encourage new ways of thinking. It was established to take businesses into exciting new territory, enabling them to discover untapped capabilities and revenue streams – and in doing so, avoid going out of business in a fast-changing technological world.

At the moment, it is signing up people from manufacturing to a new Innovation Leadership Programme, formed in partnership with The Ideas Centre Group and Verdo. Starting in April, this programme will take management from any sized business and help them to unlock their creative possibilities. This will enable them to be more innovative and, in doing so, better serve their company and the sector it supports.

Designed for the more courageous, the Innovation Leadership Programme will challenge, provoke and stretch participants' minds to reach for new ideas and better habits. This process will be complemented by

practical coaching sessions. All of this will help participants unearth novel concepts and turn them profitable, delivering them with industry-altering impact.

Participants will instantly find themselves in good company: the BCIMO “walks the walk” in terms of developing creative and financially viable ideas that could change an industry. It has become well-known in rail as a guiding hand behind the build, launch and operation of a new Very Light Rail (VLR) National Innovation Centre in Dudley. VLR harnesses low weight, low-cost and advanced rail technology to create a more affordable option to help towns and cities connect.



Very Light Rail (VLR) National Innovation Centre

The crucial need for an Innovation Leadership Programme

The BCIMO organised the Innovation Leadership Programme because it felt there were a lot of outdated ways of doing things holding back manufacturing.

“There needs to be a change in mindset,” Dr Nick Mallinson, Chief Executive of the BCIMO, said.



Dr Nick Mallinson

“The majority of the population – myself included – have been educated to rely on what worked before. This means you can easily become reliant upon ways of doing things that go back 100 years.”

Failure to innovate, however, comes at a price.

“Right now, we’re in the fourth industrial revolution, with digitalisation, and other countries are racing ahead of what we’re doing in the UK,” Nick said.

“‘Tried and tested’ has a sell-by date. When you look at traditional industries, most of them have now disappeared in the UK – replaced by cheap labour or mechanisation. When a change in the market is coming, you *have* to spot that something needs to be done.”

He added: “We often don’t look at situations as if they are a blank sheet of paper, with real possibilities. But that is important because real change comes from disruptive or transformational innovation.”

Generating ideas in the Innovation Leadership Programme

So how do we move past the pitfalls of the ‘tried and tested’ that Nick describes? Furthermore, how do we innovate and disrupt an industry struggling to break free of the past?

This is what the Innovation Leadership Programme is all about.



Dr Dave Hall

Dr Dave Hall, from The Ideas Centre Group, is one of three experts leading participants through the upcoming Innovation Leadership Programme. His work will help people bypass the tried and tested and develop new ideas – envisaging something never experienced before that will ultimately make a business money.

“I’m a scientist and engineer by training, so I understand rail can face an over-reliance on past experience,” Dave said. “Engineering relies a lot on people looking back on their experience to solve the problems of the day. The top people in engineering and manufacturing organisations will often be appointed because they were the best at that.”

Dave’s job on the programme will be to get people to come up with radical ideas. He will push them into territory many will never have experienced before to create paradigm-shifting concepts. Once there, he will help them extract the actual value of that idea before constructing a path to make it a reality.

In short, participants will have incredible new ideas and a plan to realise them.

“Going through this process is life-changing but genuine,” Dave said. “You start to look at things very differently.”

Understanding the mind

Dave’s work will be complemented by that of Heather Wright.

On the Innovation Leadership Programme, she will give people a stunning insight into how they think and, crucially, provide them with the tools to swap deeply-embedded thought habits for more successful ones.

Her work sends people away inspired, armed with real scientific knowledge about their thought processes, and able to embed helpful habits in all parts of their lives.



Heather Wright

“A change in thinking must manifest itself with a change in behaviours. We must learn to consistently do things differently so that we can get different results,” Heather said.

The effect of this is often profound. “I have been working with individuals and organisations on this subject for over 25 years,” she said. “I have seen businesses thrive and achieve targets they didn’t think they could hit. Teams have reported a complete, positive change in attitude towards their abilities and buy-in to organisational change, and I have seen individual and staff engagement rise beyond expectations.

“One organisation went from a turnover of £365,000 to £15 million in three years.”

The power of accountability



Bankie Williams

Bringing this all together will be coaching expert Bankie Williams. He adds a third essential ingredient to the Innovation Leadership Programme: a chance to collect thoughts, reflect and be accountable.

He said this last step was particularly important: “All too often, being the leader of an organisation isn’t just a lonely and isolated job, it is also a role where we can become disconnected and unaccountable. I have found that business leaders miss the sense of being held to account. In this regard, my coaching role will be to encourage the peer group to hold one another to account for the delivery of stated actions arising from the sessions with David and Heather.”

The sponsors and drivers of innovation

What does Bankie hope people will get from the course?

“The first thing I hope for is that programme members have a deeper understanding about what innovation is and is not,” he said. “Once they have this understanding, my hope is that innovation is no longer considered as ‘something else techie organisations do but not us’.

“I then hope that, given the seniority of the individuals on the programme, they will become the sponsors and drivers of innovation within their respective organisations.

“On a bigger scale, I hope this programme, in a small way, starts a movement within the Black Country and that the region becomes a ‘go-to place’ for innovation.”

The Innovation Leadership Programme is now open for people to express an interest in joining the first cohort from April 2022. The programme will require eight half days of your time over a four-month period.

To register your interest, visit <https://bcimo.co.uk/initiatives/innovative-thinking/> or email Naomi Arblaster naomi.arblaster@bcimo.co.uk to find out more.

