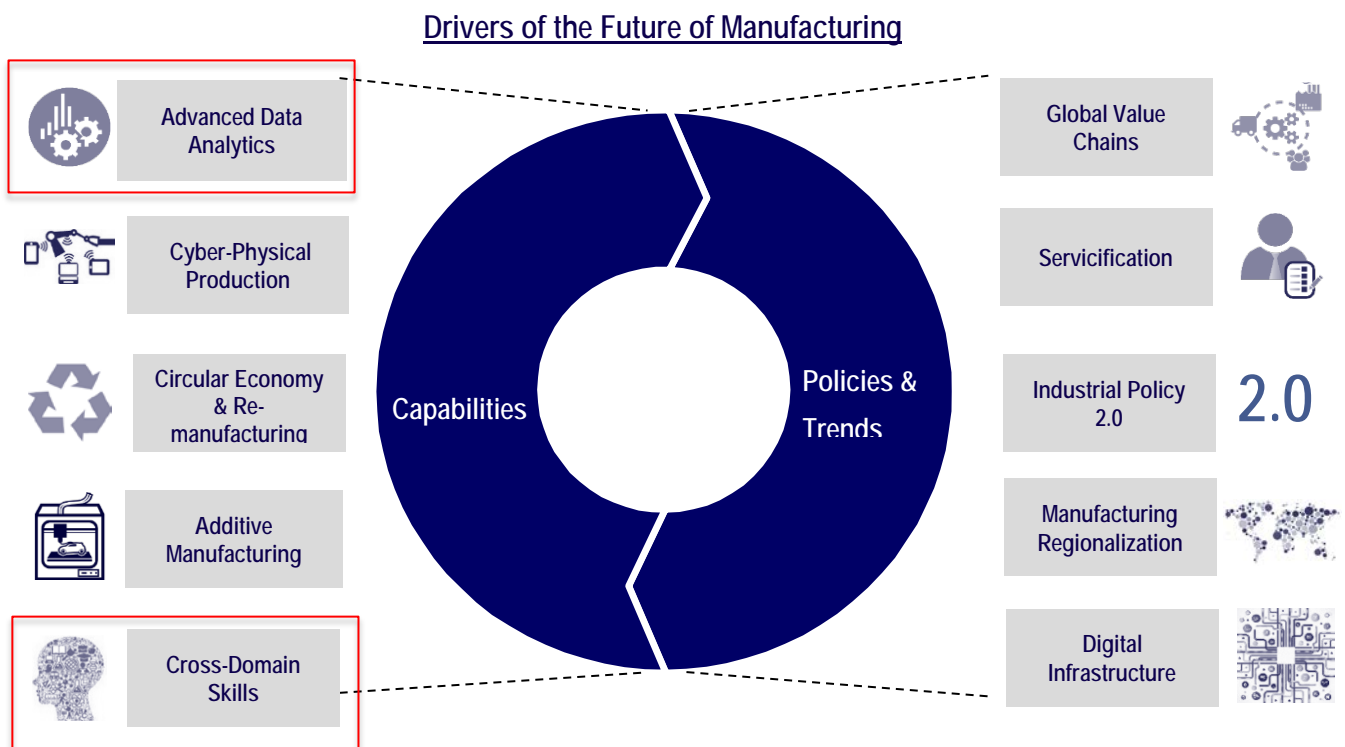


Case 20

Training and Internship Programme for PD Athlone



Source: World Economic Forum Global Agenda Council on the Future of Manufacturing, Whiteshield Partners framing



1. Challenge Confronted

In early 2014, PD Athlone, a leading global contract research organization that provides drug discovery, development, lifecycle management and laboratory services, was reporting difficulties recruiting staff in the areas of bioanalytics and biopharmaceuticals. This reflected difficulties being experienced by other companies in high tech sectors.

2. Solution Used

To address the skills shortage in this area, IDA Ireland, Skillnets, the Department of Social Protection (DSP), the Irish Medical Devices Association Skillnet (with support from ICT Ireland Skillnet), Ibec and the National Institute for Bioprocessing Research and Training (NIBRT) came together to design and implement an innovative training and internship programme to prepare trainees, and to take up positions in PD.

The programme was comprised of six weeks of theory and practical training involving both in-class and independent learning activities, followed by a three-month practical placement with PD. The qualification awarded for the pre-placement classwork and coursework was a level 9 *Certificate in Science in Bioanalytics*.

