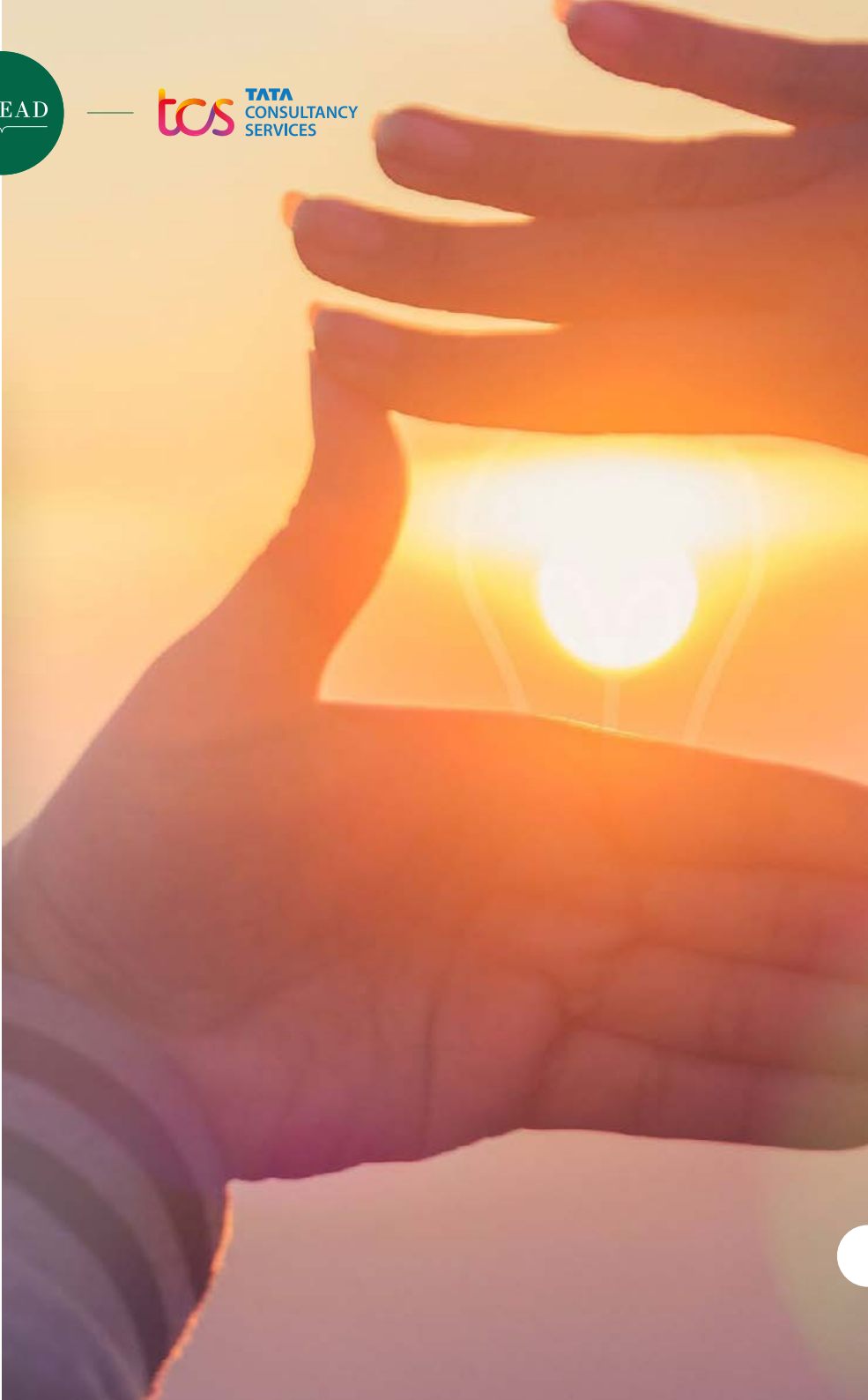


The INSEAD logo is a green circle with the word "INSEAD" in white, serif, uppercase letters inside.The TCS logo features the letters "tcs" in a stylized, lowercase font with a red-to-orange gradient. To its right, the words "TATA CONSULTANCY SERVICES" are stacked in a blue, sans-serif, uppercase font.A photograph showing two people, a man and a woman, sitting at a desk in an office. The man is in the foreground, wearing a blue denim shirt, and is looking down at a document. The woman is behind him, wearing a red top and glasses, also looking at the document. A third person's shoulder and arm are visible in the foreground on the right, out of focus. The background shows a window with blinds and office furniture.

