

SP3 RESPONDING TO HUMAN RESOURCE CHALLENGES FOR THE ROAD SECTOR

This session presented examples of initiatives in different organizations, public administrations, academic institutions, and regional and international road associations. The session was divided into two parts: Issues of competencies and actions to respond to these issues, and making the road sector more appealing.

Recommendations to decision makers

The road organizations from private and public sectors must answer the needs for the construction, maintenance and management the transportation infrastructures. However, many of them are facing an ageing workforce and problems of renewing their staff, in an environment where there is a reduction of resources. Meanwhile, the nature of jobs is changing, with the expanding needs of users, the emergence of new techniques, the diversification and specialization of expertises, and the changing of roles between the public and private sectors.

The continuous development of the competencies of personnel is therefore an increasingly important challenge. This applies to all areas of roads and road transportation, and all types of work: studies and planning, construction, and maintenance. All occupational groups are affected, including engineers, professionals, technicians, and workers.

A comprehensive approach is needed to address this challenge, from student outreach activities to recruitment methods and finally, training and retention programmes.

Technical aspects

Student outreach measures seek to increase the number of qualified applicants for jobs in the road sector, by attracting young people to scientific and technical disciplines. They are aimed at students of various ages: college or university students, as well as high school and even elementary school students.

The promotion of transportation activities raises kids' awareness of the sector, making the associated professions and research activities more attractive to them and encourages them to undertake and continue these types of studies. The measures that can be implemented vary greatly including scholarship programs, grants for university research programs that contribute to training young researchers, job shadow days, workshops in schools, participation in career days, competitions organization support, mentoring program between experienced and new employees or between an engineer and a school teacher, etc.

Recruitment is often more difficult since skilled persons are in demand not only in the transportation sector but also in other industries which are facing workforce shortages. The private sector firms are able to adapt more rapidly to these rather competitive conditions, but generally all organizations have to rely on various measures.

Different methods have proved effective for example summer internships are an opportunity for students to become familiar with a place and to gain practical experience. Partnerships with universities and colleges help to promote co-operative education, a pedagogical approach whereby students spend alternate trimesters studying in the classroom and earning wages in a workplace.

Once the employees are recruited, the organizations must retain them. Retention programs are generally form part of an employee management framework which could include the management of coaching staff, the quality of working life, management of contribution and of recognition, skill management, the needs of planning the labour force and work/life balance.

Since the expertises in the transportation sector are increasingly diversified and specialized, the road organizations must also maintain and develop the skills of the employees. Professional training is therefore a very important issue. Most organizations do not have the resources required to meet all of their training needs, leading them to collaborate with other organizations, like road associations and academic institutions.

Recommendations to PIARC

PIARC products are of high quality and have a significant potential to become learning material. Since the professional training must take into account the specific problems of every world region, or even every country, PIARC should continue its collaboration with regional organizations, in order to respond as effectively as possible to local needs.

However, the professional training courses offered in PIARC member countries are also increasingly aimed at an international audience: while travelling abroad has become easier and more commonplace, distance training is experiencing rapid growth. Courses that are technical in content and less specific to the local context (regulatory, political, or other) can then find a market beyond the boundaries of the country where a training organization is located.

In light of this, PIARC makes available a directory of professional training organizations in the field of roads and road transportation in its member countries.