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Getting your workforce management house in order

Manufacturing & Logistics IT spoke with Mike Hawkesford, managing director of Crown Computing, and Neville Henderson of Pasfield Curran, about how a workforce management system, coupled with a sound in-house workforce planning methodology, can optimise staff deployment – even in times of demand volatility.

A workforce management system can help an organisation to optimise its workforce planning regime by helping to ensure the right people with the right skills are in the right working environment at the right time. However, some companies buy such a solution and expect it to be an immediate panacea for their staffing and production capacity problems. Neville Henderson of Pasfield Curran makes the point that, in instances where a company's existing staff deployment methodology is not as efficient as it could be, the services of an external consultancy can prove to be invaluable. Then, once an efficient working strategy is put in place, sourcing a reputable workforce management solution can ensure this runs as efficiently as possible.

"We usually work with companies that often have high levels of customer orders coupled with intermittent and often heavy drops in demand," said Henderson. "This can lead to excessive overtime requirements and the need to take on agency staff, then during a slowdown, quite the opposite – even to the extent that the company considers staff layoffs." Henderson explained that at the initial analysis stage of consultancy, Pasfield Curran usually undertakes demand profiling at the company site. This looks at what has

occurred in the past, where the company's peaks and troughs usually take place, considers what is most likely to occur in the future based on historical demand trends, and also looks at any significant changes in internal operational processes or general market demand changes.

Teamwork

Following on from the analysis stage, Henderson points out that it is a matter of developing a methodology that achieves greater operational efficiencies, as well as ways to save time and money for the company. "For example, we organise staff into the most effective teams; people who are best able to work together within a particular department or work centre," he said. "We also determine what sort of work should be done by each team and consider how workers can be incentivised to achieve greater and faster productivity."

Henderson added that, sometimes the recommended new workforce methodology is mandated directly by the management, but wherever possible Pasfield Curran also encourages as much employee involvement as possible in order to ensure everyone fully understands the benefits of, and the >>

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Mike Hawkesford: "It is the ability to change and adapt resources quickly that really sorts out the men from the boys."

rationale behind, the decision to take a particular operational route. "It has been our experience over our ten years in business that the more involvement we have at

the beginning of the project the less negotiation and changes there are likely to be as the project nears completion," said Henderson.

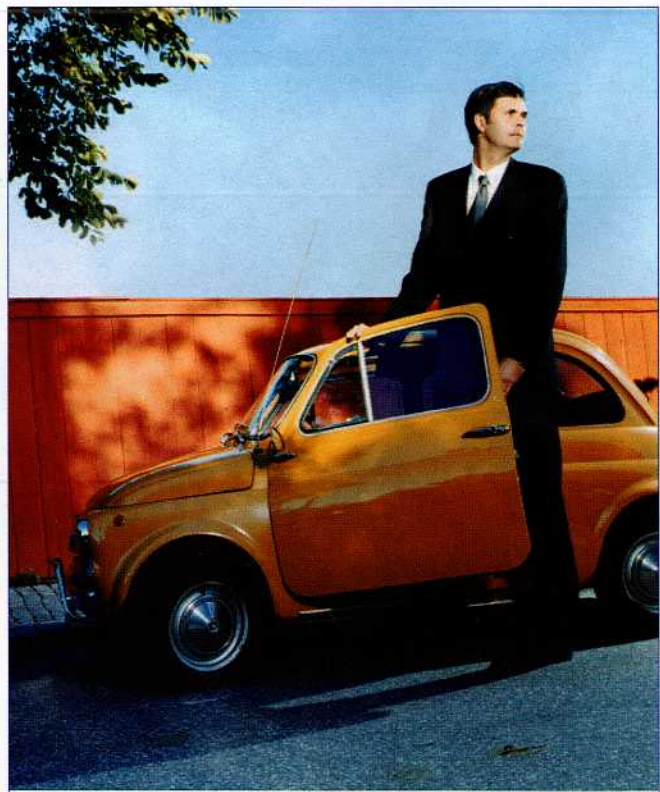
He added that part of Pasfield Curran's service involves the recommendation and supply of an accompanying workforce management software system. "Such a system should not only be able to ensure the right workforce capacity is available at the right time and in the right place – it also needs to be able to think outside the box when required," remarked Henderson. Crown Computing's Mike Hawkesford put this requirement in context: "Procedures can become more complicated when the company experiences fluctuations in demand for reasons that maybe difficult to ascertain. There are many possible reasons behind such fluctuations, but one of the most common is weather patterns. Companies know that, on the whole, temperatures will be warmer in the Summer. Therefore, food & beverage companies recognise that, on balance, they will sell more ice cream or cold drinks during this period. On the other hand, if the weather in the Summer is uncharacteristically cold, fewer ice creams or cold drinks are likely to be sold than first anticipated."

Neville Henderson: "It has been our experience over our ten years in business that the more involvement we have at the beginning of the project the less negotiation and changes there are likely to be as the project nears completion,"



Sharp and alert

Hawkesford adds that companies therefore often have to respond very quickly to variations in demand caused by unforeseen situations. "It is the ability to change and adapt resources quickly that really sorts out the men from the boys," he said. "The more reactive management is able to be the more in control the business will find itself and the better chance it will have in both delivering a better service to its customers while also protecting its own bottom line. This is where a reputable workforce management solution can prove invaluable." Hawkesford concluded by pointing out that, encouragingly, more and more companies in a variety of sectors are now much sharper and more alert through recognising the benefits of workforce management systems. ●



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