



Alba's Skills Matrix and Training Programs Increase Satisfaction, Safety

Aluminium Bahrain (Alba)

Best Advance in Competencies and Skill Development

September 2018



Company Background



Headquarters	Manama, Kingdom of Bahrain
Year Founded	1971
Revenue	\$2.3 billion (2017)
Employees	2,700
Global Scale (Regions that you operate in or provide services to)	Though Alba's production facilities are in Bahrain, it has marketing operations all over the world. Its major raw materials also are sourced from countries around the globe.
Customers/Output, etc. (Key customers and services offered)	Aluminum is sold to customers in Bahrain, MENA, Asia, Europe and the USA.
Industry	Aluminum smelter and associated production plants
Stock Symbol	ALBH
Website	http://www.albasmelter.com

Budget and Timeframe

Overall budget	Budget for employees' competencies and skills development is approximately \$4 million.
Number of (HR, Learning, Talent) employees involved with the implementation?	Competencies and skills development are applied to all the employees and therefore all 2,800 employees are beneficiaries of this implementation.
Number of Operations or Subject Matter Expert employees involved with the implementation?	Eleven senior experts in the training department, including head of training administration and manager training, are involved in the planning, design and implementation of the competencies and skills development program. The program also is driven by active involvement of about 80 on-job mentors and coaches spread across all the departments.
Number of contractors involved with implementation	About 10 local training providers and a number of original equipment manufacturers and expert consultants from overseas are engaged in delivery as per needs for skills development.
Timeframe to implement	Ongoing process. Competencies and skills development has been an important organizational objective for the last three years.
Start date of the program	Both the Training Development Programs (TDP) and Skills Matrix development programs run continuously throughout the year.

Business Conditions and Business Needs

Aluminium Bahrain B.S.C., or simply Alba, is one of the largest industrial companies in the Middle East and is the fifth-largest smelter in the world.

It is a complex organization with 2,700 full-time employees. The manufacturing and process plants are diverse in nature and many staff work in different activities.

To put this into context, the Alba plant comprises five reduction lines, three cast houses, a dedicated carbon plant, a large coke plant, a water desalination plant, 11 fume treatment plants, a marine terminal and four power stations. The plant also features a 10-hectare “green” oasis with more than 7,600 trees and shrubs, a fruit and vegetable garden and an artificial lake.

This presents considerable challenges:

- Although staff are spread across this extensive site, the functions they perform are inter-related — one function is dependent on the outcome of the other.
- In this complex work situation, teams have to be managed and led critically.
- Away from the shop floor in service departments like HR, procurement, training, finance, PR, medical and IT, it is another challenge to provide services to the production areas within Alba’s tight schedules.

Therefore developing competencies and skills of employees and building a culture of leadership across the organization have been of paramount importance.

Effective succession at all levels of management and non-management is critical to Alba’s success, so developing employees for promotion is one of the company’s primary objectives.

Business needs make this imperative:

- In the last decade, competition has grown from other aluminum smelters in the Gulf region. Alba needs to retain its best talent in the face of poaching by rival companies.
- When experienced staff retire, the company needs to fill those posts with staff steeped in Alba’s expertise and values.

- Its objective is to train and develop leaders from the local workforce to reduce the number of ex-patriates in the company, currently 13%.

Yet Alba's previous programs were not fit for the purpose:

- Non-managerial employees were only promoted when a vacancy arose, even if they had higher skills.
- Alba was paying its managers for years of service, rather than technical know-how.

Two new programs — Skills Matrix and Training Development Program — solve this problem.

Furthermore, quality and safety are very important aspects of Alba's work. Training and developing employees improve their skills in these areas.

Taking into account all the challenges described above, it was essential to frame structured competency and skills development programs that allow continual monitoring and evaluation of their effectiveness — with changes made to improve them where required.

Figure 1: Program Success



Source: Alba

Overview

Alba has devised two competencies and skills development initiatives:

1. Skills Matrix assessment and development for non-management staff.
2. Training Development Program (TDP) for management staff.

These programs cater to the organizational goal of continuous training and development of staff, equal opportunities for all and promotion from within. Both are applied to all employees across the organization.

