

CASE STUDY



18 Manufacturing
Locations



Billion
Revenue



Upcoming
Retirements Would
Leave a Skills Gap



Resource-
Constrained

Partnership Helps Pella Corporation Accelerate Qualification Through Career Progression Modeling

CAREER PROGRESSION MODELING WITH TOOLING U-SME'S
TALENT & WORKFORCE SERVICES



CHALLENGE:

Upcoming Retirements of Long-Tenured Staff

Leaders in innovation since 1925, Pella Corporation is continually driven to improve what they do and how they do it. Based in Pella, Iowa, the company has 18 manufacturing locations producing windows and doors, over 10,000 team members, and a thriving culture.

A positive by-product of this culture is low turnover. For instance, Pella's Tool and Die Department is made up of long-tenured, highly skilled machinists that fabricate precision dies for stamping equipment.

Anticipating upcoming retirements of the long-tenured staff, Pella asked Tooling U-SME's Talent & Workforce Services team to clearly establish a developmental progression framework to develop entry-level to senior level tool and die staff. The department also wanted to create a rigorous approach to advancing personnel to ensure the promotion process was less subjective.

"We had a lot of talent but didn't have a distribution curve in terms of years of experience in our die build area — it was all clumped together," said Kurtis Webb, Engineering Manager, Manufacturing and Engineering Services Plant. "That's what led us to think more intentionally about how to accelerate that learning curve — so we'd have people ready as others retire."

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SOLUTION:

Career Progression Strategy, Curriculum Designed, and Training

Tooling U-SME's Talent & Workforce Services team conducted a thorough job analysis of the department's tool and die job roles and their defined progression levels that consisted of critical tasks and associated knowledge, skills, and abilities required to complete those tasks.

"Getting the Tooling U-SME team on site to do a deep dive assessment of what we do here by talking with our team and subject matter experts was critical," said Webb. "We let them have open, honest conversations to learn about the complexities and intricacies of the work."

John Hindman, director of Talent & Workforces Services at Tooling U-SME, said, “To truly understand progression and movement between job roles in a company, we have to break down each job role, the work they perform, and their similarities and differences. When you understand the relationships between the jobs, progression becomes very clear.”

Based on the profiles for each job progression level, the services team wrote curriculum and developed training materials that consisted of a blended eLearning, classroom and hands-on approach to learning.

In addition, the Services team created a capstone assessment at the end of each program level. The capstone included job standards, work activities, knowledge exams,

skill practical assessments, work products, and committee reviews. The services team wrote all protocols, rubrics and guidelines for the capstones.

“We brought in Tooling U-SME because we were resource constrained, but, beyond resources, it turned out it would have been difficult to get where we got without them,” said Webb. “They bring such breadth and depth of knowledge. They’re doing this on a daily basis, seeing all kinds of different businesses, so they were really able to ask deeper questions than we would have known to ask.”

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RESULTS: **Decreased Time to Proficiency**

For the first time, the department had a clear picture of work accountability and career development opportunities for their team members. The Pella Technical Training group now had the tools in place to standardize the development of new hires to the group and baseline incumbent tool and die personnel and assist them in any knowledge and/or skill gaps. The structure of the program has improved employee engagement and has decreased the time to qualification, based on visible expectations and accessible learning and assessment materials that support the expectations of the job.

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“We are seeing team members raising their hands to enter these roles and progressing once they’re in,” said Webb. “When you have real people doing good things, progressing and advancing their careers, that’s when we’re winning.”

Webb said that it’s a common trap for companies to want to figure out everything that is happening with their business before bringing in someone from the outside.

“The better a leader knows their business and understands the real cost of delaying team member development, the faster they’ll opt in to putting programs like this in place,” Webb said.

As Pella celebrates its 100th anniversary in 2025, the company is an inspiring example of the importance of continually innovating to find better ways to do things. With guidance from Tooling U-SME, Pella has created a Career Progression Modeling Program, showing the benefit of building a developmental progression strategy, with designed curriculum and investing in training support, to accelerate time to proficiency while building engaging employee opportunities.



"We were excited to partner with Pella on this critical project," Hindman said. "The lack of career development opportunities continues to be a leading indicator on whether an employee will stay or leave a company. We feel that Pella now has clear developmental pathways, coupled with the materials to make team members successful in their journey."

Tooling U-SME's Talent & Workforce Services team partners with companies to analyze their needs and design solutions to strengthen their workforce and build competitiveness. Backed by deep industry expertise, Tooling U-SME provides strategic and tactical support to execute projects, including customizing career progression modeling, building curriculum, creating training materials, and much more. Each approach aligns with company goals and technical needs, providing a high-impact and sustainable solution that improves retention, productivity, and time-to-competency.



To find out how Tooling U-SME can help your company create a world-class training program, call 866.706.8665 or email info@toolingu.com



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