

CPD INNOVATION

USING CPD PROCESSES TO OVERCOME ECONOMIC CHALLENGES

The current economic upheaval has enforced an unprecedented rate of change on the engineering profession

Three-year strategic plans have gone out the window as organisations struggle for day-to-day survival. The good news is that systems are already available to deal with such challenges. The recently revised Engineers Ireland CPD criteria give organisations the chance to ensure they are strategically positioned to take advantage of opportunities that arise from the current turmoil. In this article, Liam Baxter Chartered Engineer demonstrates how Duffy Chartered Engineers (DCE) has used performance management and knowledge sharing (two of the CPD accreditation criteria), to adapt to changing circumstances. A flexible performance management methodology, integrated with a responsive training needs analysis system gives organisations the tools required to ensure employees have the necessary skills to deal with new challenges. Of particular relevance is the role of knowledge sharing in the process of preparing employees to be redeployed to stable or growing sectors of the business. The first step of a performance management system is to define the organisational objectives and requirements. In the case of DCE, these objectives evolved from an annual strategy to a specific response to current market conditions based on the available data. The outcome of this process is a plan to deal with the current situation. The next stage is to analyse the training necessary to respond to this plan. Our training needs analysis system was set up on the basis that the requirement for training is identified in line with organisational objectives (as opposed to employee focused training). This system has proved to be very effective at times when the organisational needs fluctuate. How is a skills deficit resultant from a changing organisational strategy overcome in practice? To use recent events in DCE as an example, our performance management system identified the rapid decline in our key market segment, namely the residential property sector, towards the end of 2007. Given this external factor, the strategic objectives for growth in this area became increasingly meaningless. The organisation had meanwhile identified a growing market for traffic engineering services, and it was decided to redeploy

willing staff to this area. DCE took a multi-faceted approach to re-skilling employees to take advantage of this new opportunity. For example, the development of our traffic engineering department was achieved through:

- cross-functional mentoring;
- internal lectures provided by external experts;
- the use of internet-based information systems, and
- assistance from joint venture partners.

Consultation with employees occurred via our mentoring system, those who were willing to be reassigned to other areas were re-deployed. The skills required for their new roles were identified and training requirements drawn up. As the skills required are usually quite specific, internal lectures/training sessions are organised tailored to these requirements. These lectures cover only one topic at a time and are either carried by senior staff members or external consultants, lasting no more than three hours. Employees are then given a non-critical project to work on. Queries are recorded and answered in a group session to ensure the whole group benefits. This process ensures that re-training is carried out in the most cost-effective, productive manner.

We considered sending employees on masters and post-graduate diploma courses, but we felt that the market was changing at too rapid a pace and that a year or two delay in re-training employees for different disciplines would prove critical. Part of the solution to the problem of rapidly changing market conditions is to ensure that the organisation has the skills required to take advantage of opportunities as they arise. Training budgets are often the first target for cost-reductions in lean times but, as this example shows, they are essential to allowing employees to adapt to the new requirements of their organisation. Φ

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Next issue: Festo innovates for expansion in the engineering component sector to create new jobs.