Barclaycard

Delivering Results: Connecting Strategy & Leader Development

Sector: Financial Services
In late 2008, the global economy was in turmoil.

Banking and financial-service firms faced unprecedented challenge and uncertainty—and U.K.-based Barclaycard wasn’t immune.

Even so, Barclaycard leaders were clear they needed to look to the future. A renewed emphasis on customer needs and experience was essential—and it would be fueled by greater collaboration, innovation, and operational excellence.

Eva Vandor, head of Barclaycard Academy, and James Prior, head of Executive Development, were tasked with ensuring the company had the skills to transform the business while managing external turmoil.

“We needed leaders across the business to have a full and shared perspective on our direction and our challenges,” Prior explained. “At the same time, we had to strengthen key leadership capabilities so our people could implement the strategy, cope in uncertain times, and flex to meet changing conditions and needs.”

Previously, the organization offered various leadership development programs, but they were segmented within business units.

“We needed a leadership strategy that was connected to the larger business strategy,” said Prior. “Through Barclaycard Academy, we began to move to a consistent leadership model and an integrated, effective, efficient framework for leadership across the company.”
Prior described the “head of level” leaders as a critical group to develop. These “managers of managers” are responsible for the development and implementation of the operational plan. “We have about 125 leaders who are in a position to interpret the organizational strategy and deliver the stretch targets set by the business,” he said.

Yet, these leaders also showed capability gaps. In order to understand and manage critical business challenges including globalization and expansion, reengineering processes, changes in market dynamics, and increased customer focus, they needed to improve their ability to:

- collaborate
- influence without authority
- drive innovation
- coach others
- build and maintain relationships
- gain global awareness
- translate strategy into action
- enact principles of connected leadership

“We had been a very high-performing organization, and our managers had great experience and expertise,” Prior explained. “But new realities and our ambitious agenda require greater innovation in what we do and how we work. Our leadership development strategy had to acknowledge and address this so we would have the capacity we need in the future.”
The Solution

Vandor and Prior believed that a dual approach—combining big-picture organizational strategy with individual leader development—was needed to boost the leadership of Barclaycard managers. Working with both the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL®) and Ashridge Business School, they developed the Barclaycard Executing the Programme.

The program was structured as two three-day sessions held six weeks apart. The leadership components were informed by CCL’s expansive view of leadership development and tailored to Barclaycard’s needs. Elements included CCL’s 360 BY DESIGN assessment and select personality measurement tools to help participants gain insight into their individual strengths, challenges, and long-standing patterns of behavior. Participants learned strategies for giving and receiving feedback, influencing, communicating, and leveraging social capital as a powerful leadership asset. Individual coaching and action learning projects further personalized the program and drive results. These elements helped participants integrate lessons learned into their personal development, create practical plans for converting strategy to operations, and build stronger relationships within their departments and across the company.

“We saw these sessions as accelerated and concentrated bursts of high-impact learning,” said Prior. “We were creating a shared experience for key leaders that would invite leaders to look at different ways of doing things and jump-start a culture of innovation and knowledge-sharing across the group.”

During a two-year period, 120 managers participated in the Executing Strategy Programme.

Objectives:

**Build the leadership culture.**
Of working together, thinking ahead, loving success, and taking ownership.

**Connect strategy and leadership.**
Ensure leaders are clear on the Barclaycard vision, strategy, and challenges, and their role in planning and implementation.

**Align knowledge, skills, and action.**
Build leaders who are able to learn and adjust in response to rapid change and increasing complexity.

**Improve ability to work across boundaries.**
To be able to influence and engage effectively with others across the organization to drive the business forward and deliver on goals.

**Encourage ownership and engagement.**
To build the skills and the confidence to solve problems, take a stand, and aid innovation.

Outcomes:

Participants made significant improvement in:

- leadership effectiveness
- working together/collaboration
- influence

Participants also showed measurable increases in their ability to take risks, set priorities, lead teams, and coach/mentor others.

Direct reports are more engaged and empowered.

