

GridEd Human Resources Committee Report

Abstract

GridEd was launched in 2013 through a U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) award called Grid Engineering for Accelerated Renewable Energy Deployment (GEARED) and established strong interactive engagement with technical electric utility advisors. Through engagement with the technical advisory group, it became clear that workforce development issues related to identifying, developing and hiring a technical staff could benefit from a broader strategy beyond engagement with the technical organization. Further, as GridEd expanded its electric utility advisor structure into the western U.S. many of the personnel on behalf of the electric utilities reaching out were not exclusively technical people. These signals indicated that recruiting new prospects, retaining existing staff, and developing an engineering workforce of the future was a significant issue that demands complete company engagement including human resources (HR) and corporate entities. Thus, GridEd organized an advisory team comprised of technical staff and HR professionals to discuss strategies for hiring and retaining future engineers for electric utilities. In early April 2017, GridEd established a mission statement for the HR Working Committee and its work began. This report documents the discoveries of the HR committee and its recommendations.

Background

GridEd was established in 2013 to address workforce development issues in the electric utility industry. This included deficiencies both within the university system for preparing the next generation of electric power engineers as well as the existing technical workforce that needs retraining to match the technological evolution on the electric grid. New electrical engineering graduates were not prepared for the electric power industry because of an inadequate background in electric power training. Also, the growth of renewable and distributed energy resources poses many changes to the infrastructure of the power grid, requiring professional training of existing technical staff in the new technologies and what they mean to the grid of the future.

GridEd's engagement with its technical advisory group quickly revealed that addressing these workforce challenges required broader coordination with other utility business units beyond the technical organization. Although developing technical skill requirements is critical, recruiting, developing, and retaining engineers was a major workforce development issue that requires a corporate strategy including coordination and engagement between technical staff and HR professionals. This principle was reinforced given that key personnel engaging with GridEd when it expanded into the western US were not exclusively technical in makeup. This is a departure from typical EPRI activities which are organized and built around a technical utility advisory committee.

The Principles of the HR Committee

As a first step in addressing the broad issues related to workforce development, GridEd convened a HR working committee comprised of HR professionals assembled from electric utilities supporting the GridEd project. This HR advisory structure was to compliment the technical advisory structure that was established for GridEd. The notion was to develop wholistic solutions to workforce development. As such, the team

of HR advisors established its mission to discuss issues of workforce development through a shared exchange of ideas and best practices.

The work product from the HR committee summarizes lesson's learned and best practices in human resources for workforce development as observed among HR committee participants. Monthly teleconferences focused discussion on topics including recruitment, development, retention, public outreach, and engaging underrepresented audiences which include minorities, women, veterans and other underserved labor markets. To date, the committee has fifteen GridEd utility advisors and Human Resource participants as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Organizations Participating in GridEd's HR Committee

Alabama Power Company	New York Power Authority
Central Hudson	Pacific Gas & Electric Company
Duke Energy	Portland General Electric Company
Electric Power Research Institute	Snohomish County Public Utility
Entergy	Southern Company
FirstEnergy Service Company	Tri-State Generation & Transmission
LG&E and KU Energy, LLC	Western Area Power Administration
Lincoln Electric System	Xcel Energy Services, Inc.

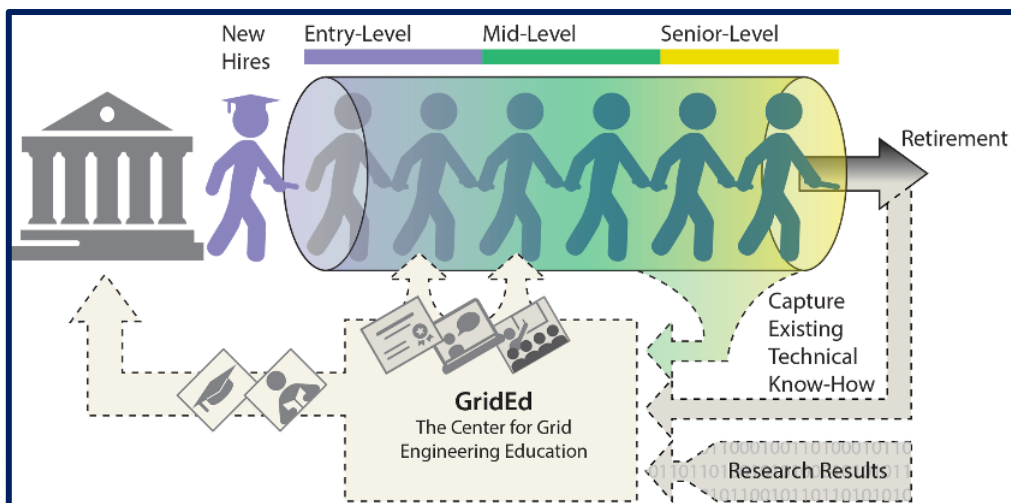
Challenge

There are several key factors that require attention for a successful effort in developing a future workforce for the electric utility industry.

1. Develop recruiting pipelines for qualified talent that is skilled in the fundamentals of electric power
2. Create a work environment where new employees want to join and existing employees want to stay.
3. Address the aging electric utility workforce issue that is taking its technical know-how into retirement, while also addressing the new skill and innovative thinking demanded by the modern grid.

Mission

The HR Committee discusses and explores primary issues of workforce development in the electric utility industry through a shared exchange of ideas and best practices from knowledgeable HR professionals. The



objective is to successfully identify leading industry practices that align with electric utility workforce development needs.

Solution

EPRI's GridEd project addresses the intersecting needs of workforce development for electric utilities as it satisfies the key challenges of the electric industry. The approach is fourfold.

