

A LIFETIME OF LEARNING

Discover why lifelong learning is essential plus practical tips for seasoned professionals looking to retrain

WORDS / TERESA HYLTON

IN THE RAPIDLY EVOLVING FIELD OF highways technology, the need for continuous retraining and acquiring new skills is vital to ensure engineers continue to deliver effective solutions. There are three key reasons why transport professionals should focus on new skills and retraining:

- The highways sector is constantly evolving with new technologies and methodologies. Continuous learning ensures engineers remain adaptable and relevant.
- Missing a step in learning could create a void between outdated and current skills. Lifelong learning can also enhance career longevity, enabling engineers to remain competitive and open to new opportunities.
- Retraining fosters innovation by equipping engineers with the latest knowledge and skills to tackle emerging challenges effectively. Key innovations currently include the improvement of materials and processes to support the green and social value agendas.

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GROWING EMPHASIS ON DIGITAL SKILLS

The highways technology sector is increasingly focused on digital skills and artificial intelligence (AI) to analyse vast amounts of data for improved decision-making and predictive maintenance. Digital skills are highly sought-after to help the automation of tasks, improving efficiency and the reduction of health and safety risks. However, engineers are still required to oversee and check these areas as a reliance on full automation can increase the risk of errors.

AI is integral to developing smart infrastructure such as intelligent traffic management systems and autonomous vehicles. We are also seeing smarter temporary infrastructure to manage



highways during construction works. Retraining in these areas is crucial as it empowers engineers to leverage these technologies effectively, ensuring they remain at the forefront of a range of industry advancements.

TIPS FOR SEASONED PROFESSIONALS

For professionals with 20 to 30 years' experience, retraining can seem daunting, so focus on skills that are in high demand such as digital literacy, AI and project management. Having extensive experience is a great foundation to build new skills, with your deep industry knowledge providing a valuable context for learning something new. However, it's important to follow an area that excites you; if you have a passion in a certain area, you will excel with that learning.

In addition, engage with mentors or peers who have successfully retrained to help guide your learning journey. As engineers, we have a duty to share and support our colleagues, so there will always be someone willing to mentor you.

SUPPORTING COLLEAGUES WITH RETRAINING

Employers and managers play a crucial role in supporting their people with retraining, and colleagues at all levels should feel empowered to develop new skills throughout their career. We must ensure that no one is left behind and everyone can access relevant training programmes, workshops, online courses and technical libraries.

Continuous learning should be valued and encouraged. Any barriers should be identified and flexible work schedules put in place to enable employees to attend training sessions without compromising their work or home responsibilities.

Learning solutions don't need to be complex or costly – employers could simply develop their own internal training programmes, leveraging the expertise of senior staff and champions who are experts in their field.

EMBRACING CONTINUOUS LEARNING

Engineers who have a full understanding of how to use their skills effectively to deliver projects are happy engineers. While apprentices and professionals in their early careers deserve plenty of focus, retraining and new-skills development is crucial at every stage of your career. It's important that we support one another to ensure a steady flow of new knowledge and skills into the workforce.



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