TCS and INSEAD: Transform and Grow – “Ablaze” and “Arise”



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Contents

3 842 words

Summary

A global IT consultancy, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), embarked on a new vision to reshape itself from a service and technology provider into a strategic transformation partner for its clients, the organisation's talent development team embarked on a one-of-a-kind initiative to train "growth and transformation leaders" from within its ranks.

Top-ranked international business school, **INSEAD**, co-designed an innovative programme based on **TCS**'s comprehensive analysis of the 16 key traits required by growth and transformation leaders. By leveraging the vast pool of talent and commitment in **INSEAD**'s global alumni community, as well as the world-leading expertise of its faculty, the school delivered a programme of learning ("Ablaze") and live project work ("Arise") on an unprecedented scale. In total some 1,320 key **TCS** staff across the planet attended the virtual classrooms and break-out cubicles of Ablaze and online workshops of Arise in just 14 months.

One year on, the impact on **TCS** in terms of new patents, new contracts, client satisfaction and participants' career progression has been huge. The first 15% of participants alone delivered a return that was over 3 times the training investment. **INSEAD** is now delivering growth and transformation programmes to the next level of the organisation's leadership. And **TCS** has just been included in Forbes magazine's list of the "World's most admired companies".



Introduction



Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) is one of the world's leading and largest IT consultancies.

Headquartered in Mumbai, India, it has annual revenues of above \$25 billion and more than 600,000 employees of 153 nationalities based in 46 countries. The company combines technological expertise with business intelligence to catalyse change and deliver results for clients in all sectors. **TCS's** mission is to help customers achieve their business objectives by providing innovative, best-in-class IT advice, solutions and services – bringing joy to all stakeholders.



INSEAD is one of the world's leading and largest graduate business schools.

With campuses in Europe (France), Asia (Singapore) and the Middle East (Abu Dhabi), as well as a multi-activity hub in San Francisco, **INSEAD's** education and research spans the globe. Its 165 resident faculty members from 42 countries, all leaders in their academic fields, inspire over 1,500 international degree students and 11,000 executive education participants every year. **INSEAD's** mission is to bring together people, cultures and ideas to develop responsible leaders who transform business and society.

A close-up photograph of a woman with dark hair, wearing a dark green sweater, looking down at a laptop screen. She has her hand resting on her chin, appearing thoughtful or focused. The background is blurred, showing a warm, reddish-brown hue. The image is framed by a large green circular shape on the right side.

The Challenge

The Challenge:

Transformation and Growth

Early in 2020 under its new CEO, global IT consultancy Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) was heading in a new strategic direction.

This was not about new markets or business models. IT consulting remained **at the heart of TCS's business**. There were no aspirations to diversify into other types of advisory services or to expand into strategy and management consultancy. Nor were there any plans to downsize existing staff and replace them with professionals from different backgrounds. The company's greatest strength is its talent: global, multinational and multicultural – yet also leveraging one of its home country's most valuable assets, India's outstanding technical and engineering schools.

However, technology and IT consultancy have come a long way since **TCS** was founded in 1967.

By 2020, clients were no longer asking **TCS** to automate single business functions or even build whole-enterprise systems. Their demands were much, much bigger. Thanks to developments such as cloud computing, artificial intelligence, big data, blockchain and cyber risk, **TCS** and its competitors were increasingly called on to be **strategic partners in business growth through technological transformation**. The need of the hour was to move from plain vanilla IT solutions to **transformative services**.



Even when clients – whether multinational companies, government departments or global strategic consultancies serving such organisations – did ask for specialist or focused solutions, technical expertise was no longer enough. **TCS** consultants, salespeople and technical experts increasingly needed to see the **bigger strategic picture** in order to find those solutions. They also had to set each project in the context of a greater, long-term goal: helping the client's entire business to transform through technology. In addition, they had to look beyond the client company to its customers – and make a meaningful difference by translating these customers' aspirations into a reality. And now an even bigger picture was emerging: the need for consultants to support cross-industry sustainability and purpose-driven initiatives.

In short, **TCS** was at an inflexion point, transitioning from being a preferred technology partner to becoming the strategic partner of choice for its clients – offering value beyond simple IT solutions. Much more than an IT consultancy, it had to become a catalyst for change and sustainability in every business sector it served. And, much more than IT consultants, its people had to become **growth and transformation professionals**.

