

John Deere Champions Workforce Development

At Deere, employees take ownership of their career paths.

ASK RICK MCANALLY HIS TITLE. He will tell you it is director of global talent management and diversity for John Deere. Ask him what he does for a living and you get a much more interesting answer.

"I am one of the luckiest people I know," he says. "I get to do something that is totally enjoyable. I manage the processes that affect our employees' relationship with John Deere—from the time they are hired through when they reach their potential."

In his 33 years with John Deere, McAnally has followed a path through a number of Deere operations and functions. He started with the company through an internship program while he was in college. His assignments included manufacturing and manufacturing engineering before he moved into labor relations and human resources. Prior to being named to his current position, McAnally served as the human resources director for the company's agricultural equipment division.

Even though he leads the Deere learning function, McAnally quickly disabuses you of any notion that it is an ivory tower position. The connection between learning and the company's performance is clear and direct.

"We are in the process of expanding our John Deere

University to build a consortium of learning campuses across divisions and around the globe," explains McAnally. That connection brings together different audiences—such as the company's equipment divisions and its dealers—through its corporate John Deere Learning Center or at training centers around the world.

"Deere is also deeply involved in virtual classrooms and virtual training so that we can broadcast the training and bring classrooms together worldwide," McAnally explains.

Centralized versus decentralized

The training function at Deere is not conveniently described as centralized or decentralized. It is "somewhere in-between," according to McAnally. "We respect that training needs to be adapted to the audience, and put emphasis on translation and cultural adaptation, as well as meeting the audience's professional needs."

John Deere does not emphasize centralization of training development; rather, it focuses on where training can and should be developed most efficiently.

According to McAnally, it is all about taking advantage of Deere's strengths—leveraging the capability that

Deere has, whether it's in the company's marketing training groups with product training, or in the corporate learning center with leadership training in Europe, India, or elsewhere.

A deliberate strategy

Under the leadership of its chairman, Robert Lane, Deere's performance is very much tied to the development of its workforce. (See the interview with Robert Lane on page 32.) "Bob has been very deliberate in setting the strategy for the company, and driving that strategy through aligned high-performance teamwork," notes McAnally. "We communicate that in a number of different ways to our employees."

One key program tied to employee development is Deere's performance management system. All company objectives are supported by the various division objectives that are available for employees to view in an online performance management system. John Deere employees then align stretch goals, job responsibilities, and development goals with those business objectives.

Goals are set at the beginning of the fiscal year, and are discussed in mid-year and year-end reviews. "It has become a very efficient process to educate employees on the company's strategies and then get employees aligned to those strategies," McAnally says. "We follow up by supporting employee development through several channels."

McAnally points out that the right environment also contributes to robust employee development. Throughout the organization, emphasis is placed on creating a developmental environment, be it training or experiences, internal or external, where the awareness of employee interactions contribute to growth.

Competencies tied to development

The competencies that are associated with an employee's job at John Deere are tied to development in the company's learning and activities courseware catalog, so employees can use educational opportunities to aid their development.

Last year, Deere launched an online career development program that gives employees a context and a method to address their own development. That system, which has "a job-fit analysis," helps employees assess where they are today and compare themselves with positions they would like to attain. This process helps employees identify deficiencies, and together with their manager, work to design their own development, McAnally explains. Deere employees can also prepare an internal résumé for the company's job-posting system. That posting exposes the employee to management throughout the company. McAnally notes that

Developing differently

In the new global job market, it has become necessary to look at employee development differently. At John Deere, rapid development means the company must not only compress the development cycle for learning content, but also compress and accelerate the delivery of specific learning to employees.

"For example, at the new John Deere Technology Center in Pune, India, we are onboarding application developers who will work in virtual teams with U.S. employees," explains Rick McAnally, Deere's director of global talent management and diversity. "Because of cultural differences, competition for talent, and the turnover rate in India, it is critical to have effective learning paths in place for new hires. These learning paths must quickly build the John Deere culture while upskilling new hires on how different technologies are implemented within John Deere."

McAnally explains that the company addressed these challenges by creating a boot camp training program to develop both technical and team-building skills in the new hires to a level so that they could quickly perform their immediate tasks competently.

"This 10-day blended program addressed the technical, cultural, and teaming needs through a series of web-based training modules, self-directed exercises, daily online assessments, and debrief sessions," he adds.

everything is integrated—performance management, career development, learning and development, and John Deere University.

To define competencies for each position, Deere uses a global job evaluation process. The leadership in the various functions determines the specific job competencies for each position. Competencies are recorded in the company's human resources system, and from that, information is drawn to establish the level of proficiency required to perform a given job.

John Deere employees have more control over their development now than in the past. Employees have a greater ability to see an appropriate career path or development for their current position. "Employees take ownership of their own career-pathing," McAnally says. "The end result is a much stronger organization. This career development process was unveiled in 2005, and it is being rolled out worldwide. In its first year, the system was made available to the John Deere salaried workforce in the United States and Canada—about 16,000 employees.

"In the first three months, we had more than 100,000 hits on the job catalog, with employees investigating open positions," adds McAnally. "We now

have more than 6,000 internal résumés in the system, and it is completely voluntary.”

Recent employee surveys indicate that this valuable tool helps put learning and development into context, and McAnally projects that the number of participants will double in the next year.

Making it count, making it pay

In addition to making it easier for employees to set their own development path, the learning organization must illustrate how it is adding value to John Deere as a whole.

“We use soft and hard metrics,” explains McAnally. “We have metrics based on employee survey results when they finish their learning experience.” Six months later, surveys are again conducted to determine the applicability of the learning to their jobs. The company also uses a number of other hard metrics in terms of percentage of employees that are touched, and how effective Deere is in cost of delivery.

Speed of change

Like any 21st-century, global manufacturing company, Deere faces challenges that are directly related to speed of change. Not only must the organization develop new products quickly and deliver them to a market hungry for innovation, but it must also keep its workforce agile enough to make that possible.

“We are like many companies in that regard,” says McAnally. “We need to have short cycle times on development. We are now working with software that allows us to develop online training much quicker than in the past.

“It’s simply a must to satisfy the requirements for our customers and our employees.”

Advice for others

McAnally says he is occasionally asked what the best career path is for the workplace learning professional who seeks a top-tier position. “I think multiple paths may be appropriate, and I feel you are well-served to get experience in the business.”

He advises people to consider one or more development assignments outside the human resources area, regardless of the business. “Having a strong understanding of other functions is vital to building human resource skill credibility,” counsels McAnally.

And when that workplace learning professional finally gets a seat at the top management table, McAnally has some very brief words of advice.

“You can’t be disassociated when the business discussion is going on—you have to be part of it.” And, he adds, “you have to execute.” **TD**

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