

The role of training and development in career progression



Introduction

In competitive markets a successful business relies heavily on providing excellent customer service. Such excellence requires a team of effective employees, committed to being the best and having the necessary skills and abilities. Redrow Homes is such a business. Redrow began in 1974 as a small civil engineering business in North Wales specialising in drainage sub-contracting. It grew rapidly and now operates across the UK with ten divisions in England and Wales.

Today, Redrow is one of the UK's leading residential property developers. Its goal is to be the developer of choice for customers, colleagues, landowners, suppliers, subcontractors and investors. The company has a reputation for innovative design, build quality and customer service. Its building developments range from large greenfield sites to complex brownfield regeneration schemes. Success relies on acquiring and adding value to land for the benefit of its stakeholders, especially the local community. This is evident from Redrow's value statement:

'Our aim is to provide our customers with a home they are proud of, delivered with the best levels of customer service possible. We aim to continuously improve in all aspects of design, customer satisfaction, developing our people and enhancing communities whilst minimising our impact on the environment.'

In addition to its focus on customer service, Redrow has a competitive edge over its rivals through effective workforce planning. This involves a commitment to attracting talented young employees and providing opportunities for career development at all levels. Consequently it enjoys a much higher percentage of long term employees compared with its competitors. Redrow's commitment to customer service has led to many regional and national awards, for example, the

2013 Peer Awards for Excellence in the customer engagement category and its focus on development made it the only major house builder named in Building Magazine's Best Employer Guide for 2013.

This case study examines the role of training and development in delivering excellent workforce planning, career development and long-term customer satisfaction.

Workforce planning

The world of work is an ever changing environment requiring constant monitoring and review. There are many issues that businesses face in respect of its labour needs. The main ones include:

- staff development and training;
- employee turnover;
- competition;
- government legislation.

The building industry is highly competitive, has a high labour turnover rate and, like many industries, is vulnerable to changes in the external environment. Workforce planning enables businesses to anticipate their labour needs and meet customers' requirements effectively. Workforce planning helps determine the business' present and future labour needs by measuring the number of workers and their skills. Anticipating workforce requirements within the construction industry is especially important due to the highly skilled and specialist nature of the work. Having assessed labour needs, strategies are devised to achieve the specific labour targets.



Statistics derived from Redrow's staffing review show the importance of workforce planning and training:

- Staff engaged in over 3000 total training days for the last financial year.
- Overall 14% of its workforce is employed as trainees.
- 14.8% of its employees are under 25 (this contrasts greatly with the high UK unemployment rate for this age group).

To maintain its workforce at the required standards, Redrow recognised that apprenticeships were vital to ensure a pipeline of future talent into the business. Apprenticeships also enable Redrow to contribute to reducing the high levels of UK youth unemployment. It has subsequently trained a significant number of apprentices in the past ten years, training employees, however, is costly so businesses must aim to retain staff once they have trained them.

The following sections demonstrate how, in practical terms, Redrow engages its employees through a variety of training and development programmes.

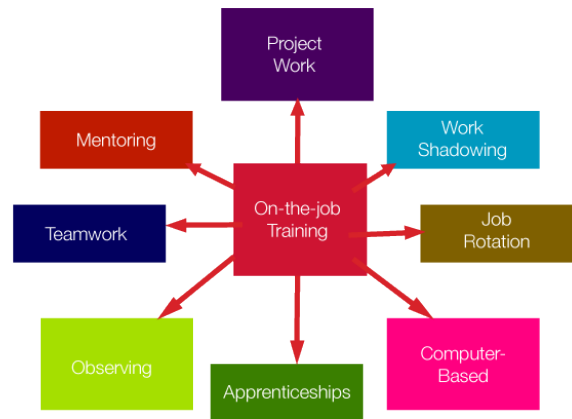
Training

Training is the process of instructing an individual about how to carry out tasks directly related to his or her current job. The purpose of training staff is to develop existing skills or gain new ones. This contrasts with development which involves helping individual employees to achieve their full potential, regardless of whether this is related to their existing position or role.



There are two main methods of training: on-the-job and off-the-job training. On-the-job training is where employees receive instruction in their workplace whilst carrying out their job. Off-the-job training is where employees receive instruction away from the workplace, for instance at a training centre, college or university.

The following diagram illustrates the main methods of on-the-job training:



Training brings benefits to both employees and the business. It increases the levels of skills, so improving productivity, quality and reduces the risk of injuries in the workplace. It makes employees more flexible, enabling them to respond quickly to changes in technology and demand. It also motivates employees by improving their career prospects.

For Redrow, induction training has been paramount in ensuring staff turnover rates are lower than the industry average. New recruits at all levels receive a formal induction. Induction provides initial training specific to the employee's role as well as giving an insight into the company as a whole. This helps recruits to quickly settle into their roles.

Whilst training gives businesses the benefits of greater efficiency, improved customer service and more motivated staff it does come at a price. These include the direct costs of the training as well as potential loss of productivity during time spent away from the job. Redrow, unlike many of its competitors, feels that the benefits far outweigh the costs. For example, Redrow's Management Development programme benefits both the company and the employee as it has proven to improve confidence and strategic thinking, resulting in a more proactive approach.