In practical terms, **TCS** consultants increasingly found themselves dealing not just with the familiar faces of Chief Technology Officers (CTOs) but with the entire C-suite. As a result, **TCS** consultants had to learn new presentation and listening skills. In addition, they had to exchange their old technical language for a new strategic discourse. Of course, they still had to keep thinking about cost optimisation and technical excellence, but now they had to see the strategic potential of everything they did. In short, **TCS** professionals had to develop a whole new **mindset of business growth and transformation**.

And that entailed significant *organisational* and *personal* growth and transformation too.



From

Cost and efficiency
Selling to familiar CIO-type clients
Responding to requests
Subject matter expertise
Creating the solution
Winning through reliability and reputation
Immediate solutions to short-term problems
Relative anonymity, reliance on TCS brand

To

Broader commercial results
Selling to entire C-suite
Imagining ahead of the client
Progressing faster along the learning curve
Orchestrating narrow experts
Winning through vision and road map
Domain-independent long-term impact
Thought leadership and personal brand

As one participant would so eloquently put it (after an **INSEAD** session on storytelling!):

TCS is navigating a wave of changes – and we are at the forefront. But we cannot explore the sea with the same equipment we take to the mountains. We need to leave our comfort zone of technology and venture into the world of business strategy.

Providing the right exploration equipment was the challenge that **TCS's** top management set to the new Programme Head in April 2020. The latter, an experienced HR manager and learning specialist who had been with the company for five years, understood all too well that the required shift in mindset was not just aligned with **TCS's** short- and medium-term strategy; it was fundamental to the long-term future of the organisation.

The Programme Head had designed many leadership initiatives in his time, but this was a challenge on a whole new scale. His mission was **to identify and prepare some 1,200 key TCS personnel to become growth and transformation (G&T) leaders**. These were mainly senior people with some 15 to 20 years' experience from a variety of backgrounds, including sales, technology, delivery and operations. In order to maximise the

impact on **TCS** and its customers, this group also spanned a wide range of geographies and time zones: North and Latin America, Europe, the Middle East and Asia Pacific.

One of the Programme Head's earliest calculations was that his task meant **scaling up TCS leadership-development activities by a staggering 400%**. This was clearly not an initiative that could be handled in house or by regular training providers. As well as scaling up, his brief also implied the need to dig deep into participants' very identity. Reshaping them from "technology consultants" into "growth and transformation leaders" was not simply a question of new skills but of intellectual buy-in and practical application of new ideas – something professors from a top business school could typically provide. Furthermore, he knew that he would not be able to demonstrate immediate impact, as he had with past projects.

TCS senior managers remained undaunted by these challenges and reaffirmed their commitment to the mission. The Programme Head turned his attention to building a team and translating the challenge into an actionable project.

It was already clear that the traditional face-to-face, classroom approach would be impossible at this scale. But how to make virtual learning engaging, interactive and hands-on, while ensuring substantial transfer of knowledge?

As it happened, this was a question that **INSEAD** was pondering too – as a matter of urgency. Although the school had innovated substantially in online learning and virtual classrooms in recent years, the bulk of its executive education programmes relied on its positioning as a top academic institution with in-person delivery. Unlike most of its competitors in this premium market, it was a truly global, standalone business school with locations in four corners of the globe. Its greatest strength was perhaps its power to convene students and participants from all over the world on one or more campuses, with professors moving seamlessly between locations.

Now, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, none of this was possible. Like **TCS, INSEAD** needed to reengineer its business to fit a changing world.





The Commitment

The Commitment

The TCS Programme Head assembled a small, dedicated team of 6 people within the HR department and began two processes in parallel.

- **Analysing the required mindset change.** This involved a multitude of inputs from both inside and outside the organisation to maximise the number of perspectives on the challenge. The **TCS** C-suite and other top executives all shared insights with the new “G&T” team, as did several senior client representatives and a hand-picked group of consultants, leadership experts and academics. At the same time, AI tools and

business-acumen simulations were used to identify the ideal profile of a G&T leader and measure how closely existing staff matched the ideal. This process also helped the team to begin creating a candidate pool.

- **Approaching top business schools** with a view to turning the needs analysis into a learning and development initiative.

