

Planning for the future

Richard Hayes, president of the Institute of Highway Engineers (IHE), says the industry must look to address its ageing workforce

Succession planning is a process for identifying and developing internal people with the potential to fill key business and leadership positions within an organisation.

This increases the availability of experienced and capable employees that are prepared to assume these roles as and when they become available.

There is a fundamental crisis in our industry which will come to fruition in a decade or so if we fail to address it now. The demographic profile of members of the professional institutions shows that most are in the 45 to 55 age group and many of these will be leaving the highways industry well before their statutory retirement age. Although such institutions don't represent all the members of staff who work in highways there is no evidence to suggest that the sample is not representative.

If we are to manage the country's infrastructure efficiently and effectively we need to ensure that younger members of the profession have the necessary skills and attributes to deal with the challenges they will face.

For many years young engineers and technicians were taken on and introduced into teams where there was a broad range of knowledge and experience. Often an older team member would take them under their wing and ensure that younger members of staff had the correct grounding to enable them to flourish.

It is sadly the case that such a holistic approach to development of staff is less apparent these days. More and more design and construction teams have reduced in size and as a result have little or no spare capacity. The time available for this type of staff development has been minimised to such an extent that

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there is no real informal training and individuals have to often learn through thinking on their feet.

Making changes

How can we change this? Are organisations really planning for the future or are they just considering the present day where survival is the only objective?

My challenge is to all experienced and partly experienced members of our profession. Your organisation may not be recruiting new members of staff and therefore the need to support and train those less experienced than you is vital.

Take a look at others and identify where you might be able to assist. It might be in a particular activity, through preparation for a new qualification or by considering professional engineering registration.

Here are some possible actions to take:

- ➔ Ensure you set aside time to include them in team meetings, events and project work
- ➔ Establish key competencies for your organisation both now and in the future and map out your organisations overall ability and what it is likely to be a few years ahead



- ➔ Establish mentors amongst your experienced staff and give them the necessary skills and training to develop potential staff
- ➔ Ensure all members of staff keep a record of their CPD which includes the mentoring process as a part of their development
- ➔ Assess the vulnerability of your organisation in key areas and develop business plans to ensure you have minimised the overall risk
- ➔ Be aware that people make career choices for different reasons than the development of an organisation, recognise this and allow for it
- ➔ Recognise the different motivations that exist in the workplace, some people are content to reach a plateau in their development whilst others are reaching for top places.

Management of talented and motivated employees should be part of the organisation's aims and should also influence the future direction of the company. Internal employees are often overlooked for senior positions because the company wishes to bring in fresh faces, but motivated staff produced by the company will respond if they have a clear route to their career goal.

Many of us developed through this process. If we are to have a legacy after we leave it should be that we did as much as we could to ensure our successors have the talent to ensure the industry can continue to play its vital role in our society. ●

