

## Case Study Pro-forma

---

Name:	Ogilvy Group
Size:	800 (Canary Wharf)
Sector:	Brand Communications
Location:	London

---

### The organisation

The Ogilvy group of companies, a subsidiary of WPP Group Plc, has 497 offices worldwide. Ogilvy Group UK operates 13 companies across the spectrum of brand communications. They are a market leader, with around 1,300 employees in the UK, and 11,000 worldwide. Clients range from large multinational corporations to firms doing business in specialised local markets. The Canary Wharf office employs around 800 employees. Employment, and thus training needs, can be roughly categorised as creative, planning and account management.

### The history of workplace dialogue

Ogilvy is committed to creating an environment where learning and development form part of everyday working life. This is seen to contribute to a positive company culture where people want to work. These values permeate every level of the organisation, from new recruits to senior management.

Rapid developments in technology and the creative and fast moving nature of the industry have always given rise to the need for training and open dialogue at all levels of the organisation. This was bolstered by the appointment of a new Chairman in 2005, who has driven revised strategic objectives in response to market demand for specific technologies. Individual organisations within the Group are encouraged to work more collaboratively.

The Learning and Development (L&D) Department has been charged with identifying training synergies across the UK. It has sought to develop training platforms that can be utilised across the different companies, whilst maintaining job specific and specialist training. Generic skills sets are identified across all occupational categories as well as in terms of the skills consistent across companies.

The central role of learning and development within the company has led to continued innovation in the structures and practice of workplace dialogue and the identification of training needs. The organisation has developed both formal and informal procedures to promote workplace dialogue over training at all levels of the organisational structure. These range from open door 'informal chats' with line managers and workplace colleagues to a formal appraisal system and the representation of training needs at the highest

strategic decision-making levels. The development of new skills is viewed as essential and as 'part of one's job'.

### **How are training and skills discussed?**

There is both a 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' approach to dialogue over training and skills. The L&D Department plays a key role and is integrated into communication and consultation structures at all levels. This ensures the availability of relevant training to meet the strategic objectives set by the company Chairman, and that training can be operationalised in a consistent manner through the company's subsidiaries, individual departments and ultimately line managers. There is a real feel that L&D contributes to the strategic goals of the organisation and supports and compliments overall organisational objectives.

Market trends and the strategic direction of the business are identified at senior level and this is relayed through managers to employees. Employee skills needs are identified through an annual appraisal and development plan. This gives the employee the opportunity to discuss their concerns or needs as well as their career aspirations. It also gives management the opportunity to identify where training resources need to be allocated in line with organisational objectives.

The appraisal approach is innovative. The appraisee nominates senior and junior colleagues from other departments [that they have worked with] to provide feedback on their performance, under the general headings of strategy, creativity and production. The results are then discussed with the line manager, training needs are identified and 3 month, 6 month and one-year long development objectives set. This information is fed-back to L&D, and internal or external training is arranged around common needs.

There are also more informal methods of dialogue over training and skills. A culture has been created whereby learning forms part of everyday working life and everybody, particularly managers, understand this. There is an 'open door' policy when it comes to training, and training needs are frequently identified by line managers who make every effort to be approachable. This is seen as a form of informal mentoring.

Communication is central to the success of the L&D agenda. In addition to the privileged position L&D hold on group, subsidiary and departmental strategic structures, they also hold quarterly meetings to discuss good practice. This is fed into HR meetings to ensure that L&D remains a high priority. They also play an important role in sharing and harmonising good practice with other subsidiaries. Good training practices are relayed to other UK and European offices on a regular basis and there is an annual Europe, Africa and the Middle East HR meeting. The company intranet also allows good practice cases to be downloaded.

### **What have been the benefits from dialogue on training and skills?**

- Feedback forms provided following training courses indicate high levels of support and positive feeling in respect of training and skills development.

- One manager claimed that, 'I've literally seen overnight changes in people's attitudes and abilities after attending training courses'.
- The organisation recognises that any attempt to quantify tangible benefits created as a direct result of dialogue around training and skills is difficult. However they stress that identifying and addressing skills needs has been essential to their competitive advantage. One manager stated that:

*"Ogilvy does have a very high opinion of learning and development. It is seen as essential to job satisfaction. They (Ogilvy) can't put enough emphasis on giving people the opportunity to learn and develop; it makes them happier in themselves, happy in their work and happier working for this company."*

- Identifying and addressing learning needs is seen as essential to the 'company culture', and vital to motivation and job satisfaction.

### **Key challenges and top tips**

Three key challenges were identified. These relate to issues of implementing the company's high commitment to training and skills.

First, as noted, financial returns on training investment are difficult to quantify. Some professional qualifications, such as those offered by the Institute of Practitioners of Advertising (IPA), are very expensive and need to be offered on a selective basis. These issues are addressed through a combination of intensive internal training programmes with practitioners in the short-term and long-term commitment, by senior management, to formally recognised external courses through individual development plans.

Second, operational objectives can at times conflict with training provision. This is addressed by giving line managers ownership for their team's training. They take responsibility for any contingencies and ensure that employees' responsibilities are covered when attending training.

The third challenge relates to educating employees that they can learn and develop without the need of formal training courses. In an organisation that takes advantage of such a wide variety of skills, time spent in other departments and workplace learning and experience can be as, if not more, important to an individual's development. The appraisal system and informal structures with line managers are used to emphasise this to employees and further identify developmental as well as training needs.