Within 9 months or so, the Programme Head had compiled a list of **16 required traits** as follows:

Building industry awareness to understand the client's context

Staying on top of market trends to help clients beat the competition

Using curiosity to connect dots, integrate them and develop proprietary insights

Presenting a compelling narrative to clients and colleagues

Building confidence in self and others

Creating psychological safety

Embracing risk

Resilience (overcoming setbacks, failing fast, disengaging, bouncing back)

Working outside the hierarchy by using persuasion to mobilise support

Getting things done by using influence without authority

Servant leadership (e.g., inclusiveness, embracing diversity and engaging others' talents)

Ecosystem thinking (engaging partners in collaboration)

Lateral/eclectic thinking integrating diverse perspectives for innovation

Forging creative solutions by bringing people together across domains

Data analysis and evidence-based judgement (mindset, not tools)

Problem-solving mindset, unifying diverse contributors to structure and solve problems



Professor Philip Anderson,
Professor of Entrepreneurship

The TCS Programme Head had also identified **INSEAD** as the preferred partner. With **INSEAD** Senior Director of Corporate Partnerships, Karthik Rajaraman, and Professor of Entrepreneurship, Philip Anderson, there had been a meeting of minds. The Programme Head explains:

Other learning providers said, "We have this course that we can customise for you", whereas Phil and Karthik said, "What do you want? Let's design it together."

In other words, **INSEAD** not only understood the required mindset; it also demonstrated that mindset. However, by definition, that meant there was no ready-made solution. And the main issue for Anderson, Rajaraman and their programme-design team was one of scale. How on earth could they reach 1,200 participants with the level of personal attention specified and embed a new mindset and behaviours?

Note that this was not a technical challenge. **TCS** had already specified that the programme should be delivered using Teams. Nor was it a budgetary challenge. Rather, it was a human and practical challenge. Given their other commitments, **INSEAD** professors could not hope to provide the number of hours required within a single year without resorting to mass teaching or asynchronous online exercises – which would not meet the **TCS** brief to provide a personalised experience.

"Professor Phil", as he became known at **TCS**, sat in his apartment in locked-down Singapore and calmly did the math.

- First, he divided the total number of participants by 10, which created 10 manageable cohorts of **120: just right for a virtual class** to explain new principles and concepts – with some instructor-participant interaction.

- He then divided the cohort into 3 groups of **40: just right for a smaller virtual class** to translate the newly learned principles and concepts into practical applications relevant to **TCS** – with more personal attention and interaction with the instructor.

- Finally, he divided each class into 8 teams of **5: just right for groupwork** to experiment with applying the new mindset through case studies and simulations – with the instructor moving between online groups, just as they would between break-out rooms on campus.

Next, he moved on to the traits. Working with **TCS** and colleagues he created a matrix to match the 16 traits to faculty expertise. This resulted in a curriculum of 11 sessions, each covering four or more of the traits, as follows.



The traits-faculty-session matrix

Faculty	Session Title	Industry awareness	Market trends	Connect dots	Evolving narrative	Confidence	Psychological safety	Embracing risk	Resilience	Transcend hierarchy	Influence	Servant leadership	Ecosystem thinking	Lateral thinking	Creative solutions	Evidence-based	Problem solving
Chengyi Lin	The CXO's transformation agenda	•	•	•	•												
Spencer Harrison	Developing creative insights with customers	•	•	•	•	•		•						•	•		•
Thomas Mannarelli	Co-creation across boundaries			•				•		•		•	•	•	•		
Philip Anderson	Managing multiple stakeholders						•		•		•	•	•			•	•
Anil Gaba	Evidence-based judgement	•	•	•		•		•	•							•	•
Henrik Bresman	Mobilising ecosystems for change			•						•	•		•			•	
Charles Galunic	Leadership in the new millennium				•	•	•		•	•		•					
Andy Yap	Productive conflict for superior solutions			•			•	•	•		•			•	•		•
Ko Kuwabara	Influencing transformation through relationships						•			•	•	•	•				
Gabriel Szulanski	Effective problem-solving in groups						•							•	•	•	•
Philip Anderson	Storytelling		•		•	•					•						

The **TCS** brief was starting to look like an Executive Education programme – or, as the Programme Head put it, a “bootcamp”, which he called “**Ablaze**”.

