

Name: **Hydrasun**
Size: 340
Sector: Manufacture
Location: Aberdeen

The organisation

Hydrasun manufacture industrial hoses and offer a range of related services that include off-the-shelf and bespoke components and cross-brand component 'healthcare' covering multiple assets. Hydrasun offer customers an inspection service that provides a full audit trail of technical integrity. The company also offers product training to customers.

From its origins in the Aberdeen-based UK Oil & Gas industry, the company has expanded throughout the UK and into mainland Europe and now operates in the petrochemical, utility, defence, marine and renewable energy sectors.

Hydrasun aims to be a market leader and an employer of choice. The workforce is growing due to an increased demand for services. Its corporate policies commit to people development and an active assurance that no harm comes to its own people, customers or third parties. Hydrasun is IIP accredited and registered to ISO9001.

The history of workplace dialogue

A recent review of internal communications, in preparation for IIP re-assessment in 2008, has identified the depth and range of communications within Hydrasun. A variety of mechanisms are used, including manager briefings, team meetings and daily briefings. In addition, departmental notice boards publicise company and team performance.

However, the company is not complacent. There is recognition of the need to continue to do more to ensure involvement and participation by employees. There are plans to reinvigorate the internal consultative forum and develop a staff involvement and participation survey.

How are training and skills discussed?

The company has a performance management review process that provides an opportunity for formal discussion to review individual progress against objectives. This is the main mechanism for managers and staff to discuss development needs and review and update personal development plans (PDPs). The PDP is owned by the individual and the individual and manager have joint responsibility to make PDP actions happen. All managers and team leaders have been trained

in delivery of the performance management review. Individuals complete learning logs that refer to the specific development programmes that they undertake and provide evidence of learning and competency that meet PDP objectives.

Skills development are clearly at the core of the company's growth strategy and it has recognized the need to look broadly at learning and development needs across the whole company. To address this, Hydrasun has developed a comprehensive learning and competency strategy. The core principle of the strategy is that learners take more responsibility for their own development, supported with the development of workplace-based learning programmes that make use of a number of different approaches to learning including delivered training sessions, e-learning, on-the-job training and supervised working. The programmes are designed to make the learning experience as beneficial and user friendly for the candidates as possible.

The company has developed a range of training programmes, based on the learning and competency strategy for different groups of workers and departments. The learning and competency programmes cover technical skills and 'soft' skills such as customer care and communications. The strategy has been built into the company's quality management system so that learning progress and outcomes can be monitored within the wider QM framework. Hydrasun's learning and competency strategy has been given accreditation by the Oil and Petroleum Industry Training Organisation (OPITO) making Hydrasun only one of nine organisations world wide to have gained approval of their competency programme that is recognized as being in line with internationally recognised standards of good practice.

Communications to staff about the strategy took place through formal launch events, internal communications and team briefings. The competency framework is also discussed in the introduction to specific training courses. Management development has also underpinned the implementation of the strategy. Senior managers, line managers and team leaders have improved their people development skills, with an emphasis on helping staff take responsibility for their own job and supporting them to work with others to develop customer focused solutions.

What have been the benefits from dialogue on training and skills?

- The development of more highly skilled technical staff has enabled the company to offer a more flexible service which in turn has helped to bring in more business and increase turnover. There is no specific data available on the link between learning and increased business and profitability. However, profitability has grown by 20% a year in recent years and labour turnover has declined in the same period, giving an indication of increased employee job satisfaction. Management have no doubt that learning and development have played an important part in these achievements.

- Hydrasun's learning and competency strategy focuses on the jobs that people do and is practically focused. The new approach to staff development has encouraged staff to identify the learning and development they need, helping build ownership of PDPs and build motivation to train.
- Workplace group training programmes bring staff from different sites together. This helps improve cohesion across dispersed sites and improves joint work on customer focused issues. Blended learning provides a mix of classroom based activity with on-the-job practice and review.
- External accreditation via OPITO improves staff perception of training programmes and helps improve confidence in their capability to perform consistently to a high standard.
- The learning and competency strategy has also helped develop the dialogue with staff in relatively low-skilled jobs, helping to raise awareness of opportunities to expand job roles and the scope to progress within the company. This helps improve motivation and raises the demand for learning.
- The learning and competency strategy helps contribute to staff retention. Employees feel more confident in their job roles and know they are working to accepted industry standards.

Challenges and 'top tips'

As the company grows there is a need to ensure that all staff have the skills needed for new challenges. Many staff have been away from formal learning for some time or left school with few qualifications and can be fearful of the learning environment. There is a need to break these barriers down. The classroom itself can act as a barrier. Understanding this, by involving staff and taking their views into account, and designing learning programmes accordingly makes them much more successful. It is important to ensure the trainers know the workplace and industry context and understand what motivates and inhibits learners. Staff need to be confident that trainers and assessors have the experience and expertise necessary to assess competence.