

KEY EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Health Care Sector



1. Please describe briefly the company's main activity, sector, organisation & structure?

Established over 100 years ago the Company has three specialist businesses and is based in the middle of England. One is home health care and the other two are concerned with the moulding and machining of wood and composites. It is a family concern with 130 employees. Products are exported to over 30 countries (15 in the health care market). The Company prides itself on being a market leader in home health care with a whole range of products & aids to the benefit of the less able and older people in the bedroom, bathroom or kitchen. It aims to supply the full needs of its customer particularly in the contract market and provides a strong after-sales service. It has a vertically integrated organization structure.

2. What are the company's mission /aims?

Its business philosophy is to maintain its position as an innovative designer and market leader in the supply of products. This requires a practiced programme of continuous improvement. The Company believes that its greatest asset is a skilled workforce – management and factory employees - but there was a major difficulty in retaining staff because of the strong competition from surrounding industries. Skills shortages are also a problem. Competition is experienced from within the UK and from China and the Eastern Block so efficiency and maintaining high quality is essential. It also has to battle against the decline in aspirations of young people to take up a career in manufacturing and the diminishing amount of government funding for apprenticeships.

3. What is the business strategy to achieve the company's aims?

The company has therefore adopted a number of human resources strategies with the overriding theme of investing in the workforce in order to retain staff and to maintain its position as an innovative designer and market leader. The strategy allows key individuals to be identified and developed on a fast-track basis.

Strategic aims:

- To empower individuals with responsibility for quality
- To analyse training needs on an on-going and systematic basis
- To offer training and skills development to all employees
- To pay employees on the basis of an accurate assessment of skills achieved
- To remedy skills shortages
- To ensure all employment policies and procedures are up-to-date and issued

The company's HR strategy is well defined according to its strategic aims and each of the forthcoming sections of this case study focuses on one or more of these aims.

4. Strategy for HR - key employee development

Quality is extremely important for the Company and this drives its HR strategy and the development of individuals. Individuals have been trained and empowered with making sure that any product that they are working on meets the high quality standard which is clearly laid down and expected by customers. Each employee has an identification label which he/she must attach when applicable to the product when they have finished their work on it.

The Quality Control Manager is still a key employee despite empowerment of the individual and he regular undertakes training courses to improve his overall knowledge and performance. He came from the shop floor and was identified through their assessment and training needs analysis process as having a particular talent for quality control, Some of the key tasks undertaken by the Quality Control Manager - besides sampling, audits and planned improvements - include working with marketing and sales departments to define client requirements and expectations, and determining whether the organisation meets those needs and if not, whether changes in work practices are required; Also the Quality Control Manager has been trained to analyse business performance statistics to measure performance against internal and external international standards.

5. How do you align the development of HR for key personnel with the business strategy?

Training needs analysis is conducted annually with periodic reviews carried out as necessary. The Company is able to predict its skills needs against budgetary requirements over each 12 month period. All employees have training records and their individual training needs are discussed and assessed approximately every 4 months with their immediate line manager and overseen by the departmental manager. Managers are assessed by directors and directors by a third party independent agency. All the managers involved in the assessments received training by the Human Resources Manager who has also been externally trained in the appropriate techniques.

All employees are given the opportunity to train and to learn new skills. This is available even when there are no vacancies, as it readies an employee for a move to another position when one comes up. It also provides valuable cover for absence. Much of the training is provided in-house through structured programmes and linked to National Qualifications where appropriate and when employees wish to formalise and enhance their skills.

6. How is corporate culture organised to bring everyone together & aligned to the business strategy?

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Skill shortages still remain. One way of remedying this was to use a local open-air prison, equipping it with Wood Machining and Spray Shop. Inmates are trained to achieve National qualifications. The Company has also taken onto its payroll a number of prisoners who were working towards their release and some on a permanent basis subsequently.

7. What motivational strategies do you have in place'?

The Company's pay banding system promotes recognition of individual development, skill and experience. (Previously, pay increases had been awarded annually to everyone, irrespective of their contribution). There are 5 pay bands and each employee is assessed against 5 main criteria (with sub-criteria) some of which is relevant to their particular occupation while others are generic. For an individual to move up a grade, when a vacancy arises they must apply to their supervisor and undertake the training programme developed for the higher grade role. The system and employee expectation has to be managed carefully as, ultimately, movements between grades is driven by business need.

In order to foster the employment relationship, the Company ensures that all its employment procedures are up-to-date and that all employees are issued with a contract of employment and a staff handbook explaining all the rules, policies and procedures and this includes disciplinary, capability and grievance procedures. The Company has also produced a detailed equal opportunities policy which recognises too the importance of diversity to the organization.

The changes the Company introduced could not be achieved without communication and consultation. For example, a document explaining the new pay system was issued and numerous group and individual meetings were held to explain its merits and to address any employee concerns. Acceptance was gained from all employees to that system and all signed variations to their contracts of employment. Another example concerns the employment of prisoners. The Company ensured that its staff was fully briefed on its relationship with the prison and any concerns were aired and allayed - for example, certain types of offenders would not be employed. Transparency enabled their new pay and skills banding system and the resultant re-grading to be accepted by all employees - each individual was initially appraised and in discussion their position identified on the matrix.