

TNT's people development strategy improves performance

TNT's people development strategy is closely aligned with its business goals. The people development team is involved in the design of learning interventions from an early stage to ensure they meet measurable objectives. The company has recently focused on leadership development to improve performance at its central sortation centres.

TNT Express claims to be the European market leader in global express delivery services. It employs 161,000 people globally with 11,200 people across more than 70 locations in the UK.

Training strategy

In 2007, TNT provided in excess of 25,000 delegate days of training for its employees – approximately three days an employee on average. The company offers around 120 core internal training programmes, from company induction to a postgraduate certificate in management, and delivers over 3,750 courses a year.

The company believes its learning and development solutions are perceived by the industry as best in class. It is recognised as an Investors in People (IiP) champion and has received, European Quality Awards, five National Training Awards, 24 Motor Transport Awards, and numerous other quality and sector awards. 'We understand that learning and development makes a huge difference to the performance and profitability of our business,' says Malcolm Pickup, TNT's Head of People Development. 'We make a significant investment in providing high quality development for our people aligned to our business needs.'

Linking training to business goals

TNT's people development programme is closely aligned to its business objectives and is intrinsically linked to a five-year business strategy. 'Our people underpin everything the business wants to achieve,' says Pickup. 'So our people development strategy is designed to provide the right people with the right skills at the right time.'

Identifying training needs

Learning and development needs are identified at the end of an induction period, annual appraisals or interim review. 'Development interventions are often requested by managers to

further improve team performance or to support the change agenda' says Pickup.

Developing learning interventions

The majority of learning interventions are designed and delivered in-house to ensure a flexible and tailored approach. The people development team work with managers to produce the right solution. 'The team develops learning interventions with the business, for the business,' says Pickup. 'The implementation phase of a project is too late in the day for the people development team to get involved. We are consulted at the conception stage. This way we get a clear idea of what the business needs to achieve in terms of output, which means that we can develop a solution with managers that fits both business and their requirements.'

Managing the programmes

TNT's people development team has 56 centrally based full-time employees. It consists of four teams with responsibilities for management development, sales and contact centres, operations and regional training. 'The regional training officers act as the conduit between the centre and the depots,' explains Pickup. 'They provide support to the depot management teams on all matters, including people development from needs analysis, through IiP, to training delivery and coaching.'

Advertising courses

All the company's learning and development courses and programmes are listed on the corporate intranet. It also has a paper-based directory of training courses for employees who do not have ready access to a computer.

Requesting training

Once a training need has been identified for a particular employee, their manager submits a training request to the central training administration team. The manager and employee receive a response within two days of

submitting the request and a course is allocated normally within the following three months. Delegates are sent joining instructions three weeks prior to the course taking place.

Delivering learning

The appropriate method for delivering learning in each instance is discussed with managers and the recipient. The type of interventions regularly used by the company include:

- workshops – for example, a half-day workshop has been used to update managers on TNT's integrity policy
- e-learning – recipients complete a short online course followed by an assessment to check their understanding of the topic
- coaching – for example, the company uses coaching by managers to address performance-related issues and executive coaching is provided for key high-potential candidates.

When organising any training intervention, particularly for operational employees, the company believes that maintaining its level of service to external customers is of paramount importance. 'This is why we design our training programmes to have minimal impact on the day-to-day running of the business,' says Pickup. 'The team takes the training to the depots to meet the varying shift patterns, causing as little disruption as possible to the working routine of our operational support staff.'

Recording training

All the training identified and delivered is recorded on a learning management system. The system provides the full development history and needs of all employees. 'This information is invaluable in helping us to develop training plans at business, depot and individual level,' says Pickup.

Focusing on managers

TNT recognises the key role its managers play in the success of the business and makes a significant investment in leadership development.

Creating a brand

'Our leadership shapes our culture,' says Pickup. 'And our leadership brand contains the right formula of both transactional and transformational elements and centres around effective communication and feedback, taking responsibility and, most importantly, always focusing on the positive.'

Improving leadership behaviours

The company's people development team was tasked to develop a programme with the objective of improving key performance indicators at its sortation centres, including operational efficiency, absence rates and accidents. 'We have a strong home-grown ethos, promoting from within the organisation,' says Pickup. 'We were confident that our managers had the skills and knowledge to perform their roles effectively. The issue was the inconsistent deployment of effective leadership behaviour. We deduced that we had contributed to this by not supporting them sufficiently in deploying their learning back into the workplace'.

'It was essential when designing the new solution that we recognised their existing knowledge and positive behaviour,' continues Pickup. 'We designed and delivered a series of development centres to assess each manager against our management behavioural competences. Candidates received feedback on the outcome of the development centre and we produced a tailored personal development plan to guide them through their next phase of learning'.

Delivering training around work requirements

The programme was rolled out to a group of around 70 team leaders, operations managers and depot managers, who are responsible for around 1,500 employees on night shift. The programme was delivered on their shifts to cause minimal disruption to the operation.

Supporting with qualifications

TNT's approach used National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) from the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM), (level 2 in team leading and level 3 in first line management). It used a blend of theoretical input and direct workplace observation and interviews to assess managers. The managers received feedback and either passed the assessment or underwent further coaching. They were also provided with a toolkit to help them manage their people more effectively.

'Because the focus was on workplace learning and reviewing real events, it challenged managers to apply fully what they knew and in turn resolved the issue of transfer of learning we had created,' says Pickup. 'This approach was a perfect fit in our operational environment.'

Success of the programme

TNT believes that its focus and investment on leadership development has been fundamental in improving its managers' performance, bringing huge benefits to both the individual and the

business. The company considers its programme to be a major contributor to a number of performance improvements, including a decrease in absence levels, increased employee engagement, positive career moves, increased operational efficiency and a reduced carbon footprint. These have all contributed to savings on the bottom line. This approach was also recognised by the Institute of Leadership and Management, which awarded TNT its 2008 Employer of the Year Award.

Evaluating the impact

TNT evaluates all its development activities against the original agreed objectives and measures. 'This is why the initial discussion with our customers is crucial,' explains Pickup. 'We must ensure both parties are clear on the output from the word go.'

Discussing development objectives

Prior to attendance on any development programme, managers arrange a pre-brief meeting with their employees. They explain the objectives of the training and discuss what the employee hopes to gain from the programme. The discussion is documented and given to the trainer at the start of the course.

Measuring changes to behaviour

Employees complete an evaluation form at the end of every learning event. On return to the workplace, they meet with their manager to discuss their learning. After a further three months, a second discussion and evaluation of the learning takes place to measure its impact. These discussions are all recorded. 'This information enables us to evaluate learning and continuously improve the support and programmes we deliver,' says Pickup.

Benefits

TNT believes its approach to the transfer of learning, particularly in the area of leadership development, has been instrumental in the improvements in the management and performance of its sortation centre operations. 'We believe that this is because we continue to make a significant investment in our people's development,' says Pickup. 'Our ethos is simple: By working with the business to understand the real development need, ensuring the objectives are aligned to the strategy and evaluating every step of the way, we will develop world-class solutions that deliver world-class performance.'