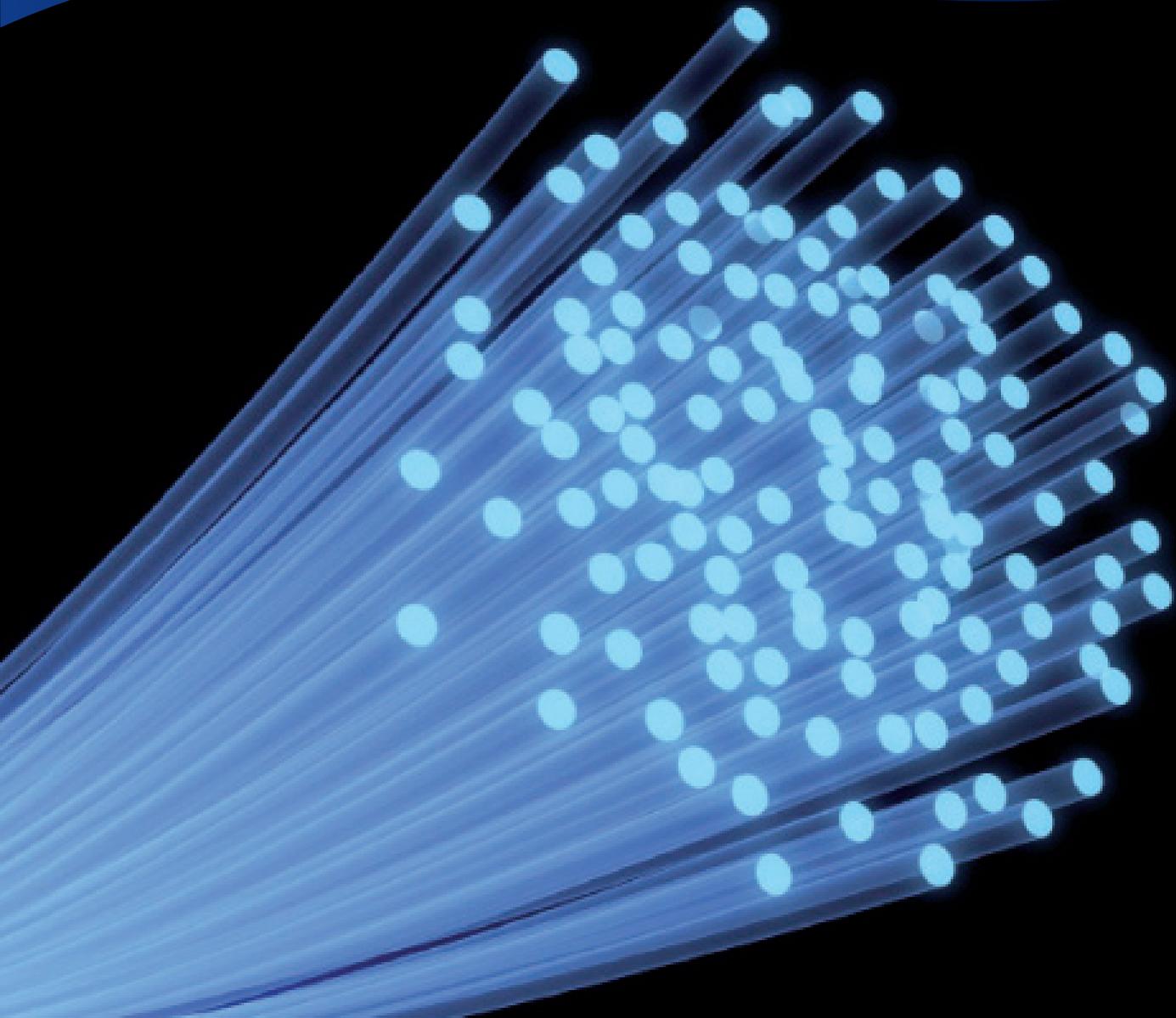


# Case Study

Arup



'The commitment at the highest levels of the firm was fundamental to the project's success,'

**David Macdonald,**  
Group Head of Resourcing  
and Development

## Situation

In 1946, philosopher and engineer Ove Arup set up his consulting engineering business in London. Over the next 60 years the business grew into an international consulting firm which now has 18 businesses operating from over 90 offices across Europe, North America, Africa, Australasia and South East Asia. Arup has tripled in size in the last ten years and now has over 10,000 people worldwide. Around 50% of that growth has happened since 2006. With 10,000 projects going on at any one time, Arup seeks to do the best possible job for current and future generations; putting sustainability at the heart of its work.

Arup recognises that the firm's strength lies in its distinctive values, independent ownership and genuine quality and integrity in all its dealings with clients and other stakeholders. The organisation is owned in trust for its employees and follows the business principles that Ove Arup first set out in 1970 in his forward-looking 'key speech'. Ove Arup's original principles included employing good people and empowering them to do good work. This has led the firm to employ a healthy and eclectic mix of talented people with very different perspectives and from many cultures, working together, learning from each other and generously sharing their knowledge and ideas in pursuit of a collective quest to create a better world. International team-working is the stuff of everyday life. Every employee has a voice and leadership is about engaging – not telling.