Anderson and the Programme Head knew from experience that, to embed the learning, it had to be applied – ideally in parallel – to actual **TCS** projects. So the Programme Head came up with the idea of live action-learning projects in groups of 4 to 6. These “**solutioning workshops**”, known as “**Arise**”, would all focus on current **TCS** proposals, clients or projects. However, this part of the initiative made the size of the undertaking even greater!

One of the colleagues Anderson consulted was Chengyi Lin, Professor of Strategy and specialist in online education. Lin saw the challenge of Ablaze and Arise immediately. “Nobody had done anything on this scale before, in terms of virtual, synchronous learning. The cumulative number of hours was crazy!” he says. To add to Anderson’s organisational headache, **TCS** had also requested **continuity**, with instructors supporting and following the progress of each individual participant. Surely, he would never find anyone prepared to commit the time required for such a task?

Then, during the darkest days of the pandemic, Karthik Rajaraman had a lightbulb moment. What if INSEAD could harness its **alumni network** to find instructors? After all, it was full of professionals with strong credentials in learning and coaching, and long business experience at a senior level. These were also people the school knew it could trust. **INSEAD** had long ago innovated in using its global network of MBA alumni to interview MBA candidates, anywhere in the world. Now it would innovate again by recruiting alumni with the right experience to deliver learning at the highest level for **TCS**.

Anderson began to formulate a plan for each class of 40 to be assigned **an INSEAD graduate as their Ablaze** lecturer. These alumni would also work with him and the 10 other faculty to identify and develop suitable learning activities on each lecture topic. They would then be able to deliver 11 classes with related group activities. They would also be able to take on the role of **learning coaches for Arise** – with projects selected from real-life challenges nominated by participants. Anderson started to put out feelers in the global **INSEAD** community.



Meanwhile, on the other side of the world, in the Netherlands, Nathalie van der Poel, found herself with time on her hands. She had graduated from the **INSEAD** MBA programme with distinction in 1999, before building a career in consulting, executive development and coaching. Since the beginning of the pandemic, however, the thriving leadership-development practice that she had founded – like many other firms in the same business – had a lot less work than usual.

When a former classmate called to ask whether she would be interested in joining him as an Ablaze lecturer, she jumped at the chance to reconnect with the school, use her skills and learn once again from **INSEAD** professors. “It was wonderful to re-engage!” she says. “Phil was inspirational.” What’s more, one of the Ablaze professors, Thomas Mannarelli, had taught her favourite MBA elective.





The Initiative

The Initiative

Between December 2020 and April 2022, INSEAD and its handpicked team of alumni delivered Ablaze to 11 cohorts of 120 TCS leaders. Arise ran in parallel and each cohort took around 3 months to complete the programme.

In theory, the first intake was the pilot group, but in reality, every run of the programme was slightly different, based on feedback from the last and new ideas from new alumni lecturers and coaches. The process was one of continuous improvement and openness to change for both partners.

Selection of participants

Using the traits as a guide, **TCS** sought **nominations** from its senior managers globally. Nominees then underwent **psychometric testing** based on the 16 traits and a **business acumen simulation** to determine their suitability. Despite the fact that the sessions were scheduled for inhospitable hours across time zones and were on top of normal workloads, applications outnumbered places – sometimes by a factor of 10 to 1.



Ablaze

The 120 participants attended 11 half-day sessions (see matrix above for subject areas), each with the following structure:

- **Plenary session** with **INSEAD** faculty (2 hours)
- **Interactive session** in classes of 40 with alumni lecturers (1 hour)
- **Hands-on learning activities** in groups of 5 (such as case study analysis, role play or simulation) designed by faculty and supervised by alumni lecturers in virtual break-out rooms. (1 hour). Professors would also drop into break-out rooms to answer questions
- **Debrief and reflection** including a 10-minute online “flight check” to consolidate learning.

Note that each class of 40 stayed with the same lecturer and same break-out group throughout Ablaze to ensure continuity, individual attention and the personal touch. ‘We were the trusted face of INSEAD for our 40 people over the full length of the 11 sessions, allowing us to develop real connections with the class and to create a space of psychological safety.’ says Nathalie van der Poel.

