



# BOSSING IT IN HYBRID LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS

Customer success story 2023

## ABOUT IMERYS

Working to support anything from the fight against malaria to the power behind electric cars, Imerys is a world leader in specialist minerals for industry, with a revenue of €4.3 billion and a 14,000-strong workforce across 40 countries. And as an employer, it's known to ambitious engineers everywhere.

“

*We're not going to grow as an organization if people have fixed mindsets, and think and behave in the same way when the environment is changing.”*

**Marianna Demiri**

**Group Talent Director, Imerys**



Global minerals business Imerys refused to let the pandemic curb its commitment to preparing future leaders by collaborating with Korn Ferry on smart new solutions.

# 01

## The challenge

For over a decade, Imerys had been building and running a very successful global leadership program. But then the pandemic struck. Would lockdowns knock it all down?

# 02

## The solution

The Imerys global talent team worked closely with Korn Ferry to reprioritize and reimagine the format and content of the program, initially online and then in an inventive new hybrid form.

# 03

## The results

Despite the pandemic and subsequent Great Resignation, retention and motivation across Imerys' teams is impressively strong, and ratings for the program—including NPS scores—are at an all-time high.

01

# The challenge



When Imerys created its immersive, in-person leadership program ten years ago, there was a crystal-clear focus: to build a pipeline of leaders ready to step up and inspire the business before the current senior leadership team hit retirement. It was immediately successful and became even more so over time.

In 2019, however, the company decided to restructure in order to become more market-oriented, respond more quickly and efficiently to customer needs and ultimately grow to its full potential. This involved the implementation of a simpler business model and consequently the removal of several layers of senior management, leading to significantly greater pressure on some future leaders to step up faster. Instead of growing into their roles over five or ten years,

they found themselves becoming real-life leaders of large teams almost overnight. Unsurprisingly, they needed all the support they could get to both learn and live their roles.

And if that was not enough, the pandemic hit threatening to shut down their most important source of support and delay their much-needed development.

Marianna Demiri, Global Talent Director, knew that stopping the program simply wasn't an option; it did so much good in terms of motivating and retaining talent, as well as protecting the future of the growing business. At the same time, she had no idea how to deliver an immersive program when teams couldn't meet in person, especially when they worked across countries and time zones.

*Later, when lockdowns did finally lift, there was more thinking to do: would the updated program return to its tried-and-tested model—or evolve again?*

# 2022

The solution





PHASE

01

## Re-prioritize

Marianna and her team had been coordinating and facilitating the Imerys Leadership program alongside Korn Ferry for several years before the pandemic shut the world down. So, it was easy enough to come together again with this shared knowledge of the content, participants and company culture, and plot a new leadership development future.

The first step—immediately after lockdown began—was to review the entire program and agree which elements would work most easily and effectively as virtual versions. For example, executive team sponsors typically met each cohort in person to share advice and reflections on their own journeys; when travel wasn't an option, they shared that same advice virtually.

*The first step—immediately after lockdown began—was to review the entire program and agree which elements would work most easily and effectively as virtual versions.*

By 2022, teams were ready to return to face-to-face training and it was tempting simply to jump straight back to the old model—but was that still right for the business? The talent team worked with Korn Ferry to re-prioritize again, agreeing which elements from the program worked better on-screen and which ones needed in-person connection to really 'click'. The executive talks, for example, were one of the elements that everyone was keen to do in-person again.

While some elements moved permanently online, every effort was made to keep the spirit of internal sharing and networking across teams and countries, because that's what had made the program so strong in the past. There's still a particular focus on core topics that have been proven to drive individual and team performance of leaders: the leadership pipeline concept; leading and managing change; coaching skills; how to build commitment to results whilst understanding the strategic context of the business; and working in a collaborative way to influence and achieve better outcomes.

