

The 'one team' approach

Developing today and tomorrow's engineers is a top priority for leading consulting engineering group Knight Piésold.



Mevashnee Naidoo, HR Director



through to professional registration. "It's an exciting journey for our young candidates and we have structured programmes in place to get the best results," explains Mevashnee Naidoo, human resources director, Knight Piésold.

Stakeholder engagement

"Clearly defining our values is important, because it provides stakeholders with a key insight in terms of our operating model. Let's start with adaptability," Naidoo continues. "At Knight Piésold, we have the ability to learn from experience and we realise that market needs are constantly changing. The way in which we recruit the skill sets we require has evolved and our talent-selection processes have changed to suit this.

"As a company, professionalism is an overriding priority. We are considerate and we respect others (i.e. clients, staff and

competitors); however, excellence is a value that all our staff practise and live by in terms of our service offering and project delivery. "Our workplace and employment practices are very future oriented when it comes to sustainability, both in terms of minimising environmental impacts and from a business perspective. We offer employee well-being and career development programmes, which drive employee engagement. Our people are our assets and are central to our plans on engineering the future.

"This all comes together through teamwork. We build effective and efficient teams by giving all staff the experience they require to develop. We don't work in silos and that is what our young leaders appreciate." Mentorship is at the heart of Knight Piésold's success and permeates throughout. Naidoo believes that it should be reflected as Knight Piésold's sixth value. "We are a learning



Adaptability, professionalism, excellence, sustainability, and teamwork are all core values that define the way Knight Piésold engages and grows its presence in the engineering and environmental sectors. These values also form the basis for the company's talent-acquisition strategy, as well as its training and development programmes at all levels, with a major focus in South Africa on selecting, mentoring and growing young engineers

organisation and there are no glass ceilings. Our registered ECSA mentors are committed to a formalised programme where their mentoring time is logged and measured. Our mentees are registered on the same programme and relationship-building starts here. You don't have to be a formal mentor at Knight Piésold to make a difference. Our directors, managers and senior specialists mentor all the time."

The mentorship approach

Knight Piésold has a three-tiered approach to mentorship that runs as parallel programmes:

Formalised candidacy mentoring

This programme focuses on young engineers who are mentored for a period of three to four years after graduation, until they have acquired the relevant experience to apply for professional registration with ECSA. The programmes require quarterly reports from candidates and mentors, combined with engagement and constructive feedback. "Alongside our own in-house training, some of our candidates are also registered on CETA-funded programmes. This financial assistance enables us to increase the size of our candidate employee complement," says Naidoo.

Currently, Knight Piésold has 38 employees registered on its candidacy mentorship programme, which is a significant number of the total South African staff component. In the last three years, seven young engineers and technologists have been professionally registered, with four to five now writing up for professional registration.

Mentorship of senior and professional staff

This is a formalised process: career pathways and goals are set, training and developmental activities outlined, with progress then measured as a continuous cycle.

During this stage of mentorship, the focus is on the professional's career aspirations, leadership readiness and personal growth. This is where an engineer's career kicks off in terms of having an increased level of responsibility. "As an employer of choice, we value our senior staff and want to engage with them constantly," claims Naidoo.

Equipping for leadership

This is the mentorship of management-level staff or staff already in senior positions



Mentorship programme

within Knight Piésold. "We believe that no matter your age or stage in a company, there will always be new opportunities available and there should always be room for development. This is assessed through a less structured approach to mentoring. We don't formalise the process (other than through our formal performance development programme) because we empower people who are in these positions to ask for mentoring in order to grow.

"Some engineers are leaders in their technical abilities while others wish to develop their people management skills. Either way, we're creating the next generation of leaders. It will be their responsibility to build and grow our company," Naidoo explains.

Bokomoso outreach initiative

In parallel with its internal development focus, Knight Piésold has partnered with a school in Lenasia, Gauteng, as part of its Bokomoso ('their future') CSI initiative to add back to communities and nurture future engineering talent. The project started in 2012 with the sponsorship of textbooks and science kits. This year, Knight Piésold is rebuilding a computer learning centre at the school.

For the 2017 CESA 'Job Shadow' initiative, Knight Piésold selected learners from grades 9 to 11 to attend an open day at Johannesburg Water's Northern Wastewater Treatment Works. Six of Knight Piésold's young engineers were on board for the day, each of which was allocated a team of learners to lead and mentor. Naidoo elaborates: "We're developing a buddy system and hoping that these learners will bond with our

young engineers in terms of future external tutoring outcomes. Our goal is to instill an understanding and appreciation for maths and science as foundational skills in engineering, as well as for a wide range of other career disciplines. As we perfect the model, other schools will be identified."

The Knight Piésold difference

So what sets Knight Piésold apart as a consulting firm? "We believe in inclusivity when it comes to project delivery and business decision-making. Our management team has clear expectations that are communicated to the general staff," adds Naidoo.

"This creates and promotes self-empowerment and excellent stakeholder engagement. In fact, we often hear that, despite our size, we punch above our weight. That's largely owing to our 'one team approach', enabling us to deliver in the most efficient, cost-effective and professional manner, and our successes are celebrated together," she concludes. **35**

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