1. University power engineering programs will produce a pipeline of qualified workers to design, operate, and maintain the electric grid of the future. Attracting these new workers is essential.
2. Professional training for existing workers is a critical aspect of maximizing the return on a company's investment in its exiting staff and addressing gaps in the knowledge and skill sets required as the grid evolves.
3. Recruiting new employees from an experienced reservoir of skills needed to meet the needs for the grid of the future.
4. The electric utility industry must demonstrate the attractiveness of its work environment with plenty of growth opportunities. The HR department will play a key role in developing that strategy.

What is Workforce Development

Workforce development is an interconnected set of solutions to meet employee and employer's needs and is essential to an organization's success. Developing these solutions takes money, energy and time. However, by making these sacrifices early and often, an organization will see a more motivated and engaged group of employees. One aspect of workforce development is training and development. Employers should be looking into the future and preparing employees for the impending skills gap by developing training programs, mentoring programs and other knowledge transfer opportunities. Employees recognize that by creating these programs employers have invested in their future. This leads to employees that are less likely to leave the organization which results in reduced turnover. Lastly, identifying this skills gap has proven to be a critical need in the electric power industry and was discussed many times with in GridEd's HR committee. The committee shared several leading practices to address the skills gap which are provided later in this report.

Key Items of Discussion by the GridEd HR Working Committee

The GridEd HR Working Committee was created to bring together HR professional in the energy and utility industry to collaborate on current trends and issues in the market that are impacting our existing and potential talent. The committee has followed a practice of meeting monthly to discuss a variety of topics. Since its inception, the committee has developed a mission statement and created a list of topics that are further developed at each meeting. The committee has focused on themes that include 1) recruiting of diverse and skilled talent, 2) benefit programs that help with retention/attraction of talent, and 3) knowledge transfer. What follows is a synopsis of what was discussed during the HR committee meeting calls on several topics.

Recruiting

GridEd's HR committee discussed several options to align our resources and create more visibility for the energy industry at career fairs. One opportunity is to pool committee member resources to attract more potential candidates to our job openings and highlight the vitality of the electric power industry. Additionally, the committee recognized that the employee experience begins at the career fair and goes through the employee lifecycle at the organization. Therefore, in addition to a great career fair experience, employers

should consider how they are interviewing and onboarding candidates and employees. One focus was ensuring that when hiring managers and their teams are interviewing candidates, they are looking for learning agility, the ability to do the job that is being recruited for as well as having the aptitude to learn a new or different skill set to meet future needs.

Retention and Retention Strategies

Retention strategies include mentoring, robust onboarding programs and more flexible work arrangements. This is an evolving issue for utilities which are accustomed to hiring lifetime employees. Employees in general are far more mobile in today's society for a variety reasons. Professional development and growth of employees is critical to improved retention. It is essential that managers have regular development conversations with their employees.

Mentoring

EPRI has established a formal mentoring program that has been created to grow internal talent by connecting employees with other employees that have similar interests and have knowledge that aligns with the needs of the mentee. The program has been in existence for five years and has received positive feedback from all participants. The formal program lasts for eight months and we encourage continued connection between the mentor and mentee even after the formal program ends. Mentors and mentees are connected via a questionnaire application they complete. A kick off meeting is used to explain the program and have the mentor and mentee meet in person. Throughout the program HR representatives check in with the mentoring pairs. This type of program could be emulated at other organizations to help with knowledge transfer and continued professional development and growth.

Onboarding

Research has shown that new hires that have been effectively onboarded are more likely to feel they fit with the role and the organization. Onboarding can improve engagement of new hires by connecting them with their colleagues and providing training on organizational policies and procedures to effectively do their job. Connecting the new hire with an "onboarding buddy" gives them a peer that will help them navigate the culture of the organization and assist them in better understanding their role.

The committee has had conversations and shared best practices on how to improve our onboarding processes to improve retention. Many have implemented the "onboarding buddy" or a similar process. Others have improved the efficiency of first week activities by creating an onboarding plan for the new hire and automating many of the first week activities.

Flexible Work Arrangements

It is proven that organizations that have flexible work arrangements have greater productivity and increased employee engagement. However, occupational differences within organizations can make it difficult to implement a consistent and inclusive flexible work arrangement policy. Most of the company's represented on the committee have flexible work arrangements and have identified that it is an important part of their retention strategy. They have also recognized that there are generational differences in how to implement flexible work arrangements and are working to break down these differences through various change management activities.

Succession Planning

Identifying future leadership in a company should be a continuous and ongoing process in organizations. Succession planning is important to ensuring that an organization is prepared for the inevitable surprise of a high potential candidate leaving. Effective succession planning includes employee development plans that are and have been implemented over months or even years. A robust succession planning process with employee development plans is an effective competitive advantage. Many on the committee discussed how their organizations have succession planning sessions once to twice a year. This is where the members of the executive and/or senior leadership team get a glimpse into the high potential employees and future leaders of the organization.

HR Committee Accomplishments

The GridEd HR committee completed the following actions:

- Developed an infrastructure to engage HR professionals from electric utilities to discuss issues facing the industry and approaches dealing with them
- The group met on a regular basis via phone and/or WebEx for information exchange and discussions of issues impacting the energy and utility industry
- Explored ideas on how to tackle our workforce development challenges proactively
- The committee is in the process of working with a vendor to develop a recruiting booth that will attract more talent at the career fairs and expositions that we currently attend separately. The booth banner will be “Careers in the Electric Power Industry” and will have 1 – 2 representatives from most of the committee member companies.
- As the Committee continues to develop and work together, it will implement many of the strategies shared in this report. Additionally, the Committee will continue to grow our professional network of HR professionals and implement best practices that will improve the attraction and retention of employees in the energy and utility industry.

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