



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

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 taking on 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.

The Organization:

Benesch (Alfred Benesch & Company)

The Challenge:

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

The Solution:

Harrison Assessments' Smart Questionnaire and Paradox Technology.

The Outcomes:

Emerging leaders gain insights into their own behaviours and abilities.

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.

— 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. Since members of the Benesch team had past experience with a variety of assessment tools, they quickly chose Harrison Assessments for its superior accuracy and comprehensiveness.

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Thirty-one emerging leaders from across the company then completed Harrison's Smart Questionnaire. "That turned out to be a phenomenal success," Doerr said. "The Questionnaire 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."

In addition, Harrison's Paradox Technology gave the officers some surprising insights into personality and behavioural traits that could make them either effective or ineffective leaders, depending on how they were used and balanced.

As part of the leadership development program, every one of the emerging leaders spent time with a Harrison coach, examining their assessment results and discussing their personal development and improvement. The leaders then participated in four two-day group workshop sessions facilitated by a Harrison coach. While these workshops addressed personal leadership traits, they brought a lot of attention to the group dynamic and how the company's potential future leaders might 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 ways they do, 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."

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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 assist from Harrison Assessments, Benesch is already seeing strong results.

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.



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