Redrow's apprenticeship scheme is central to its workforce planning. In the early 2000's Redrow took on around 12 apprentices per year but this has steadily increased to around 50 per year. Redrow is proud of supporting over 250 apprentices in the past 10 years, with many of them going on to very successful careers. In recent years the company has made significant improvements to its schemes, for example, it introduced regional and national awards for the top performing apprentices to provide them with a route into management.

Within its apprenticeships scheme, Redrow uses placements as the main on-the-job training method:

'Apprentices are placed with an experienced and trusted sub-contractor, where they can learn the skills required in their chosen trade while working on Redrow developments and also attending college one day a week.'

As well as its trade apprenticeships, Redrow also offers apprenticeships in office administration as part of a new bespoke training programme. Mentoring is a key element of training at Redrow. This ranges from one-to-one support to letting apprentices swap job roles with their seniors. Charlie Baker, an Apprentice Carpenter, carried out a job swap with Keith Miller, Commercial Director. Over the two day period Charlie attended top level meetings in Keith's place, took part in site inspections and even had Keith's office. The following day Charlie provided Keith with a varied day with plenty of hands on carpentry and joinery experience. Such training enhances staff skills, prepares them to be more effective in their roles and gives them insights into future positions they can aspire to.

Development

Redrow is firmly committed to developing its staff; a key element of its development process is a comprehensive appraisal system. An appraisal involves a manager meeting with his or her staff and discussing their individual progress against previously agreed targets. Any improvements from training are noted and then a new set of targets are agreed for the next phase of the employee's appraisal cycle. Appraisal is a vital element in helping individuals to enhance their personal qualities and competencies to enable them to grow and move into more challenging, higher level roles. It also improves productivity, efficiency and highlights potential for promotion as well as being a motivator in terms of self esteem and achievement.

At Redrow, there are a variety of opportunities for progression available. Senior management have developed a range of programmes that support its employees in their desire for growth and progression. For example, the graduate programme has recruited 36 staff in the past three years. All graduate trainees have a senior manager as a mentor and undertake projects on behalf of the main board of directors. The intensive nature of the programme has resulted in five of the six 2011 cohort moving into middle management positions.

Another aspect of development at Redrow involves the Management Development programme.

So far over 50 Redrow managers have successfully completed the programme with a further 45 progressing through it. This initiative helps select employees earmarked as future managers. The programme develops the skills needed to effectively and professionally manage others and deliver the best possible results in line with the expectations of the company. As with any management programme, it focuses on leadership, teamwork, communication, **managing change, solving problems and delivering** results. Karen Jones, Group Human Resources Director, states:

'By investing in our existing employees through our Trainee Site Assistant Programme, Sales Management Trainee programme, and Management Development programme we help employees to improve their knowledge and skills, gain new qualifications and achieve their full potential, whilst ensuring that the business has the calibre of workforce needed to grow and prosper.'



Clearly, Redrow's employees and the company benefit greatly from the training and development programmes. In particular, the staff are keenly aware of their respective roles and responsibilities and this is considered in the next section.



Roles and responsibilities

Redrow ensures low employee turnover levels by offering extensive staff development opportunities. These range from building and selling new homes, to roles in architecture and design, quantity surveying, accountancy, conveyancing, HR, customer service, marketing, IT and office administration. With some apprenticeship and graduate schemes on completion there are no full time jobs available, however this is not the case at Redrow. All the graduates and many of the apprentices have been employed within the organisation and career progression has been a key benefit for all involved. The involvement of Redrow's staff in a variety of community projects also demonstrates how its commitment to corporate social responsibility is incorporated into its training and development programmes.

Its graduate and undergraduate programmes use community based projects to provide the training element for teamwork and leadership skills. Graduates have worked with LATCH this year (a children's cancer charity in Wales) and undergraduates have been engaged with the Delamere Cancer Centre in Cheshire. Five graduate trainees from Redrow recently spent three days refurbishing accommodation at Cardiff's University Hospital for LATCH. The team worked together to transform one bedroom, two lounges and a boardroom at the hospital. Completing a community-based project forms part of the group's 15-month training programme with Redrow. Conor Roberts, 24, is based at the divisional head office in Cardiff. Conor, commenting on his role, said:

'We had to think on our feet and draw on the wide range of skills we have developed over the course of the Redrow graduate training scheme. While negotiation and communication were vital, we also learnt to be flexible, manage our time and to work effectively to a tight deadline. We successfully completed the project without any budget, and seeing the impact of the finished accommodation on the children and families at LATCH was incredibly rewarding.'

This clearly shows how Redrow's investment in training and development has a positive impact on both employees and the local community.

Conclusion

Redrow seeks to maintain its reputation for excellent customer service and corporate social responsibility through training and developing its staff to their full potential. It does this through its apprenticeship and graduate training programmes, utilising its existing staff and its state-of-the-art training centre to provide a full and extensive package of off-the-job and on-the-job training. Through its schemes it has developed employees, equipped them with the skills and abilities identified through workforce planning, making them capable of increasing Redrow's performance both today and into the future.

All employees are able to access a wide range of progression routes and promotion opportunities that suit both their requirements and those of the business. The high retention rates and excellent customer satisfaction reflect a workforce planning programme that is beneficial to staff, the company and the wider community.



1. State two reasons why businesses train their staff. (2 marks)
2. Using examples from the case study, explain the difference between training and development. (4 marks)
3. Analyse the long-term benefits to a business of a commitment to continually train and develop its employees. (6 marks)
4. Evaluate the importance of appraisal in the training and development process. (8 marks)