- 80% report feeling more empowered to do their work.
- 79% also report feeling more engaged in their work.

Participants are developing and leveraging networks and relationships to drive company strategies.

- 100% increased both the size and quality of their internal and external networks.
- 100% improved their ability to gather multiple perspectives and ideas.
- 100% leverage their networks to benefit Barclaycard.
The Executing Strategy Programme was consistently well received and many participants expressed their eagerness to put what they learned into action. Three months after participants completed the program, they were given an online survey to gauge the impact on their effectiveness as leaders. Their managers and direct reports were sent a separate online survey to measure how they perceived the outcomes of the program.

**Strong Participant Satisfaction**

One participant described the program’s value as “really good to take you out of the day-to-day work environment and provide you with the time and head space to focus on you and your development as an individual.” Another participant wrote: “After the course, I felt lifted above the daily challenges of my role to a broader and more strategic level supported by the peer group with whom I attended the course. It was one of the best executive development courses I have attended.”

Participants consistently found the program to be relevant and valuable:

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<th>Participant Satisfaction</th>
<th>100%</th>
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<td>Would recommend the program to their colleagues</td>
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Increased Leadership Effectiveness

Improvements in overall leadership effectiveness among program participants have been apparent, said Barclaycard’s Prior.

“All the people who have been through the program have a maturity and a resilience that we’ve needed to get through tough times, and we will continue to rely on,” he noted. “Their perception of the organization is broader; they ask different questions. We’re seeing better planning and better execution.”

All participants (100%) felt they had become more effective leaders, with slightly more than half (52%) describing their improvement as great or very great.

Importantly, participants’ direct reports noticed positive changes, too. Ninety-two percent of direct reports said their manager was a more effective leader, with 22% describing that improvement as great or very great.

Managers reported even more change. One-hundred percent of the managers of the participants reported improved leadership effectiveness, with 38% of the participants described as improving to a great extent.

“These numbers are especially meaningful because we’re measuring improvement for a group of leaders who are already really good,” said Prior. “We have found a way to provide the knowledge and motivation to help good leaders be even better.”
In the changing context of Barclaycard’s global business, effective collaboration is essential. As a result of the Executing Strategy Programme, 100% of participants showed some level of positive change on a range of “working together” abilities.

All participants (100%) reported they improved in three areas: establishing strong, collaborative relationships and alliances; perspective taking; and systems thinking. Improvement was considered great or very great for 76%, 66%, and 59% in each of the three areas, respectively.

“IT’s also notable that we saw consistency in reported impact across all cohorts and across all raters as well,” said CCL’s Emily Hoole, group director of Global Research and Evaluation. “This is substantial evidence that changes are occurring within the participants as a result of the program.”

Direct reports also saw the most positive change in participants’ ability to establish strong, collaborative relationships. Ninety-two percent reported some level of positive change for that item, with just over half (51%) describing that improvement as great or very great.

All managers (100%) reported some level of positive change for all “working together” items but reported the most significant changes in participants’ efforts to build common ground. They reported that half of the participants improved their ability to focus others’ energy on common goals, priorities, and problems and 57% improved their ability to seek common ground in an effort to resolve conflicts.
Improved Influence Skills

Another key outcome of the program was to boost participants’ ability to influence others, particularly in situations in which they have no direct or formal authority. This skill is tied to several behaviors, including the development of the network of contacts needed to do the job and the ability to inspire and motivate others.

All managers (100%) saw positive change on all influence items measured. The most change was reported in participants’ network development and ability to influence without formal authority (43% great or very great improvement in both areas).

Most direct reports (90% to 93%) also noticed positive change on all influence items. An improved ability to inspire, motivate, and spark others to take action was the most significant change, with 43% showing great or very great improvement.

Participants were particularly effective in establishing strong connections, alliances, and networks—and leveraging them to benefit the business.

All participants (100%) said they increased the size of their network, with 73% reporting that their network had increased to a great or very great extent. Similarly, all participants deepened relationships with people in their network, with 73% reporting they had done so to a great or very great extent.