Arise

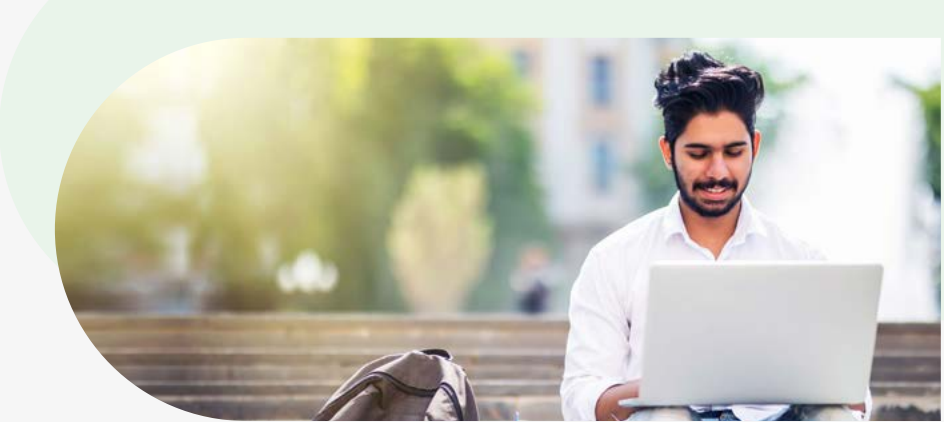
Participants submitted project ideas shortly after the start of Arise. After selection of the 25 or so best ideas by the **TCS** G&T team and **INSEAD** coaches, **TCS** created teams of around 4 people for each project. Sometimes these coincided with Ablaze break-out groups, but usually they were mixed and matched according to the project, based on factors such as skillset and experience.

The coaches then supported the groups through their project work over three sessions, culminating in a simulated presentation to the client’s C-suite. For this final “pitch”, the group’s own coach and one other coach played C-suite roles. Both offered constructive feedback.

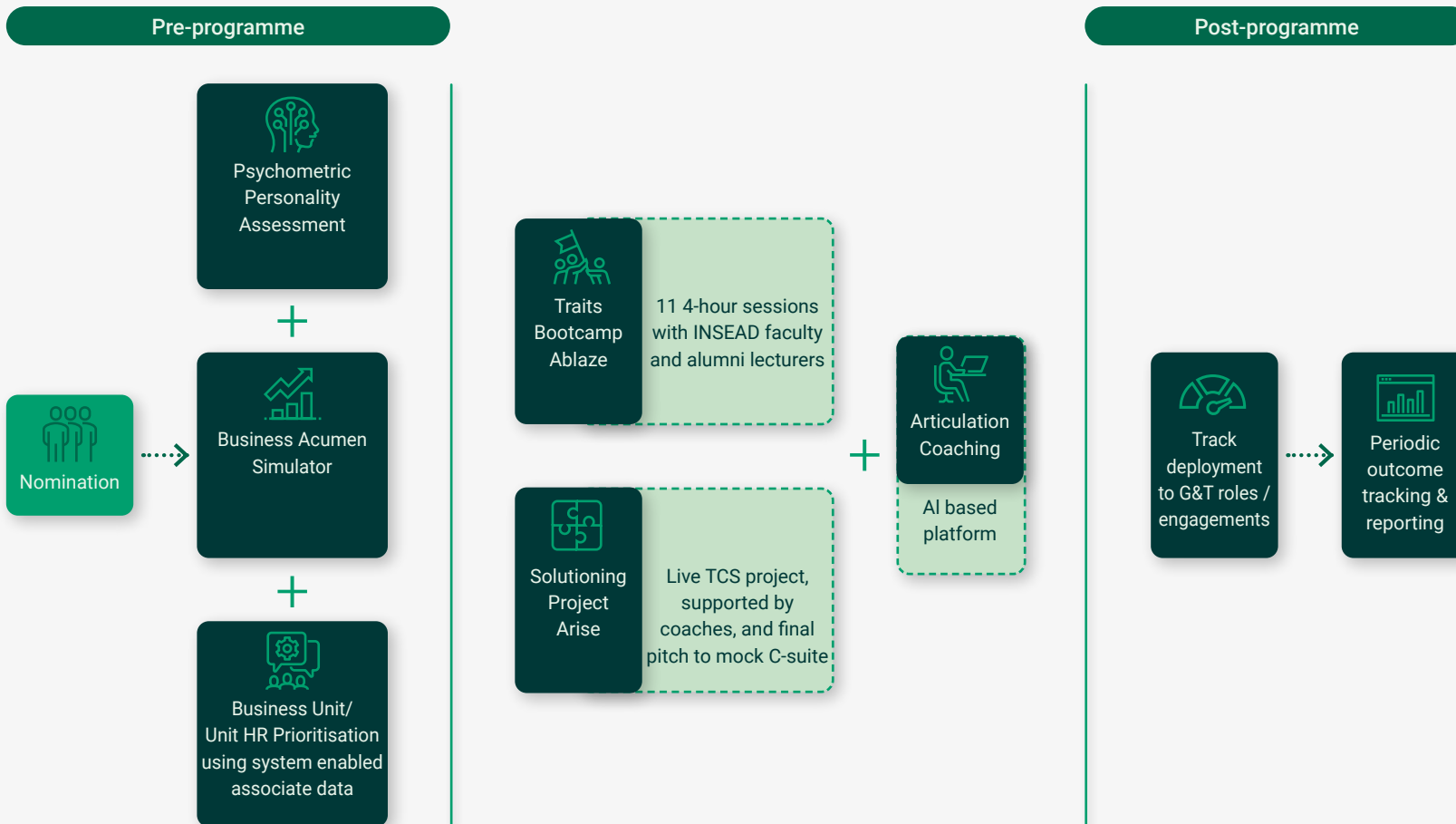
“We provided a bridge between the academic work of Ablaze and its real-world application in **TCS**,” explains Lakshmi Narasimha Moorthy, a serial entrepreneur, **INSEAD** alumnus and Arise learning coach. “We also get the participants to develop a 50,000-foot view of their project, as well as helping them to develop their teamwork and storytelling.