The programme's four specific goals were to:

1. Pilot a multi-partner approach to meeting the needs of employers and the unemployed
2. Recruit 20 participants to the programme
3. Deliver high-quality training on bioanalytics (theory) and bioanalytical techniques (practical)
4. Offer three-month practical placements for all trainees

3. Lessons Learned



1. The partners should consider completing a full outcomes evaluation of future projects. This would involve the administration of pre- and post- measures of knowledge, confidence, efficacy, skills, employment and financial support/earnings.



2. A two-day interview and CV-skills training workshop was included in this programme. The workshop was funded by DSP and was identified by a number of the trainees as being of critical importance to their securing employment. Following this success, interview and CV-skills training should be included in all IMDA Skillnet conversion programmes in the future.

Training and Internship Programme for PD Athlone

Dates: March 2014 – Nov. 2015

Keywords: pharmaceuticals, training, partnership, Ireland

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Key Facts:

- The biopharmaceutical industry is a critical component of the Irish economy, generating exports of €55 billion in 2011, and with a total employment of 60,000.
- Major players such as BMS, Alexion, Regeneron, Pfizer, BioMarin, PD, Ethicon, Eurofins are actively looking at major biotech investment programmes for Ireland over the next 5 years.
- Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) published the National Skills Bulletin 2015 stating that the industry is evolving and employment in biotech in Ireland has grown exponentially from 400 in 2004 to over 5,000 in 2014.
- A number of companies, including PD Athlone, reported difficulties recruiting staff in the areas of bioanalytics and biopharmaceuticals.



3. The training needs of trainee cohorts will vary from programme to programme. For some groups it may be necessary to increase the level of input during the Level 9 component of the training. In this programme, for example, a number of trainees felt that additional class time would have benefited the learning process.

Description of the Work Performed

The programme completed by the trainees contained two core components. First, the Level 9 *Certificate in Science in Bioanalytics* was delivered by NIBRT over a six-week period. For the first five weeks, trainees spent two days each week in class, learning about the theories underpinning bioanalytics. Coursework on theory was delivered in PD Athlone's offices and in the IDA's offices. In addition to the in-class training, each trainee was expected to complete approximately 40 hours of independent learning, in total, over the six-week period. In week six, the trainees completed three days of practical training.

The course was assessed through a combination of research projects, written exams, online assessments and laboratory reports based on practical training. Trainees also received a two-day training session on CV preparation and interviewing skills. In addition to the technical and theory training, DSP contracted IBT Training Limerick to deliver a two-day workshop on *CV Preparation and Interviewing Skills*, held in January 2015.

The second component of the training involved a three-month practical placement with PD, based in the company's Athlone or Brussels headquarters

Key Outcomes

Of the 20 participants, 18 are currently employed, 16 with full-time permanent posts and two on specified-term contracts. Six of the trainees in full-time posts are employed with PD in Athlone. Of the remaining three trainees, one has returned to full-time education and two are unemployed.

In meeting the four above programme objectives, there were a number of positive outcomes.

1. **The multi-partner approach succeeded** due primarily to:
 - The **complementarity in the roles of the core project partners**.
 - All partners showed a commitment to **working together** towards a common goal of providing the optimal training and placement solution for trainees.
 - **Partners were also reported to have taken a personal interest** in project success.
 - The **expertise of the DSP case officer involved in the recruitment, shortlisting and mentoring roles** was highlighted as "excellent."
2. **Twenty candidates were selected** due in part to a robust publicity effort that yielded a high volume of applicants, and to a rigorous selection process that brought the top candidates into the programme.
3. **Training quality was judged largely successful**, as a result of **on-going support and mentoring**, and **training on interpersonal skills**, communication with clients, and CV and interview preparation.
4. **Placement for three-month practical training** worked well due to a:

- a. **Clear effort to match the skills and interests** of the trainee with the department in which he/she was being placed.
- b. Clear **understanding of his/her responsibilities** and knew what he/she was expected to achieve by the end of the placement.
- c. **Sense of achievement** and that it felt good to be involved in a team with a clear goal and to work with a successful company. They valued having an **opportunity to apply their knowledge** in a practical way.

Drivers & Enablers



Engaged partners and skilled staff



Clear program goals



Well trained, high value employees