

Registrar and Hughes: Partners in Strengthening Employee Development

Arlington, Texas—located about 17 miles from downtown Dallas and touting a population that's nearing 300,000—is a growing city which welcomed more than 900 new businesses in 1996 alone.*

Along with all of the newcomers are Arlington's long-time corporate residents. And one of the most well-known of those is Hughes Training, Inc.

Hughes Training is a leading supplier of training and simulation systems to defense, commercial/industrial, space and air traffic control markets worldwide. They operate within Hughes Aircraft Company, (a unit of Hughes Electronics), which in turn operates under its parent company, General Motors. Got all that?

The Arlington, Texas Chamber of Commerce makes special mention of Hughes Training on its Web page, calling them one of the city's largest major employers in the private sector. Indeed, the company employs nearly 1,100 people at its Arlington headquarters, and over 4,500 worldwide.

While Hughes Training is in the business of delivering a full range of training systems, services, and equipment to its customer base (70% of which is military, and 30% commercial), the organization also places a major emphasis on training its own employees. To coin a cliché, it practices what it preaches.

As an example, about two years ago Hughes formed the Training and Employee Development team, led by Bill Long, executive director, and began implementing what it calls Competency Modeling. This is a system used to identify what competencies individuals require to do their jobs.

During approximately the same time frame, Hughes merged with a major simulator development company—CAE-Link—and in the process, inherited Siltan-Bookman's Registrar software, which had been in use at CAE-Link.

As it turns out, the successful mix of competency modeling and Registrar is indeed helping Hughes to strengthen employee development, and also to comply with ISO standards.

Ken Roadman, scientist in the Instructional Design Engineering Department at Hughes, explained the competency model. He pointed to a company flow chart which outlines the 'ingredients' of employee development much like a well thought-out recipe.

"We start with a business strategy and plans, and then we look at those in combination with people goals. We mix these with employee development needs, and from that we determine what skills training and career planning are needed."

While Hughes could—and sometimes does—use their competency model for external customers, the primary goal of the program is to address internal needs.

"We're identifying our own skill gaps and training needs," said Peter Irvin, principal engineer at Hughes Training. "All 4,500 people at Hughes are going through this process."

Independent Evaluations All Point to Registrar

Hughes' exposure to Registrar came at about the same time the competency model was coming together.

"I had visited Binghamton and was impressed by the way CAE-Link was working with Registrar," said Irvin, referring to the company with which Hughes was merging at the time.

"They were using the DOS version of the software back then, and Registrar showed itself well as a method of tracking training, and maintaining records.



Peter Irvin (right) and Ken Roadman (left) of Hughes Training, Inc. say Registrar came out on top when measured against other systems.

Hughes Training, Inc.

“Soon after this, I found out that two or three people at Hughes had already looked at Registrar independently in its early stages. They had assessed different training management systems, had drawn up a matrix of the strengths and weaknesses of each, and Registrar had come out on top.

“We were just beginning to apply the competency model, and Registrar seemed the ideal tool to help us coordinate all of this for our internal training.”

Prior to implementing Registrar, Hughes didn't have a well-established method in place for tracking training. “It was done on a departmental or individual basis,” said Irvin.

“It was not a centralized, organized process. As we expanded, and as we were going more toward ISO compliance, it was obvious that we had to get a system for maintaining records and preparing reports...a robust system.”

Hughes Wish List Fulfilled by Registrar

Hughes wanted to be able to report on training by department and by employee. “We also needed to do resource management for budgeting purposes,” said Irvin. “We needed to be able to develop training plans for individuals and for particular jobs. Registrar helped us secure those plans and allowed us to do those things. A training management system can play a significant role within a company.”

Roadman talked more about how Hughes benchmarked Registrar against other systems:

“We had various focus groups identifying things like ‘What would end users require from the system? How about managers? And employees?’ Through the focus groups, we identified important characteristics and then overlaid them on the products we were looking at.

“We selected the Windows version of Registrar. Its robustness was clearly going to meet our requirements. And we were especially impressed because it had features that we had put aside thinking ‘it would be nice to have them, but they probably don't exist.’”

The Building Blocks of a Virtual Office

Today, 20 people at Hughes are trained on Registrar, and the software is being used at several sites. Data is still being imported into the system, but that's to be expected, according to Irvin, who refers to it as “an evolutionary process.”

Roadman agreed, adding: “Being able to import data from other sources is a big strength of the application. We don't have to duplicate data entry. For example, while we were waiting for things to stabilize, we kept track of ethics training on an Excel spreadsheet. Our systems administrator has been able to take that data, convert it, and import it into Registrar.”

Goals are being met at Hughes. Registrar is helping the company address individual development plans, training requirements, career planning, and curriculum roadmaps, all part of the company's competency model process. It's also helping training administrators with scheduling, departmental budgeting, and report preparation. And Irvin again emphasizes that Registrar has become an extremely important tool for helping Hughes comply with ISO standards.

As employee development strengthening continues, Irvin foresees adding Personal Registrar and Call Registrar (Registrar's self-registration options) to the team. “We want to give individual employees access to information. We would like to make Registrar as available to them as Microsoft Word or any of our basic tools.

“At the Silton-Bookman User's Conference, they discussed the ‘Virtual Training Office.’ This is where we're going. Registrar, in my thinking, is a critical part of our virtual office.”

*Statistics about Arlington, Texas came from the Arlington Texas Chamber of Commerce Web page at <http://www.cc.arlington.tx.us/>

For more info. about Hughes Training, visit their Web site: <http://www.hti.com>

