

## Case Study

# The Competent Manager Programme at Nifco UK Ltd

### Summary

Nifco UK Ltd is a manufacturing company based in Stockton-on-Tees. In early 2004, it was operating at a loss and recognised the need for rapid change if the business was to survive. A Business Excellence Model was implemented and action was taken to develop the company's management and leadership capability.

The Competent Manager programme was the key component to the change process. The programme, based on the National Occupational Standards for Management and Leadership, was delivered by an independent learning and development provider.

Although staff numbers had been reduced over the 18 month period, production levels were maintained and the company has now broken even. The culture of the organisation has been changed to a more positive 'can do' approach where learning and development are recognised as key to the company's future success.

### Background to Nifco UK Ltd

Nifco UK Ltd (formerly known as Elta Plastics Ltd) has been established in Stockton-on-Tees since 1969. It is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Nifco Group of Japan.

The company manufactures injection moulded products (eg industrial plastic fasteners) for the automotive and electronics industry. Customers include Ford, Toyota, Honda and Nissan.

### Company perspective

Ian Bainbridge, the Organisation and People Development Manager joined Nifco UK in early 2004 at a time when the company was making "significant losses"

Ian recognised that rapid changes were required if the business was to survive.

In particular, the company was "vastly over-staffed" – and there was little staff development taking place. This was a particular concern in the areas of

management and leadership. Managers in the company had typically risen through the organisation, but without any management development or qualifications. Therefore, managers often had very good technical skills, but too often lacked an appreciation of wider management and business issues.

In particular, managers were not sufficiently relating their actions to organisational objectives. As a result, production processes were often 'efficient' if viewed in isolation, but were not always 'effective' in supporting the profitable performance of the company. Ian found that people were not planning ahead or viewing their actions in a broad perspective. This lack of management and leadership capability "dragged the business down".

To address these issues, Ian introduced a Business Excellence Model for the company. This required a focus on desired business results and identifying the 'enablers' which made those results possible. Enablers included the development of processes, policy and strategy and most importantly the development of management and leadership capability within the company.

The decision was taken to develop the capability of managers and leaders by using the Competent Manager Programme. This was included a coherent programme which could be delivered at the workplace – it was also accessible, even to those without an academic background. Ian explains "We want to be a world class outfit – so we want our people to raise their game. This requires setting recognised standards we want them to reach – this is why we want their development to be based on a national standard".

### The Competent Manager Programme

The Competent Manager Programme comprises a Certificate and Diploma in Management, offered to both individual and corporate clients. These qualifications are delivered by Partners in Management Ltd, a training and development provider working

in partnership with Huddersfield University Business School - meaning that participants achieve University validated qualifications.

The Competent Manager Programme was originally developed by Huddersfield University Business School and based upon the MCI standards. Whilst employed as an academic at the Business School, David Broadhead revised the programme around the 1997 Management Standards as these were "the only nationally recognised management standards". In 1999 David Broadhead established Partners in Management Ltd and in January 2005, through a franchise arrangement, the programme was re-validated following an update and redesign based on the 2004 Management and Leadership standards.

The programme uses the National Occupational Standards as a 'baseline' from which to develop skills, knowledge and understanding. Participants are encouraged to manage their own learning and development with work-based issues at the heart of the learning process. The aim is to establish development as a continuous process and to achieve outcomes in the workplace as defined by the National Occupational Standards.

### The Competent Manager Programme at Nifco UK Ltd

Currently, fourteen participants from Nifco are working towards the Certificate in Management. The duration of the programme is nine to ten months and comprises the following modules:

- **managing activities**
- **working with people**
- **managing finance**
- **managing information**
- **providing direction**
- **achieving results**
- **managing personal development**

The programme is based around monthly one-day workshops backed up by one to one sessions – participants also have access to a range of learning materials.

