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Great names in business Pier Francesco Guarguaglini

Helping our people take flight

With 2,000 new recruits in one year and a focus on advanced training schemes, Finmeccanica believes that staff development leads to business growth.

by Roberto Persico

The best way to allow a company to soar is to let its people grow. This is the firm belief of Finmeccanica, Italy's biggest aerospace, defence and security company. With more than 56,000 employees, the group generates around EUR 11.5 billion in revenues per year – an enormous sum, which is growing and being cemented in parallel with a corporate focus on innovation and human resources, according to Finmeccanica chairman Pier Francesco Guarguaglini.

How do you help people to develop in a big company like yours?

Here at Finmeccanica we believe it is crucial to invest in training and in our personnel, and to provide workers with the necessary tools to integrate fully and grow within the company. Training our staff means investing in the future of the company. Our constant focus on excellence and continual monitoring of performances via individually targeted measures, mean that we can follow the development of our staff. Finmeccanica gradually instils them with its own distinctive ethos, paying constant attention to professional growth using an integrated training system at international level, which is aimed not only at our new young recruits but also at our senior management, and which accompanies and guides them through their development.

What does your company ethos mean in concrete terms?

Every year Finmeccanica organises meetings between professional “families”; skills workshops that are designed to develop cross-department activities in similar professional areas. The aim is to promote and support personnel development, help employees settle in and encourage them to co-operate with each other. We also hold an annual convention for managers of the group's companies. This is an excellent opportunity for all the people who contribute daily to Finmeccanica's growth to meet and discuss results achieved and future plans, and even just to get to know each other.

In your view, what must a training scheme do to enable young people to settle successfully into today's continually changing work environment?

Working at Finmeccanica involves coming into direct contact with the world's most advanced technologies, since we invest more than any other Italian company in research and development, and consider innovation as one of our main strengths. I think it would

be difficult to find a better mix than this. For a graduate in physics or in electronic or aeronautical engineering, following at first hand the design and evolution of a fighter plane such as the Eurofighter or the M-346 training aircraft, or the development of a permanent magnet electric motor or a next-generation atomic clock for space applications is a significant opportunity. For many years now, Finmeccanica has been ploughing significant resources into research and development: this means investing not only in products but also in people. For example, we are now in the third year of our Innovation Award, which rewards innovative ideas developed by Finmeccanica staff that can improve operating and product efficiency within the company. This demonstrates how the group enables its employees to grow both technically and managerially. In addition, we have launched the Mindsh@re project, which aims to link people together in a knowledge network that we hope will generate a whole range of new ideas, products and talents, and will act as an engine for real innovation via “technology communities”, an organisational model that groups together our research activities into industrial themes that we consider to be of prime importance.

How do the worlds of work and education meet and co-operate with each other?

Finmeccanica participates actively in the work of 19 Italian research institutes, 29 foreign research institutes and universities and 41 Italian universities. It also works together with national and international public bodies. The group’s subsidiaries have cemented numerous relationships with universities and research centres, especially in Italy, France, the UK and the US, where research activities are being carried out in support of the group’s change and innovation initiatives. Finmeccanica also sponsors three permanent chairs at MIT (Cambridge, Mass.), Carnegie Mellon University (Pittsburgh) and Stanford (California). In addition, we have numerous agreements with Italian research centres such as the CNR, the CRA in Capua, and the JRC in Ispra (the European Commission research centre with which we are working on a Europe-wide security project). The group recruited almost 2,000 young people in 2006, including around 1,200 graduates (80% of whom gained their degree in engineering), and attracts and trains young talent from all over the world.

So there is a degree of “cross-contamination” between the two worlds?

Yes. Today the challenge posed by the knowledge economy requires continuous integration and exchange between “education” and “work” environments. Finmeccanica is actively involved in creating highly qualified staff via an innovative training system that will ensure such fertile “cross-contamination” between university and company. Today, when we talk about the knowledge economy and knowledge workers, it is no longer possible to imagine the relationship between education and business from a sequential and separate viewpoint: we need to see increasing interconnections and exchanges between the two spheres. An example of the “cross-contamination” between the world of university and the world of business is our Fthink master’s degree, introduced last year, whose name is a cross between “think” and “Finmeccanica”. Fthink is a master’s in international business engineering, a high-level training course for which we have made available 29 scholarships. The aim is to give candidates (who have an

average age of 25) an integrated view of the areas of business & program management, innovation & technology management and international strategic business management. The courses are given both by Finmeccanica managers and by lecturers from Italian and international universities, in order to instil our new graduates with technical as well as managerial knowledge. Once they are taken on within the group, all the young recruits will be enrolled on a special scheme, our “young people programme” which, via various initiatives, will support them and ensure that they can keep on growing professionally.