

Putting people in control

Investing in workforce is imperative to a successful business strategy

Lori J. Molinari

Much has been written about the challenges many worldwide organizations face in sourcing, retaining and developing their talent in today's fast-paced and competitive market. This is a significant and often underestimated contributor to plant-performance issues and to the high costs that most

industries face. In an environment that emphasizes the importance of return on investment, surprisingly few companies recognize that the return on investment in people can easily outstrip returns from investing in equipment.

The best processes in the world are of limited value if adequate skills are not available to implement them, or if resources are continually absorbed in the training of new employees. The key is not just to hire and train, but to retain and continually develop the available talent.



Operational excellence

While many hours and resources are spent on the continuous development, refinement and updating of business strategies, quite often the same energies and focus are not placed on the critical players that are responsible for its execution – the people. It takes many more people to execute a strategy than it does to develop one, and it is its successful execution that drives people and value. In ABB’s Process Automation Services, the criticality of execution is clearly recognized and people management is not only a common support process in its service business model but is also heavily embedded in its overall business strategy **1**.

With ABB’s customers as the focal point of its people-management initiatives, the company’s success is derived from maintaining strong customer-supplier relationships and making its customers more profitable. ABB contributes to the success of its customers through its people’s knowledge in knowing what, when and how to most effectively and efficiently improve customer plants. In recognizing the influence of people, ABB places equal importance on satisfaction as a key metric alongside issues such as safety, environment, overall equipment effectiveness and cost.

The fostering of people and drive for maintaining and building a high-per-

formance culture throughout ABB Process Automation Service starts at the top with the management team and cascades down throughout the entire organization.

Putting people-processes in place, sharing the strategy in a way that everyone can understand and buy into, and showing how their roles relate in the “big picture” has enabled ABB Process Automation Service to transform strategies into operational realities. The results of investing in people have proven to be major success factors in attracting and retaining top talent as well as maximizing performance, building employee engagement, and achieving innovation and motivation – the prerequisites of operational excellence.

One of the notable strengths that ABB brings to its customers lie in the people management programs that are run worldwide to continuously develop, build and monitor the company’s workforce. A wide range of comprehensive programs are available to employees and customers around the world. Besides the broad range of courses available through the ABB Universities and local country organizations, ABB Process Automation Service has developed a specialized suite of learning events tailored specifically to its products and service businesses. The relationships and networks de-

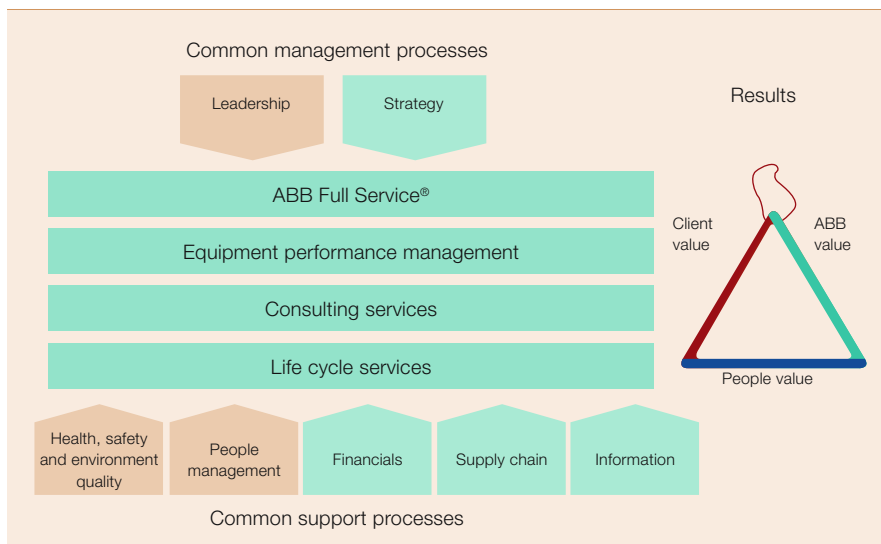
rived from these events have drastically improved employee performance, engagement and motivation.