Each module specifies the units from the National Occupational Standards which are

covered. Participants produce a portfolio of evidence to support their claim to competence. This requires participants to 'tell their story' – i.e. to describe how their work situation relates to each module, with relation to management and leadership theory and supported by evidence produced in the workplace. David Broadhead, as the programme co-ordinator assesses and provides feedback on the portfolios – he describes this as "a valuable part of the developmental process".

The programme also highlighted further training and development needs. In particular, some participants struggled with the required literacy and numeracy and action was taken to address this need.

### Participants' perspective

Fourteen participants attended the introductory session to the programme in January 2005. Typically, participants had little or no previous experience of undertaking management qualifications. Many were initially uncertain how they would 'prove their competence' - however, as the programme progressed, the process became clearer.

Two of the participants describe their experience of the programme:

Steve Ryan has worked in manufacturing for the past 15 years and worked his way up to a management role, but without any formal qualifications. He has worked with Nifco for 2½ years as a Section Leader. Steve commented that at first he was a little daunted at the prospect of taking the qualification and was particularly concerned that the programme would be "too academic". However, he found the programme "went beyond my expectations... it very much relates to actual work and helps me to expand on what I already know". He describes how "I now know what I'm trying to achieve and how to work with different people to get results". Most importantly, Steve feels the programme has helped him "learn how to learn". For example, Steve was one of those who recognised the need to improve his numeracy. The programme "gave me the confidence to re-take GCSE Maths". He would now like to progress to the Diploma in Management and "maybe Maths A Level".

Chris Pearson, a Business Unit Manager at Nifco, also describes how he has gained from the programme. In particular

it "provides an opportunity to reflect on how to be more effective in the workplace - for example, understanding why people behave in particular ways and how to develop effective teams". Chris commented that the programme "involves a lot of thought provoking discussion" and "relates well to work". Chris identified the most challenging aspect of the programme as "finding time to complete the qualification".

### The current and future situation

In the past 18 months, the number of staff at Nifco UK Ltd has been cut from 650 to 420 people. Despite this significant reduction in staff, production levels have remained unchanged. Perhaps most importantly, the company is now breaking even financially.

Warren Broadbent, the Training Manager describes how there used to be a blame culture in the company, where employees were apprehensive to try anything new. In contrast, during the past 18 months, a far more positive 'can do attitude' has developed. There is "greater trust and openness... we don't talk about

problems – we talk about issues".

"People are now more aware of a wider perspective and how their decisions and actions can impact on the business as a whole. Communication has also improved between different parts of the business".

Warren stressed that the fact the Competent Manager Programme is based on national standards was very important to Nifco. The company's Business Excellence Model requires them to benchmark performance against a national standard – and this means a lot to the people on the programme. People now have standards which they are expected to achieve in the workplace.

For the future, the intention is to offer the Diploma qualification for more senior managers and as a progression route for those who have completed the Certificate. Within the next couple of years all managers in Nifco UK Ltd are expected to achieve a management and leadership qualification.

### Further Information

#### The Management Standards Centre

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## Management Standards Centre

The Management Standards Centre (MSC) is the Government recognised standards setting body for the management and leadership areas.

Upgrading the skills of managers is fundamental to the government's aim to raise UK productivity and competitiveness. The MSC was responsible for developing a new set of National Occupational Standards (NOS) for management and leadership in May 2004. They describe the level of performance expected in employment for a range of management and leadership functions/activities.

As an employer led organisation which champions management and leadership the MSC is working with the Skills for Business

Network to identify and address the skills gaps and shortages on a sector by sector basis thereby contributing to the profitability of the UK.

### Our vision

To create a UK partnership of employers and other key stakeholders to lead the professional development of all those working in the field of management and leadership.

### Our mission

To fulfill the needs of employers by developing a skilled management workforce through promoting our nationally recognised set of standards and qualifications which have full employer relevance and 'ownership'.

For more information about the Management and Leadership NOS see: <http://msc.managers.org.uk/downloads/MandL.ppt>



## The Management Standards Centre

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The Management Standards Centre is an organisation within the Chartered Management Institute

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