Follow-up

Following “graduation” from the programme, the **TCS** G&T team tracked the deployment of participants to new roles, projects and client relationships. They also undertook periodic checking-in and reporting. Finally, after 9 to 12 months, participants received a questionnaire designed to gauge the longer-term impact of the programme.



Programme Process & Design





The Impact

The Impact

“We made it clear to senior management that the programme wouldn’t get immediate or fully tangible results,” says the Programme Head. “So we waited for 9 to 12 months before attempting to measure the impact.”

The main method of measurement at this stage was a survey focused on three elements:

- **Key learning** (“After all, you can only use what you’ve internalised if you remember it!” says the Programme Head)
- **Implementation** of the learning, with examples
- **Outcomes of the implementation**, also with concrete examples wherever possible.

Completion rates were high and the data is still being collated. For the first 15% of participants alone, the outcomes already include:

- **8 patents** in various stages of filing, including a whole new approach to digitising entertainment content and a new architecture for the IT industry
- 1 design already **granted copyright**
- **4 new proofs-of-concept** presented to clients in different sectors
- **10+ new contracts**
- **4 contracts with new clients**
- A total of **US\$ 400 million in contract value** directly or indirectly attributed by participants to having completed the programme.

In other words, the first 15% of participants alone delivered a return that was over 3 times the training investment. In addition, participant tracking reveals that around **73% of participants have already moved into growth and transformation deployments**. Retention rates among participants are also up by around 25% (although other parallel internal initiatives are likely to have contributed to this figure). Finally, the programme **exceeded its own ambitious target of 1,200** participants and reached 1,320 TCS leaders within the original timeframe envisaged.



Not content with numbers alone, the Programme Head joined one of the later cohorts as a “mystery shopper” and went through the entire programme himself. He says:

Phil and Karthik were aware of what I was doing, but most of the professors didn't know me as the Programme Head. It was a phenomenal experience. It also enabled me to improve a lot of our internal administrative and nomination processes. But the highlight was working on a live client solution in Arise. One of our team members took our ideas to the client and returned with feedback. For a learning and development specialist it was great exposure to the business.

There is also anecdotal evidence from the managers of participants, who have spoken to clients about the discernible changes. One notable difference is that graduates of Ablaze and Arise no longer rush into selling their services. Rather than jumping straight to the claim, “We can do this!”, they listen, research and understand the client's “pain points” – and tailor their proposals accordingly.

According to Nathalie van der Poel, this change was evident during the programme:

In the beginning, the participants were always talking about technical content. But gradually, they began to focus less on solving problems and avoiding mistakes and more on engaging, creativity, curiosity and storytelling. I could see them moving onto a strategic level before my eyes.

Lakshmi Narasimha Moorthy, learning coach, had a similar experience. He is also aware of at least two of the simulated project pitches he witnessed having turned into real contracts – and keeps hearing of others in the pipeline for consideration. Typically, he estimates that 3 out of every 5 of his coaching groups were visibly transformed during the programme, while the other two also made considerable progress in specific areas.

