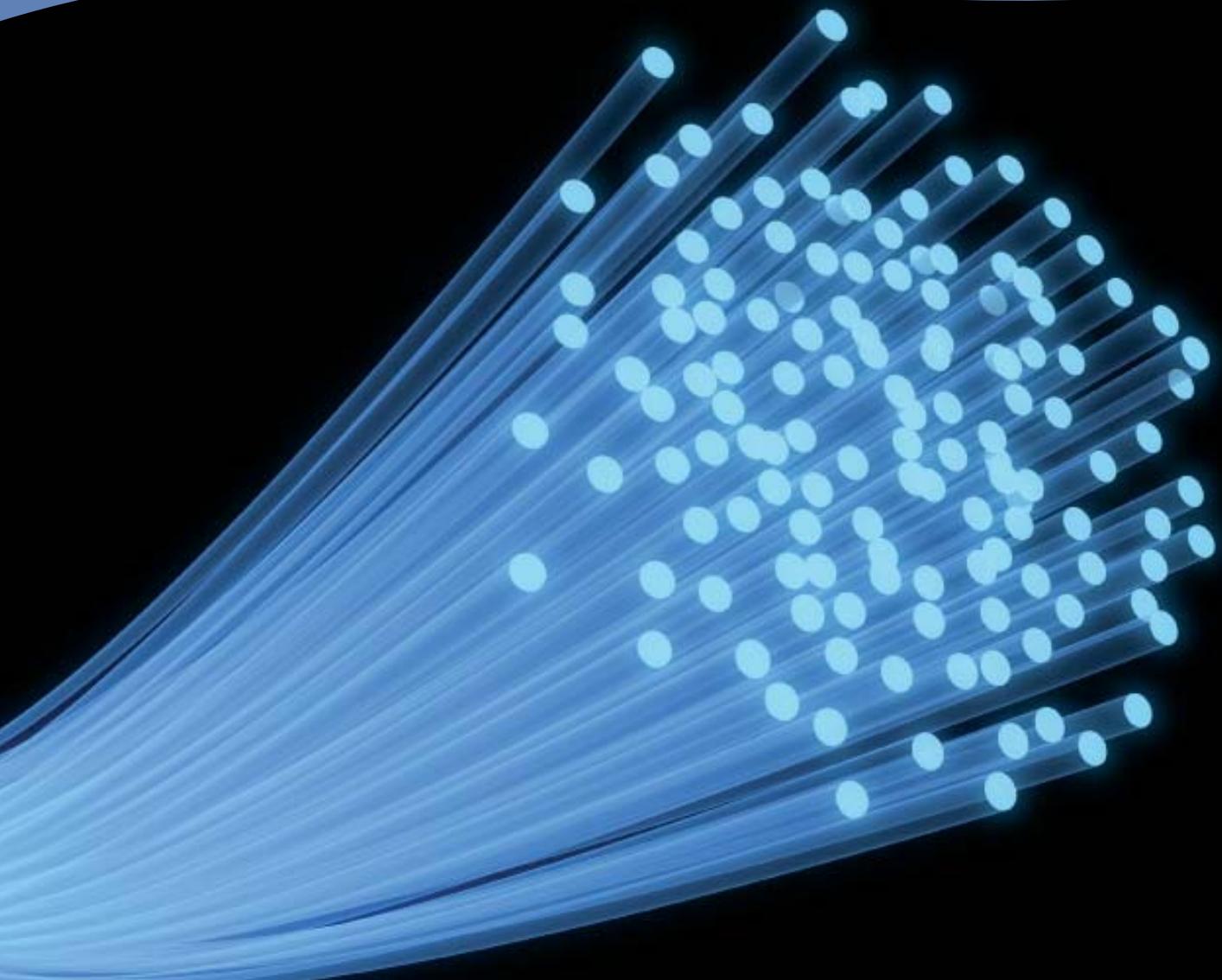


# Case Study

Parsons Brinckerhoff



## Situation

Founded in 1885 and headquartered in New York City, Parsons Brinckerhoff (PB) is a leader in the development and operation of infrastructure to meet the needs of communities around the world. The firm provides strategic consulting, planning, engineering and programme and construction management services to both public and private sector clients. PB is active in multiple market sectors, including transport, power, buildings/facilities, water/wastewater, environmental and urban/community development. It employs around 12,000 people worldwide.