Participants also reported using their more robust networks to benefit Barclaycard in a number of ways, including to:

- gather multiple perspectives and ideas
- connect different parts of the organization together to address cross-functional problems or projects
- provide advice to others
- increase the speed of decision-making

“We are seeing the initiative people are taking to connect with others across functions, geography, and levels in the organization,” said Barclaycard’s Vandor. “They are not just staying connected with their colleagues from the course, but reaching out to other parts of the organization. They see the value that multiple perspectives can add to their work and their personal development.”
Better Interaction with Direct Reports

The value of the Executing Strategy Programme has transferred beyond the individual participants to their direct reports. The post-program survey included a series of questions aimed at direct reports to gauge whether they had benefitted from their boss’s participation in the program.

The greatest improvement was seen in participants’ ability to coach the team for performance, with 90% of direct reports reporting some positive level of change. The ability to receive and use feedback from others was felt to have improved by 89% and the ability to provide direct reports with appropriate feedback was considered improved by 88%. Direct reports also noted positive changes in their boss’s ability to coach and develop individuals and to lead their teams.

As one direct report said, “I have particularly noticed an enthusiastic increase in the level of feedback given and an active willingness to receive feedback. I have also noticed that he seems to have given more ‘free rein’ to his ability to give developmental coaching. He is very good at it and I have spent more time thinking over my own development as a result.”

The improvement in the interactions between program participants and direct reports may explain significant increases in engagement and empowerment among the direct reports: Eighty percent reported an increase in empowerment—having the authority and resources to make decisions, solve problems, and get the work done. Engagement—the amount of energy, enthusiasm, and inspiration you have for your work—increased for 79% of direct reports.
The success of the Executing Strategy Programme was tied to a deep commitment on the part of top Barclaycard executives to connect the leadership strategy with the business strategy, according to CCL’s Rachel Hanley-Browne. “This allowed us to design a program that has clear relevance and would drive meaningful results.”

Manager support is also a critical element in ensuring transfer and impact of learning. Program participants agreed that their manager supported them in a variety of ways, such as supporting time away from work to participate in Executing Strategy, meeting after the program to review goals, and recognizing and rewarding behavior changes. “The participants’ managers were clearly involved and supportive of the program and the company’s investment in developing the ‘head of level’ leaders,” noted Hanley-Browne. “Participants experienced this as consistent with Barclaycard’s culture of high performance and innovation.”

The partnership between CCL and Ashridge was also crucial for enduring impact. The collaboration allowed Barclaycard to provide a powerful integrated program on both the “what” and the “how” of strategic leadership.

“CCL had the specialized knowledge around leadership behaviors,” said Prior. “CCL’s research and capability in this area was an important component of the program. Ashridge complemented that with their business acumen and rigor around financial services.”
Each year, Barclaycard manages in excess of £200 billion in payments for more than 20 million consumers and over 240,000 business customers.

Driven by Barclays Group’s vision to become the “go-to” bank for customers in diverse markets, Barclaycard has solidified the basics of customer service while adapting to an ever-changing economic climate.

“In a short period of time, we have expanded our thinking about the business and our leadership culture,” said Prior. “Because of the Executing Strategy Programme, key leaders are better equipped to face complex challenges and drive innovation. And that impact is cascading throughout the organization.”
The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL®) is a top-ranked, global provider of leadership development. By leveraging the power of leadership to drive results that matter most to clients, CCL transforms individual leaders, teams, organizations, and society. Our array of cutting-edge solutions is steeped in extensive research and experience gained from working with hundreds of thousands of leaders at all levels. Ranked among the world’s Top 5 providers of executive education by the Financial Times and in the Top 10 by Bloomberg BusinessWeek, CCL has offices in Greensboro, NC; Colorado Springs, CO; San Diego, CA; Brussels, Belgium; Moscow, Russia; Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; Johannesburg, South Africa; Singapore; Gurgaon, India; and Shanghai, China.