Skills Matrix Assessment

Skills Matrix Assessment and training scheme streamlines the succession plan for non-managerial roles. It provides equal opportunities for all for development and promotion to the next level. It involved preparing an approved matrix of knowledge and skills for every non-supervisory job across the organization. This job profiling ensures multi-skilling at every level so that management in each department can rotate jobs and reassign employees to meet ever-evolving requirements — giving Alba a competitive edge.

Up to 600 employees each year enter the Skills Matrix Assessment for promotion. It therefore ensures regular progression of non-management staff, their development and multi-skilling.

Employees are assessed by two independent judges according to agreed criteria. During the assessment process, gaps in knowledge and skills are identified and training arranged to fill these gaps. The employee must prove their competence within six months. Successful candidates are promoted to the next level and unsuccessful candidates get further training and are re-assessed after a gap of six months.

Thus, identifying skills and training needs is a continuous process for all employees.

Training and Development Program (TDP)

TDP selects Bahraini employees to take up higher responsibilities and/or middle- and senior-level management roles based on their knowledge, abilities, initiatives and demonstration of potential growth. They are then given all-round development in



educational and functional areas, as well as management and leadership areas, to prime them for the position they will take up.

More than 160 candidates were working on TDP in 2017. At the completion of the program they will be promoted to higher positions, mainly replacing Bahraini retirees and expatriates.

These programs are prepared as per each individual's specific needs, identified through analysis of the target job profile and the individual's profile. The program ranges from one to three years and involves regular reviews by a panel of managers every six months.

Figure 2: Image from Alba's Website

The **vision** to believe
The drive to **achieve**



Source: Alba

Design of the Program

1. Skills Matrix Assessment and Development for Non-Management Staff

Alba needed a system where all non-management staff had equal opportunities to be evaluated for promotion and move on to the next grade if found to be competent — whether or not vacancies existed at the higher level. This would remove stagnation of staff at one level for a long time and create an environment of fairness, development and growth. It would also ensure that staff are trained at multiple skills, increasing their value to the company.

The program-design team:

- Identified all non-management jobs in every department plus the knowledge and skills (based on multi-skilling) required for each job.
- Broke each knowledge and skill into job elements and designed performance criteria plus training and assessment methods for each. Candidates would therefore know how they would be evaluated for each element of their job and could prepare accordingly.
- Reviewed and improved the set of Skills Matrix documents for every job in collaboration with superintendents and departmental managers.

A presentation on the Skills Matrix is attached. It shows how for Grade 5, employees need five job skills; 10 job skills for Grade 6; 15 for Grade 7 and 20 for Grade 8. Here is an excerpt:

Figure 3: Grade 5 to 6 Promotion

EXAMPLE OF GRADE 5 to 6 PROMOTION	
EXISTING SYSTEM	NEW SYSTEM
<p style="text-align: center;">Example:</p> <p>Casting Operator is Grade 5</p> <p>Presently he has more than 10 job skills such as:</p> <p>J1: Safety in Handling Hot Metal J2: Forklift Operation J5: Tech Know how about the Furnace & Eq. J6: Alloy Calculator J9/J10/J11/J12: Casting Operation J13: Casting Defects Identification, Causes & J14: Operation of OH Crane J15: Billet Inspection & Defect Identification J16: Operation of Billet Inspection Table J21: Understanding of Production Planning ... J24: SAP Understanding & Basic Application J25: MES understanding & Basic Application</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">With the new system he will be Grade 6</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Grade 6 Criteria:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">General Secondary Education Certificate + 3 years' experience at Grade 5</p> <p style="text-align: center;">or</p> <p style="text-align: center;">National Diploma + 2.5 years' experience at Grade 5</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Plus</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Minimum 10 Job Skills</p>

Source: Alba

2. Training Development Program (TDP) for management staff

Alba needed to introduce a program where management staff identified for promotion are trained in all aspects of their job — functional and soft skills. The result was TDP.

- A candidate is selected for development for a higher position.
- Current competences and the tasks needed in the target job are analyzed.
- A Training and Development Program is prepared, using predefined modules.

Functional Development

- Short courses, seminars/conferences, long academic course if required.
- Master a new concept/method by exploring, research and self-learning. Project report.
- Practical experience of working in associated areas.
- Direct ownership alongside present position holder and acting phase.

Managerial and Soft Skills Development

- Short management/leadership courses.
- Each course has work-based assignments, a project report and an oral presentation.
- Modules are sourced from in-house faculty or external institutions and may be blended between e-learning and instructor-led.