In 2008, PB reviewed its approach to leadership development. Previous programmes had been run but a fresh approach was needed. Planning for tough market conditions and anticipating a possible change of ownership the senior management team wanted to achieve three objectives with its new leadership approach:

- to develop a strong group of future leaders as part of its talent management strategy and succession planning
- to ensure organisational agility – making sure the business would be able to respond to new business challenges including a potential merger
- to develop an enhanced leadership capability that would help drive competitive advantage.

HR Director Dominic Kirkbride explains: ‘Leadership is more important than ever. Organisations which are well led have a much greater chance of succeeding in turbulent times. Today’s global situation calls for leaders who can act strategically, ethically and responsibly against the backdrop of reduced resources, a downturn in demand and financial uncertainty. These leadership qualities are the critical drivers for ensuring our survival and for identifying and capitalising on opportunities resulting from the current economic climate. With them we can build sustainable competitive advantage and fuel future growth.’

PB sought a business school to partner with in order to deliver on these objectives. Jude Rowan, Learning and Development Manager, Europe Africa, comments, ‘We wanted to work with a top-class business school with first class academics – master practitioners in their fields. When we came to Henley we were impressed by the high calibre of people we met and the quality of clients they work with. The facilities and location were excellent – a wonderful place for learning.’

## Approach

Since the target group of 17 high potential leaders could not spend long periods away from the office PB decided to opt for a modular approach – 3 modules of 3 days each. A mixture of practical and theory, each covered a different topic. In between these intensive sessions there were a number of action learning interventions delivered to all participants in 4 regional groupings. After the final module in July 2009 the 4 groups were given a number of real business issues to consider and asked to present their analysis and proposals to a PB EA Senior Management Team meeting in October. This gave everyone the opportunity to use their new skills on a current business-focused project and for the senior management team to begin to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme through the quality of analysis and suggested solutions.

‘Everyone thought it was superb and a number consider it to be the best development programme they have done in their careers to date. Since the 17 participants come from right across the business – including 3 from South Africa – we expect the business benefit of the programme to be felt right across the organisation.’

## Results

Jude commented, 'Whilst the feedback on the whole programme has been extremely positive the two most valuable aspects were the session on personal behaviours in Module 1 – the personal insight and discovery profile – and the session on commercial leadership and strategy in Module 2. For some this was new but all have commented how easily they were able to see the immediate application of the skills discussed in this session.'

'The Senior Management Team have been impressed by the quality of output from the team projects and some proposals are to be considered for implementation.'

One of the 17 participants, Regional Director Mike Davies summarised his view of the experience. 'The programme really focussed on what is important in business leadership. It has fundamentally changed how I interact with people above and below me in the management structure as well as with clients. We live in times of rapid change and for businesses and people this can be unsettling. Developing a business structure that can respond quickly to the needs of its staff and clients, is very important. I think those of us who attended the course were given practical advice on how businesses will need to change going forward, how that change can be implemented and the difference that true leadership can make to an organisation.'

Though the programme has only recently reached its conclusion early results are impressive; 3 participants have achieved promotions – due in part to their participation in the programme. Several participants have been selected to participate in integration teams resulting from a major restructuring of the business. The Senior Management Team have been impressed by the quality of output from the team projects and some proposals are to be considered for implementation.

Jude concluded, 'Everyone thought it was superb and a number consider it to be the best development programme they have done in their careers to date. Since the 17 participants come from right across the business – including 3 from South Africa – we expect the business benefit of the programme to be felt right across the organisation.'

This case study is an example of the bespoke leadership development work Henley carries out with organisations in the UK and worldwide. Henley also offers a portfolio of open leadership programmes that provide development opportunities for leaders at all stages of their careers. Please contact us to discuss your leadership priorities.

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