Professor Philip Anderson sums up the change: “You'd meet a participant at the beginning and end of the programme and think, ‘Is this the same person?’” Professor Chengyi Lin also saw an evolution between cohorts, as the programme's influence spread. “There's been a shift in psyche in the whole company,” he says.

One participant, a chief IT architect, sums up the personal and business impact:

The programme encouraged me outside of my comfort to explore known unknowns and unknown unknowns through design thinking. The frameworks supported me to identify and formulate problem statements. In fact, I have initiated my first IP filing and a couple more are in the pipeline. Ablaze and Arise have given wings to my thoughts.



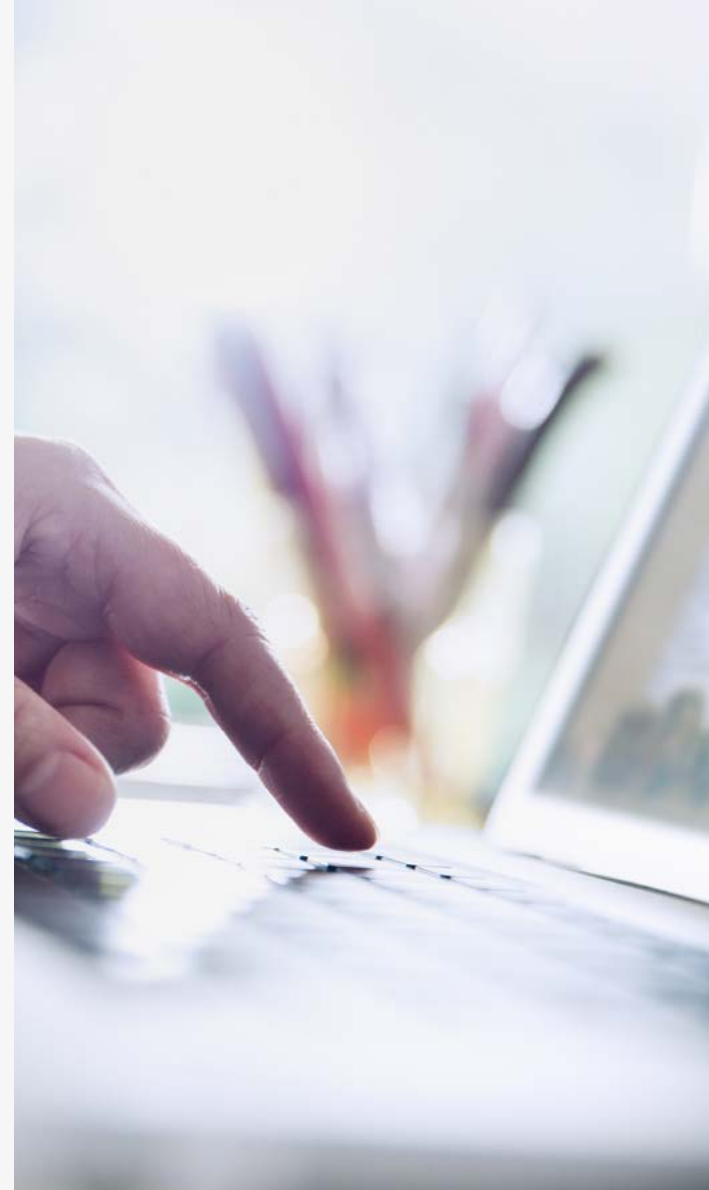
Conclusion

Conclusion

The partnership between **TCS** and **INSEAD** is evolving, with a new, concise, still-virtual version of the programme currently being rolled out at lower levels of the hierarchy. “It’s the biggest partnering experience I’ve had in 35 years of educating executives,” says Philip Anderson. “There is an unprecedented level of cooperation on a scale beyond anything I’ve ever experienced.”

He also does not hide the fact that, for **INSEAD**, the contract was a financial godsend at a time when the pandemic threatened the school’s business. What’s more, Ablaze and Arise were long-term gamechangers in that they proved to both partners that virtual delivery can be as impactful as in-person teaching.

Meanwhile, for **TCS**, the transformation continues. It is no coincidence that it has just been included in Fortune magazine’s list of the World’s Most Admired Companies. As Suresh Muthuswami, Chair of **TCS**, North America says, “This recognition is an outcome of the longer-term, purpose-driven partnerships we have built with our clients, communities and all other stakeholders.”



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