

Briton Engineering Developments Ltd

Lees Mills, Scholes, Holmfirth

Company mission: *'To develop, enrich and lead the urban snowsports market worldwide, through technology, design, expertise and enthusiasm.'*

Briton Engineering is the market leader in the urban snowsports market, Established in 1979, Briton are the Inventors of Snowflex* a ground breaking innovative snowsports slop design utilising highly experienced design and build engineers developing site profiles.

Also, Briton are developers of unique passenger rope drags for the urban snowsports application.

Number of company employees : 10

Structure of informal learning

Whilst no known structure appears to be recognised, employees are recruited for their attitude rather than skills already possessed.

Description of informal learning

Bureaucracy is seen as counter productive to Briton. As such the company has a 'fluid' skilled workforce that can, and does turn their hand to all disciplines needed within the company. They actively encourage the 'have a go' attitude and support a no blame culture. Suggestions and ways to improve the business are put forward and nothing is formal.

Mentoring, job rotation schemes and cover rotas are developed. The emphasis is very much on 'wide and varied and multi- skilled workforce. The site manager for instance also develops the website!

There is a definite passion about the employees at this company and that is reflected within the success of the company.

Employers demonstrate a commitment to supporting informal learning

Management discussed the informal learning approach and provided anecdotal evidence, which were later supported by other members of staff.

Appropriate strategies exist for enabling informal learning and the management are keen to maintain bureaucracy to an absolute minimum, with employees being recruited with the correct attitude for learning and development. Job advertisements and the selection procedure specify the attitude for learning and development more than skills sets. It is more important that the potential candidate has the correct attitude rather than a particular craft.

Employees are informed of the processes and opportunities for informal learning, and staff have access to and all help towards the compilation of a staff newsletter. The use of notice boards for informal and formal communication is seen as a positive and a necessary requirement of information dissemination and communication at the company.

Job rotation takes place on a very frequent, but non structured basis. It is important for the company that employees can react to the speed of customer requirements and a multi skilled workforce can achieve this.

Extensive use of mentoring

Mentors are identified at the time of induction. Induction is company wide and is a mix of formal and informal processes

Informal learning is valued as part of the Staff development process and staff are actively encouraged to undertake/try/develop a wide range of jobs and techniques. Staff are also encouraged to consider and participate in more complex work.

Informal learning is recognised as part of the appraisal process. Not surprisingly the appraisals are informal, though they do have a structure. However, informal learning is the priority for team and company success

Work processes demonstrate a support for informal learning

Communication channels support informal learning. Staff are actively encouraged to put forward suggestions and ideas. There is a no blame culture within the organisation and this allows individuals to feel confident to try new ideas etc. mentoring and coaching take place with regularity. Team meetings are held frequently, usually in the pub!

Appropriate social and personal spaces are provided throughout the company. Whilst social areas are provided for staff breaks and 'time out', it was the layout of the offices and workshop that provide the informal learning to really take place. Staff at Briton Engineering Developments Ltd have no 'set' work areas but were encouraged to work/discuss where the job was best suited. This had come about after a staff suggestion and it appears to be working very well.

Appropriate social structures and events are encouraged. Social gatherings are the norm and are actively encouraged. After the completion of every successful tender, production run and/or assembly it was the norm to celebrate and socialise.

Conclusion

Management view informal learning as the success factor of the organisation. Whilst some staff members were unfamiliar with the term 'informal learning', once the concept had been discussed, i.e. the nuances of what it was, all staff agreed that this way of working contributed significantly to the success of the organisation.