In any organisation senior leaders must represent the values that create the reputation of the firm. This is doubly true in Arup where its values are what makes it distinctive. In 2011, following a period of rapid international growth, Arup sought to support its new directors – by re-igniting commitment to, and passion for, the distinctive values set out in the 'key speech'. It set out three objectives:

- For leaders to have a more effective relationship with their teams and the teams around them
- That leaders recognise the importance of their leadership and their impact on the organisation; understanding their 'increased responsibility to deliver'
- That leaders be able to articulate Arup's distinctiveness with its own people, on its projects and in its market place.

The intention was not to develop a formulaic interpretation of the founding principles but to encourage every leader to translate them in a clear, personal way into actions that are 'right' for them and therefore for the firm. 'We didn't want to 'sheep-dip' people through leadership training,' explains Cathy McNulty, Group HR Director. The project was shaped by David Macdonald, Group Head of Resourcing and Development, and a Steering Group of Board members from reciprocal boards around the world. Cathy continues, 'Involving our Board Members brought the event alive with the most influential people in the firm involved.'

'We didn't want to 'sheep-dip' people through leadership training'

**Cathy McNulty,**  
Group HR Director

## Approach

Working with Henley, the Arup team outlined a series of specific development objectives for participants. These were to:

- Increase their self awareness of strengths, development needs and their own leadership contribution
- Help them be able to describe Arup values and culture and their personal part in protecting and evolving those
- Ensure they were clear about the firm's expectations of the leadership contribution of a new senior leader
- Develop their abilities and a personal implementation plan in the three shared responsibilities of all Arup leaders which are to:
  - 1 Role model our values
  - 2 Pass on what you know
  - 3 Leave Arup better than you found it.

Working closely with Arup's development team, Henley designed a series of three day events to take place around the world. Each event had a global cohort of 25. Before attending, each participant would complete a 360 degree assessment. The events featured a range of innovative, self-directed and collaborative learning methodologies chosen to work with the Arup culture. These included elective parallel sessions, 'Open Space' which could include one-to-one coaching or participants creating their own tutorial group on an issue of common importance, and circle dialogues. There was ample opportunity for networking, peer learning and informal discussion both during and after each event. A follow-up coaching session and development plan helped to maximize learning effectiveness.

Whilst structured by Henley some sessions were primarily led by Arup Board members who gave their point of view on each of the three responsibilities. This commitment from the senior team gave strong reinforcement to the importance of the programme. Cathy comments, 'Working with Henley - an externally renowned school - on both design and delivery - gave the programme additional 'kudos'.

## Results

Arup choose not to measure effectiveness in financial terms. The firm has set a five year horizon for reviewing the success of the programme. Currently success is evaluated through the stories told by participants. Some comments from participants include:

- 'The event was very effective in reinforcing the leadership contribution I can make at Arup'
- 'The event has been extremely effective at clarifying my own leadership contribution and provided the opportunity to step back and reflect on my role in an open and transparent environment where others are tackling similar development issues as myself'
- 'It has motivated me to move outside my comfort zone to tackle new and challenging roles for the betterment of the firm and myself'

'Working with Henley – an externally renowned school – on both design and delivery – gave the programme additional 'kudos'. Involving our Board Members brought the event alive with the most influential people in the firm involved.'

**Cathy McNulty,**  
Group HR Director

‘Our leaders are starting to pass on what they know to their teams and are starting to relish their role as drivers for change and guardians of the culture. The spirit of the programme is being advocated by the alumni – to the extent that its reputation is building quickly and more and more leaders want to be part of it.’

**Cathy McNulty,**  
Group HR Director

- ‘The programme was a great opportunity to step out of the day-to-day, focus on leadership in a structured program, and share insights with colleagues, coaches and faculty. Exceptionally useful, but the challenge remains to maintain the focus on leadership actions and living values long after the ‘push’ effect of the Arup Leader ‘hothouse’ has passed’

Follow-up sessions allow participants to review their personal development plans and see how effective they are at role modelling values. HR Directors collect qualitative feedback that reveals how participants have changed their actions and behaviours. One recounted how he now sets time aside once a month to meet with each of his direct reports just to get to know them and their work better. Another made changes to the way they scheduled their time in order to be able to talk more face-to-face with people. Cathy McNulty adds, ‘Our leaders are starting to pass on what they know to their teams and are starting to relish their role as drivers for change and guardians of the culture. The spirit of the programme is being advocated by the alumni – to the extent that its reputation is building quickly and more and more leaders want to be part of it.’

In addition to this programme Arup are also preparing a complementary one day programme for existing – rather than new – directors and a second one day programme around the core values for new associates.

#### For more information

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

## Case study **Arup**

**i** For more information, please contact:

**Kathleen McFarlane**

Henley Business School  
Greenlands  
Henley-on-Thames  
Oxfordshire, RG9 3AU

exec@henley.com

Tel +44 (0)1491 418 874

[www.henley.com/open](http://www.henley.com/open)