



Benesch Develops Inspired—and Inspiring—Leaders, with Insights from Harrison Assessments

Harrison Case Study Benesch

The time had come to strengthen Alfred Benesch & Company's leadership pipeline.

After decades of steady growth and a string of fruitful mergers and acquisitions, Benesch had evolved into a leading structural and civil engineering firm - designing major bridges and delivering complex projects for the Department of Transportation and the nation's railroads, along with varied work for clients throughout the public and private sectors.

To ensure Benesch's continued success, its senior management team knew they must develop a continuous supply of inspired leaders. After all, the company's aggressive expansion had created significant challenges related to workplace culture and organizational cohesiveness, and Benesch's 600 employees were now spread across 16 states.

For years, Benesch had developed its leaders internally and informally, relying on the c-suite to spread its knowledge and management skills to up-and-coming leaders. "But we knew that needed to change," said Laura Doerr, Benesch's Vice President & Human Resources Director. "We needed to put a formal leadership development program in place."

As it turned out, a key component of this program was Harrison Assessments.

Leaders Gain Insights into Themselves and Each Other

Being an engineering firm, Benesch decided to build its own leadership development program from the ground up. Assessing the personal skills and behaviours of Benesch's leaders would be an essential component of the program. A number of members of the Benesch team had past experience with a variety of assessment tools, but they chose Harrison Assessments for its superior accuracy and comprehensiveness in addressing leadership behaviours.

Thirty-one emerging leaders from across the company completed Harrison's SmartQuestionnaire and received debriefs on their results. "It turned out to be a phenomenal success," Doerr said. "Harrison not only gave our emerging leaders a solid understanding of their own skill sets and behaviours but it also helped them better understand how they interacted as a group."

The Organization:

Benesch (Alfred Benesch & Company)

The Challenge:

To launch a formal leadership development program that creates inspired and self-aware leaders.

The Solution:

Harrison Assessments' SmartQuestionnaire and Paradoxical leadership methodology.

The Outcomes:

Emerging leaders gain detailed insights into their own behaviours and how to maximise their effectiveness.

Benesch's leaders develop a deeper understanding of their group dynamic and how they interact.

The Harrison tools help develop a continuous supply of self-aware and inspired leaders.

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In addition, Harrison's Paradoxical Leadership approach provided the managers with the essential understanding of their behaviours and stress responses that can make or break the organization. Determining whether a person's strong behavioural traits are genuine strengths or costly derailers. A crucial consideration most traditional assessments fail to make.

As part of the leadership development program, every one of the emerging leaders spent time with a Harrison consultant, examining their assessment results and discussing their personal development and improvement. The leaders then participated in four facilitated two-day group workshop sessions. These workshops addressed both personal leadership behaviours and brought attention to the group dynamic and how the company's potential future leaders might best work together. Finally, the group underwent Benesch-specific training, led by the company's own internal experts who focused on important aspects of Benesch's workplace culture and business strategy.

Doerr said that two groups of emerging leaders have gone through the leadership development program to date, and the company is in the midst of planning for a third. Tellingly, not a single emerging leader has left Benesch since the program was launched in 2015. Doerr believes that's a powerful testament to the value of the program and how much the company's leaders learn from it.

A Chance To Learn and Be Introspective

Looking back at the program's origins, Doerr noted that Harrison Assessments suited the company's needs far better than other tools for a few reasons. "First of all, we're engineers, which means we're meticulous and technically oriented," she said. All of Harrison's tools are meticulously crafted and backed by solid science, which suited Benesch to a tee. "But beyond that, we know that great leaders need effective people skills and we felt that Harrison helped us gain a deep understanding of this skills and this non-technical aspect of leadership."

At its core, Benesch's leadership development program is based on the notion that people can't lead others effectively until they understand themselves - what motivates them, why they behave the way they do and how they react in specific situations. "We wanted to give our leaders - especially our future leaders - the chance to learn about themselves and be introspective," Doerr said. "Our formal development program gives them this chance, and Harrison Assessments gives them the insights needed to make the most of it."

As for the future, Doerr said that Benesch plans to use the Harrison tools to do some additional coaching and to improve its recruiting. "We think the Harrison data could be used in a number of ways for our internal coaching initiatives, and its assessment tools could be a big help in identifying and hiring people who truly fit our culture."

Building successful leaders is a challenge, even for one of the nation's top engineering firms. But with a little assistance from Harrison Assessments, Benesch is already seeing strong results.

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About Benesch

Benesch is ranked #127 in Engineering New Record's Top 500 Design Firm listing, and is consistently recognized as one of the nation's Top "Go-To" bridge firms by Roads & Bridges magazine. With expertise in engineering, planning, site development, environmental, geotechnical, construction inspection and landscape architecture, Benesch serves clients with both the public and private sector. Learn more at www.benesch.com.

Harrison Talent Life Cycle Solutions

Harrison Assessments uses predictive analytics to help organizations acquire, develop, lead and engage their talent. This comprehensive Talent Decision Analytics provides the intelligence needed throughout the talent life cycle to build effective teams and develop, engage and retain key talent. Contact us to learn how we help organizations make great decisions.