The TDP program and tasks undertaken during the program are specific to the individual's training needs and their area of work.

Delivery of the Program

1. Skills Matrix Assessment and Development for Non-Management Staff

Deployment is carried out through the following steps:

- The HR team prepares a list of employees eligible to undergo Skills Matrix Assessment and they are assigned places every month according to quotas for each department.
- The training team works with every department of the company to agree assessors for each candidate — one from training and one from the relevant department.
- Before assessment starts, the entire process is explained to the candidate. They have to prove their competence in each element of every skill within a period of six months. If they do not complete all skill competences within six months they are recorded as failed. They then must prepare again for six months before re-assessment.
- Assessment is based on evidence of competence in each skill. The assessors evaluate the evidence and check competence through a written test, verbal answers, demonstration of skills, simulation of a task or evidence of prior learning.
- During assessment, training is arranged to plug gaps in skills and knowledge, as well as rotation of jobs and reassignment of jobs, so candidates grow in all areas of their work.
- Successful assessments are verified through interview by a training department section head and then a report is sent to HR to put the promotion in place.

Figure 4: Sample Knowledge Competencies

DESIGNATION: OPERATOR GRADE : 5 - 7

Knowledge Competency		Job Skills	
K1	STAE Safe Training	J1	PTA Operation (with valid licence)
K2	Understanding the Micropot Commands	J2	Pot Tap Hole Breaking and Covering
K3	Basic Computer Literacy	J3	Driving Point Feed (with valid licence)
K4	Basic English Literacy (upto Level 3)	J4	Anode Changing Operation & Its Related Activities
K5	Awareness of Safety Induction guidelines	J5	Cell Maintenance - Dressing & Checking Feeder Holes
K6	Environment Management System(Including Reduction Line-4 - 5)	J6	Crushed Bath & Aluminium Fluoride Filling
K7	Fire Fighting	J7	Driving Forklift/ Tractor (with valid licence)
K8	First Aid	J8	Changing CAFD, CBFDF & ATFD
K9	Basic Mathematics Skills	J9	Metal / Bath Tapping
K10	Process Technical Know - How (Process Course)	J10	Anode Beam Raising Activities
K11	Understanding of Level 1/Level 2 Reports in Line-4 & Albsys Application	J11	Fixing and Removing Coerete/ Temporary Slabs
		J12	Driving Power Sweeper & Personnel Carrier
		J13	Transferring the Gantry (with valid licence)
		J14	Cell Cut-Out Activities
		J15	Checking Pots with Anode Effect
		J16	Cell Preparation/ Preheating & Start Up activities
		J17	Emergency Busbar Installation
		J18	Treating Impossible Anode Effect
		J19	Entering and Retrieve Data from Level-1/2 System via Line-4 or Albsys in Line-5
		J20	Metal and Bath Level Measurements
		J21	Handling Micropot Failure and Related Alarms
		J22	Checking Abnormal Pots
		J23	Taking 24 hr ACD Control
		J24	Treating Noisy Pots through 5 Minutes Graphs or Albsys Applications
		J25	Supervision of Anode Beam Raising Activities

Source: Alba

Figure 5: Sample Knowledge Competency Assessment Sheet.

POWER - MAINTENANCE							
ASSESSMENT SHEET: KNOWLEDGE COMPETENCY (K2)							
English Literacy (Up to Level 3)							
Name:			Department: Power Maintenance				
Co. No.:			Section: Mechanical				
S. No.	Job Description/ Activity	Reference	Assessment Criteria	Competence		Assessor Signature	Remarks
				Yes	No		
1.	Successful completion of English Language classes and exams up to level 3 at an external institute or Completion of HND course.	Classes held at the institute	Completion and pass certificate up to level 3 of English Language course or HND course				
2.	Written communication ability.	Course material of English course	Quality of written reports submitted for the Job skills.				
3.	Oral Communication ability	Assessor	English communication with colleagues and supervisors.				

