

International Paper increases emphasis on training to improve employees' skills

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In the past five years, International Paper Co. (IP) has seen its workforce more than double from 35,000 employees in 1987 to more than 72,000 in 1992 to support net sales that have more than tripled during the same period from US\$ 4.5 billion to US\$ 12.9 billion. Of those 72,000 employees, some 22% are based in 13 overseas mills while 78% work in the company's more than 400 U.S. locations. In 1990, IP was ranked No. 1 in industry sales. How does a company that is experiencing such explosive growth maintain its competitive position even in a recession-beaten economy?

Capital investments of more than US\$ 8 billion and acquisitions tallying an additional US\$ 4 billion over the past 10 years provide only a partial answer.

"In order to maintain the competitive edge, it's not enough to address the process," said Edward C. Champagne, manager of manufacturing education for IP. "The only competitive edge we have is our people."

To hone that competitive edge, IP formalized its commitment to its employees in 1987 by establishing a Corporate Education Department, based at its new headquarters in Memphis, TN. The department, which began with a director and five area managers, is currently staffed by 15 employees supporting education throughout the corporation.

Conducting a needs assessment

IP management realized that defining the role of each employee was fundamental to understanding what skills the employee needed to acquire or strengthen to make a contribution to the company. In 1987, a committee comprising Champagne, his boss, five manufacturing mill managers, and an outside consultant acting as a facilitator set out to understand the role of the first-line supervisor. A project with a singular goal quickly broadened to a company-wide, 1.5-year study to examine the role of every employee and determine the skills each employee needed to advance within the company.

In 1989, the Corporate Education Department began to implement programs to enhance employee development.

"Everybody coming into a first-line job goes through what we call *Phase I-Phase II* at entry level, and that includes a number of

things," said Champagne. "We train each new employee in safety, quality, employee relations, stress management, performance management, and communication skills, and we discuss the changing role of the supervisor both in today's economy and in today's changing leadership styles.

"Even if a person stays on one job for many years, we still need to enhance his or her skills to keep that employee growing."

The department also implemented a program called *Skill Scope*. Each year, employees complete a questionnaire that asks them to rate their own communication and leadership skills. The employees' supervisors as well as four people who work for them and four people in lateral positions also complete questionnaires about the employee's skills. By comparing the various responses, employees can see how perceptions of themselves compare with others' perceptions of them. The results are used to create a needs analysis that will be addressed through training courses over the next year.

"We publish a mini college catalog that lists about 300 courses that the company offers," said Champagne. As employees discuss their career development with their supervisors and identify their needs, they can decide which courses to take and when to take them over the year."

How does a company with 72,000 employees support training programs for those people?

"After we did that initial needs analysis," said Champagne, "we discovered that most of the knowledge was here within International Paper."

Harnessing knowledge

The department worked with a consulting firm to harness the array of knowledge scattered throughout the company. Through a *Train the Trainer* program, the consultants trained IP employees to train their coworkers.

"When we train the people internally, it becomes a learning experience for them, then they become a lot better at it and they pass that information on to others," Champagne said. "That's the only way we can really make this cost effective and spread that knowledge and skill in a very structured way. We would never be able to do it using outside vendors."

More than half the people working for International Paper have



Laura Bilbro, senior process hygienist, and **Stan Crawford**, power plant trainer, in the TAPPI Learning Center at IP's Natchez, MS, mill

fewer than five years of experience with the corporation, Champagne continued. "And that means we have to incorporate them into our culture. The only way we can do that is through the *Train the Trainer* program. Ninety-five percent of everything we do now is based on that venue."

Enter interactive video

As part of the process of implementing this program, the department realized that building an internal training network was the first step of its corporate training strategy. The company also needed tools that would provide a consistent instruction method for employees.

"That's why we went to TAPPI to take a look at the interactive videodisc system," said Champagne. "We wanted to have a uniform application across the corporation."

George G. Nelson Jr. has been responsible for employee training since 1984. A member of TAPPI's Human Resources Development Committee, he was involved with TAPPI's first interactive video project, "Papermaking: The Process and the Product."

"I was interested in getting something like that because I felt it would be useful to our people here," he recalled. In early 1988, the Natchez mill received its first interactive video system: an IBM TouchScreen computer and InfoWindows system.

"We started using it for training, primarily for salaried employees," he said. "Soon after that we started using it for training instrument electrician apprentices. We bought some courses that were available through the Instrumentation Society of America,

and the apprentices started using them for part of their training.

"We were using the system more and more so we bought a second IBM TouchScreen InfoWindows unit," Nelson said.