## Re-imagine

The rest of 2022 was all about reimagining the future of leadership training at Imerys. Yes, the virtual version worked well, with the usual number of participants doubled to 60—but size wasn't always welcome. Indeed, the team agreed that smaller groups, making deeper personal connections, were far more powerful than bigger virtual-only options. At the same time, virtual learning also had its benefits in terms of cutting down travel costs and time. As a result, it was agreed that Workshop One (a series of three, four-hour virtual classroom sessions) would remain virtual, supported by some online learning, while Workshop Two would be an immersive

in-person experience over four days, bringing together the leadership group from across EMEA, US and Asia Pacific.

This led to the development of an exciting new hybrid model that uses online where it makes sense, but includes events throughout the year at which participants can come together too. Because at a time when many businesses are facing some of their highest attrition rates, keeping the sessions personal and strengthening connections across global teams makes more than good sense.

“

*A fantastic caliber of facilitators from Korn Ferry accompanied the group throughout and have been exceptional in their level of facilitation.”*

**Marianna Demiri**

**Group Talent Director, Imerys**

And of course the program still contains the elements that have made it such a success in the past, including:



360-degree feedback from peers and managers to help participants spot their own weaknesses, before benefiting from Korn Ferry 1-2-1 coaching throughout the program duration.



Insights based on Korn Ferry's years of leadership research and development.



Huge engagement and support from Imerys executive team.



Korn Ferry facilitators to design, deliver, project manage and facilitate sessions.

With participants coming together from 15 countries, careful coordination was also crucial to make sure everyone could work in their time zones, without dialing into events at the crack of dawn or in the middle of the night. Hence, events were split by time zone so everyone could take part.

PHASE

03

## Repeat (and retain)

The leadership program is undeniably the jewel in the Imerys talent development crown, with many people eager to join and stay with the organization for their chance to take part. And while this is great news, it also means Marianna and the team have another challenge on the horizon: giving more people the same or a similar development experience.

*Right now, only 30 people take part in the program each year, all chosen by senior leaders or the senior HR president. But in the future, Marianna would love to see a lot more people having the same opportunities.*



03

*The results*





Those taking part consistently rate the program highly, with a 96% internal NPS score, and over 95% of people who start the course complete it. More women are taking part now too—the latest cohort was roughly 35% (a figure Marianna and the team are still working to increase). The new virtual and hybrid versions of the program even won a Brandon Hall Gold Award for best unique or innovative leadership program. And one leader who took the course eight years ago is now on the executive committee; he inspires current cohorts with his own journey to senior leadership.

Marianna also describes the change she sees in participants at the end of the 12-month program: these future leaders emerge thinking and acting more like leaders. She tells us, “They’re more confident, more self-aware and they really understand the significance of their current role and the impact they’ll have as a leader.” They’re more relaxed too,

as the program gives them a plan for where to go next—and they have the support of the rest of their cohort to get them there.

As word of the program continues to spread, it’s having a positive impact on the Imerys employer brand as well. Past participants praise it on LinkedIn, talk about it at careers events and in interviews. And Marianna has found that letting people know about Korn Ferry’s involvement—the research that’s gone into the program and the facilitators that lead it—also adds to the program’s prestige.

What began as a straightforward leadership development program a decade ago has now evolved into so much more. It’s a symbol of the whole organization’s commitment to developing and retaining its best people.

96%

internal NPS score

95%

of people who start the course complete it

35%

are women taking part



## Let us be part of your success story

Contact us and see how our Leadership & Professional Development experts and technology can help you achieve your business goals.

[Get in touch](#)

© 2023 Korn Ferry. All Rights Reserved. Korn Ferry is a global organizational consulting firm. We work with our clients to design optimal organization structures, roles, and responsibilities. We help them hire the right people and advise them on how to reward and motivate their workforce while developing professionals as they navigate and advance their careers. Our 11,000 experts in more than 50 countries deliver on five core areas: Organization Strategy, Assessment & Succession, Talent Acquisition, Leadership & Professional Development, and Total Rewards.