Two such global programs are Site Management Training and Maintenance Training, both of which are week-long intensive classroom and example-based learning events. This type of focused training gives new employee’s rapid and broad understanding of the practical standards, methods and support that is available to them, permitting them to efficiently deliver value to ABB’s customers. Existing employees are kept up-to-date on best practice methodologies, latest technologies and tools. These trainings are continually improved through global learning and the anonymous attendee feedback assures honest and constructive critique.

The value of these trainings **2** is reinforced with full attendance and feedback such as shown in **Factbox 1**. The training courses are followed up with options such as specialized local training, site specific plan development, internships and cross-border job rotations to reinforce ABB processes and continually develop the company’s global workforce.

The loop is closed by ensuring that employees have the ability to execute and deliver results through annual employee satisfaction surveys to mon-

1 People-management is an integral part of the overall business strategy of Process Automation Services



Factbox 1 Sample feedback from employee training courses

“A very good selection of topics addressed to actual and future site managers, combined with the presence of relevant business professionals resulted in a serious and very important training inside ABB.”

“This course was superior to my expectations! It was excellent and well proportioned to help us succeed in maintenance.”

“The Reliability maps, information and knowledge is fantastic! Many good and new tools, I can compare my site activities with the presented material.”

(Site Management Training
Maintenance Training – Belgium, October 2007)

itor workplace environment, employee performance/engagement/motivation and overall functionality of the organization. Over the years, the results have shown common improvements in the areas of career development, connectivity and communication. ABB has listened to its people and used their valuable feedback to identify innovative solutions for continuous improvement in these areas.

Career development

For career development, an employee self-service (ESS) talent management system is in place globally. This system catalogs the skills and experiences of ABB Process Automation Service's global workforce and allows employees to define their own value proposition to the business. The ESS system is integrated with ABB Group's people-management systems and gives other management groups the ability to efficiently manage their talent worldwide (eg, recruitment, succession planning, leadership development, training and certifications). The effective management of talent has not only allowed Process Automation Service to maintain its competitive advantage, but also to showcase its global talent to customers as one of the company's value propositions.

Connectivity

For connectivity, it was realized that people need and want to become more connected with networks and tools to collaborate in areas relevant to their work. ABB Process Automation Service has diligently worked on breaking down the country and departmental "silos" and has developed its service knowledge portal (SKP). This portal provides a global platform for standardizing processes and tools across the company's various service offerings and industries.

For example, in the maintenance outsourcing offering, ABB Full Service^{®1)}, where reliability is one of the principal core areas of competence, the SKP has an extensive maintenance library and communities of practice (CoPs), consisting of experts from all around the world. Because ABB is uniquely positioned to develop and evaluate emerging technologies and due to its large customer base, the company has

2 Focused training programs permit ABB employees to better deliver value to customers



the systems in place and talent to globally maintain and implement industry-specific solutions.

The SKP enables the company's country organizations to leverage this standardized content, while developing their own localized content to enhance their support and service offerings to global customers, manage projects and build customer relationships more effectively.

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Communication

The third and most fundamental element is communication. No matter how talented a company's global workforce, without proper communication, people will not have the ability to execute and deliver their projects. Communication is one of the main drivers for providing people the ability to perform, and is a single tool which assures the cohesion of the ABB Process Automation Service organization while at the same time building and enhancing employee performance and engagement. From

using tools such as the SKP, to creating virtual communities of practice, where topic specialists from around the globe collaborate and improve processes, to detailed implementation plans on how to improve communication at the site level, ABB recognizes the value and impact of leveraging the knowledge of its people. Significant investments are continually made in enhancing and integrating systems to ensure the efficient delivery of messages in a directed and coherent manner throughout all levels and countries.

In the case of ABB Full Service[®], where both ABB and the customer work together to maintain and improve equipment performance and reliability for the entire facility, client value is the ultimate objective. ABB has clearly paved the way and has differentiated itself from its competitors by having a solid and proven foundation of systems, tools and programs that not only embrace its global workforce, but also aid in ensuring that the greatest value is delivered to every customer anywhere in the world.

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Footnote

¹⁾ See also "A head start to profitability" on page 88 of this ABB Review Special Report.