

CUSTOM PROGRAM SUCCESS STORY

FOCUS: LEADERSHIP / NETWORKING / GLOBAL OPERATIONS

INDUSTRY: OIL AND GAS



MIT Sloan
Executive
Education

Aker Solutions

BUILDING A LEADERSHIP PIPELINE

THE CHALLENGE

The Norway-based Aker Solutions provides oilfield products, systems, and services for customers in the oil and gas industry worldwide. The company employs nearly 28,000 people in more than 30 countries and has highly ambitious growth targets.

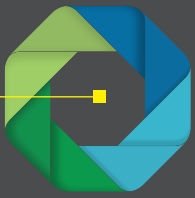
Aker Solutions realized that in order to reach its targets it needed to strengthen its leadership capacity. As the company becomes bigger and more globally distributed, it requires a new class of managers with strong leadership skills, thorough understanding of market dynamics, and the ability to make informed decisions in an increasingly complex marketplace. Bjarte Johannessen, Head of Organisation Development at Aker Solutions, approached MIT Sloan Executive Education with a request for a custom program that would turn Aker Solutions' high-potential managers into capable future leaders.

THE SOLUTION

From the beginning, the relationship between Aker Solutions' stakeholders and MIT Sloan faculty was a close partnership. MIT Sloan Executive Education program designers developed a modular, multi-session executive education program to introduce the company's executives to advanced management frameworks and the latest thinking from MIT Sloan faculty and experts.

After a day-and-a-half preview for Aker Solutions' senior leadership at the company's headquarters in Oslo, the program officially launched when a group of 25 senior managers arrived in Cambridge for a week-long learning module composed of lectures, presentations, small-group exercises, and workshops. The program content covered a wide variety of subjects—system dynamics, change management, systematic management, supply-chain management, the global mindset, leadership, and communication skills—integrated to address the specific business needs of Aker Solutions. The week concluded with a capstone experience where participants ran a project in a simulated environment to test their knowledge.

Several weeks later, everyone reconvened in Oslo to present projects to the company's top management. The excitement in the room was palpable, and the networking that took place among business leaders—many of whom have never before met in person—was instrumental to the program's success. While the company had been built on a very dispersed, decentralized business model, the pendulum has recently swung in the other direction for Aker, requiring more standardization, alignment, and collaboration across units.



CUSTOM PROGRAM SNAPSHOT:
AKER SOLUTIONS

CHALLENGE

Develop a new class of managers capable of meeting ambitious growth

SOLUTION

A multi-module executive education program including action-learning projects and an MIT-designed project simulator

RESULT

Alignment, collaboration among business areas and units; a broadening of managers' perspectives and increasing confidence

“Networking has an impact in the short term as an experience, but also long term, which is very important,” said Johannessen. “From that perspective we see that there is an excellent opportunity here to build relationships across the business areas and business units. That’s an effect we see already, but it’s even more important in the longer term.”

WHY MIT

“The reason we chose MIT is the *Mens et Manus* philosophy,” said Johannessen, “It resonates well with us, because we are an organization of highly competent people who deliver products, systems, and services to very demanding customers. A very strong academic, scientific foundation combined with practical application is key to how we think about organizational learning in our company.”

THE RESULT

The success of the pilot program further reinforced Aker Solutions’ commitment to learning. “The experience was very positive. People came out of the program very inspired. And that was actually one of the objectives of doing this—creating this enthusiasm and engagement and motivation. The whole program was very professionally organized from the logistical side to the delivery of the lectures. Very strong experts and very strong delivery,” noted Johannessen.

“The programme opened my eyes to new possibilities, new perspectives on how to achieve my goals and the pitfalls to look out for along the way,” said program participant Dale Harris, Vice President, Customer Delivery at Aker Solutions, adding, “I continually go back over the material and always find something helpful.”

Future leadership can be difficult to measure, but already Aker Solutions reports significant improvements in alignment and collaboration among its many business areas and units, as well as a broadening of managers’ perspectives and increasing confidence to lead more complex projects.

The program was fine-tuned to best serve Aker Solutions’ growing base of future leaders. The second cohort of managers visited MIT twice for week-long learning modules three months apart; and the final module was held at the company’s headquarters in Oslo two months later, followed by a debriefing session where alumni of the program shared their knowledge with colleagues. “This program is an illustration of how we expect people to work going forward, meaning working more across the business areas and together. In that sense, this program is a symbol of change in our organization,” said Johannessen.

“WE LIKE THE MIT CONCEPTS BECAUSE THEY ARE SIMPLE, BUT NOT SIMPLISTIC—THEY ARE SIMPLE AND EFFECTIVE.”

BJARTE JOHANNESSEN
Head of Organisation Development
Aker Solutions



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