Part of a toolkit

To broaden the skills of the "up through the ranks supervisors" at the company, IP requires those employees to take courses in communications, basic chemistry, psychology, and business and economics. They are also required to take Corporate Education courses, one of which is the TAPPI interactive videodisc course, "Papermaking: The Process and the Product."

"Sometimes one of these supervisors will work in the paper mill but not understand the pulping area, the power area, the wood room area, or some other aspect of how a paper company operates," said Champagne.

"We feel that the TAPPI papermaking course gives them a pretty broad overview, not only of what happens, but why it happens," said Nelson.

"We purchased 23 interactive video systems, and we have one located in each of our 23 paper mills," Champagne said.

Each system includes an IBM PS/2 Model 55 SX computer, a VGA monitor, a Pioneer LDV 2200 Laserdisc Player, a Videologic DVA-4000 full-motion video adapter, Roland CS10 speakers, DOS operating system software, and a mouse.

"Videodisc is the medium we chose because people are more accustomed to watching television," Champagne pointed out. "It also gets the people personally involved with the process. They

have to physically react to something.”

“It gives them an opportunity to study things that they find interesting,” said Nelson. “So they enjoy this new method of learning.”

“It’s also something that can be done 24 hours a day,” Champagne said. “We run our mills 24 hours a day and the videodisc gives the people who are on the shift from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. the same opportunity as those who are on the day shift.”

“They can use the system at any time once they know how to log on with their ID number. We have an instructor there 24 hours a day, seven days a week. That would not be the case if we had a stand-up trainer.”

“In addition, given care, the interactive videodisc will last forever,” Champagne said. “An audio or VHS would not; they would wear out eventually and the quality would depreciate. They can get dirty, and they can get lost.”

IP’s systems were delivered in January 1992.

“The day they were delivered, the employees started using them,” Champagne recalled. “People were standing in line waiting to get the system.”

The employees’ reactions have been so positive, Corporate Education is now faced with a new problem.

“In the short time that we’ve had them, a couple of the trainers at the mills have called me and said, ‘We have too many people who want to use this and the word is spreading. The hourly people want to use it as well as the first-line supervisors. We’re going to have to buy two or three more of these things. What do we do?’”

“In one of our locations, they’ve actually set up a program where the hourly people work in teams,” said Champagne. “This has become part of their process to get advanced; the sooner they complete the videodisc program, the sooner they advance.”

“We do a lot of training of people in kraft recovery,” Nelson noted, “because that’s a fairly hazardous operation, and we want to make sure that people are well grounded in what goes on there. So the TAPPI ‘Kraft Recovery’ videodisc courseware has been incorporated as a regular part of their training.”

“New employees will also do one-on-one training with an experienced trainer,” he said. “The courseware is just part of his toolkit, you might say, that he uses to train those people.”

The trainer will introduce the employee to the TAPPI Learning Center at the mill and help the employee begin the recovery course. Trainer and trainee will watch and discuss the course together.

In addition to serving as a training course, “Papermaking: The Process and the Product” acts as an orientation to the industry, a welcome to the company, and a visitors’ tool.

“And now that we have the systems, we can also use them for electronics, for simulations, and for increasing people’s reading skills,” Champagne noted.

Training for impact

To measure the effectiveness of IP’s training program, Corporate Education implemented a four-step model it calls *Training for Impact*. First, employees fill out a standardized questionnaire after they complete an IP seminar. The data from the questionnaire helps Corporate Education to determine if the employees learned skills or information that they can use in their job, how the course will change how they do their job, and what in the course was of little or no value to them.

Second, Corporate Education requests that the employees complete another survey six months after attending an IP seminar to determine what has changed in the employees’ behavior because of the course.

Third, Corporate Education personnel meet with the employees’ supervisors to determine if the employees’ working habits have changed, and if so, if those changes can be documented.

Fourth, Corporate Education personnel ask the supervisor and the employee if, as a result of the course, any cost savings or improved ways of doing things have been realized.

Employees are also asked to take exams before and after a course to determine the extent of learning that took place.

“We try to measure this in terms of dollars and we call it *Training for Impact*,” said Champagne.

Hands-on expertise

The trainers who staff IP’s Learning Centers are employees who have been trained through the *Train the Trainer* program.

“The person who is the trainer here at the Natchez mill pretty much taught himself how to use the Learning Center equipment,” said Nelson. “There were enough of us to show him the basics. The interactive system is simple enough for him to learn on his own.”

“We appreciate the support from TAPPI because most of us that are dealing directly with the system are not computer experts,” Nelson said. “TAPPI’s Learning Center staff have certainly been able to give us some help if we need it.” ■

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