



THE TIMES 100

BUSINESS CASE STUDIES

Training and development – Network Rail

Network Rail is the business responsible for the tracks, bridges and tunnels that make up the British rail network. These, along with signalling and level crossings, form the railway's infrastructure. Its responsibility extends to 20,000 miles of track and 40,000 bridges and tunnels. It also runs 18 of Britain's major rail stations, from Edinburgh Waverley to London King's Cross. To achieve its work programme Network Rail needs to recruit and retain talented engineers. To maintain the quality of staff, Network Rail has put major investment into improving the knowledge and skills of its workforce. It operates a 'learning for life' policy and staff are expected to continue learning throughout their careers.



Training is usually defined as being job-related. It provides staff with new or improved skills so that they can carry out a role or task better. Training staff brings a number of benefits to a business. It makes staff more efficient and therefore they produce more output. At the same time it improves safety and reduces the risk of accidents. Workers become more flexible, allowing the business to use them in whatever areas they are needed. This can also help to improve motivation. The provision of good training has led both to higher quality applicants and to better customer satisfaction. The UK is currently facing a shortage of young people with skills in technology and engineering. Network Rail has recognised that it needs to fill this gap. It has therefore put in place high quality training to make sure that it has people with the right skills it requires in the future. There are two main types of training – 'on-the-job', which is training based in the workplace, and 'off-the-job' which is based at a college or other learning centre. Network Rail has developed many such centres to fulfil its specific needs. It currently has 26 modern training centres across Britain. Examples of off-the-job training at the Walsall centre include practical training on a purpose-built 60 metre stretch of internal track with signalling and 150 metres of outdoor track. Trainees learn how to practise procedures in controlled environments that they can then use when they return to the British Rail network. On-the-job training includes trainees accompanying mentors, for instance, when fixing signalling issues, and learning hands-on how to maintain the network effectively. The Advanced Apprenticeship Scheme is a three-year programme, designed for young people aged over 17 with at least 4 GCSEs. Both boys and girls are encouraged to apply. Apprentices spend a year training with the Royal Navy at Europe's largest engineering training facility at HMS Sultan in Hampshire. Here they learn both technical and leadership skills. A further two years are spent in on-the-job training around Britain, returning to HMS Sultan for additional courses and learning. At Network Rail's own training centres a mixture of classroom learning and job-related experience is given. Network Rail uses its own expert engineers as trainers. This means that apprentices gain knowledge from people with direct experience of rail issues and projects. The Graduate Programme helps Network Rail to build the leaders of the future. Graduates control the pace and content of their work so that they can progress at their own rate. They gain key experience on a range of placements and receive regular reviews of their progress and performance. There are opportunities in all engineering disciplines (civil, mechanical and electrical). Trainees work on some of the biggest engineering projects in Europe and get involved in management and decision-making roles in all functional areas.

Once trained, Network Rail makes sure that its employees have access to development opportunities. Development is about enhancing relevant skills, qualities and knowledge to give a person greater competency. People who take development opportunities can move into more challenging, higher level roles. However, there is the risk that a person who has better skills can more easily find another job elsewhere. Network Rail recognises this risk, but knows that it is balanced by the excellent opportunities and conditions that it offers. The development programmes that it runs lead to further nationally recognised qualifications ranging from NVQs and HNCs through to degrees and diplomas. These are all backed by a university, college or professional body as appropriate. Network Rail also offers employees the chance to take part in its own leadership programme. This is designed to develop employees so that they can take on managerial roles.



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Questions

1. What is off-the-job training? Give examples relating to Network Rail.

2. Describe the difference between training and development.

3. Explain firms may prefer on-the-job training methods instead of off-the-job training.

4. Analyse the reasons why Network Rail operates a 'learning for life' policy.

Task

Scenario – a dentist wishes to attend a three day training course to update their skills and knowledge. The course is 120 miles away from where the dentist lives and works. Draw up a table showing the costs and benefits of the dentist attending this course. Carry out some research to help you estimate the monetary costs.

What have you learned?

60 second challenge. Work with a partner and decide who is going to go first. This person then has to speak for 60 seconds, without pausing, about what they have learned about training and development. Then, the second person has to talk for 30 seconds about what they have learned, without repeating anything the first person has said.