Source: Alba

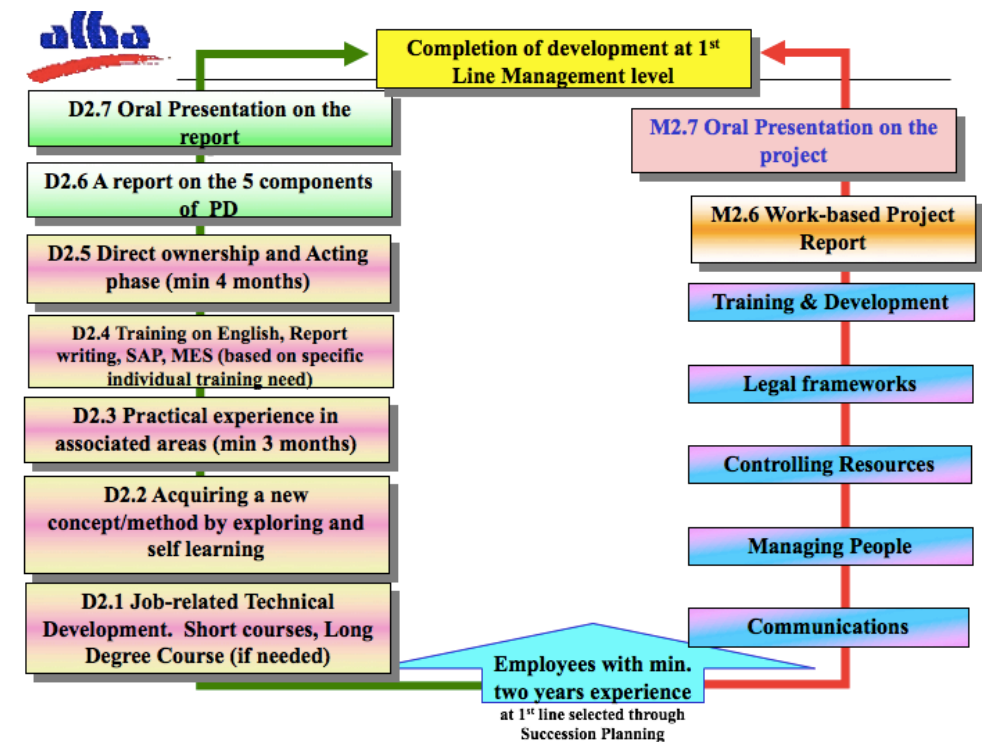
No employee with more than six years' experience will be on Grade 4 or 5 if they attain the necessary skills.

2. Training Development Program for Management Staff

Candidates for development and promotion are selected by an HR panel. The training team works with the candidate's department to prepare a bespoke TDP program. All tasks in the TDP are well-defined with performance criteria and date for completion.

The fact that each program is approved up to CEO level underlines the importance that Alba accords to competencies and skill development.

Figure 6: Training Development for Management Staff



Source: Alba

Functional development is shown in the left column on diagram above. Managerial and soft skills development is in the right column.

Progress is monitored as follows:

1. On completion of each module, the department manager reviews the candidate's progress and gives feedback to correct mistakes and improve skills.
2. Every six months (called a phase), the candidate submits a phase report of their progress to their department manager and the training department.
3. A formal phase review is carried out by a panel comprising the department manager, training manager and relevant director. The candidate explains their progress through a presentation. The panel evaluates their development in their tasks, knowledge, communication and time management.
4. The panel approves completion of the phase or suggests any follow-up activity.
5. On completion of the phase, the employee moves on with the tasks for their next phase.
6. When they complete the requirements for all phases, a TDP completion report is generated and the HR department puts the promotion in place.

Change Management Efforts

Skills Matrix Assessment and Development

The initial challenge for the Skills Matrix Assessment and Development was preparing a Skills Matrix for every non-management job in the organization. This challenge was overcome through coordination with department specialists and standardization in terms of uniformity, fairness and simplicity.

Another challenge was eliminating bias or perception of bias during assessments, and this was achieved by assigning two assessors to each candidate. A further challenge is scheduling of time and availability of equipment and plant processes for assessments. This is addressed case by case by working closely with the relevant department.

Training Development Program

Challenges in the TDP included communicating the existence and benefits of the program to all management staff. These were overcome by conducting awareness sessions for all management staff. Alba also a pilot TDP program for the first two candidates, with the learnings and experiences used to improve final implementation.



To overcome the challenge of engagement, programs are delivered on site at Alba's premises, a strategy that ensures full participation in each session. Training providers are shortlisted based on their experience, evaluation of their training outlines and their ability to tailor to Alba's specific need. TDP is normally delivered using an experiential approach as this has proved to give best retention of the concepts.

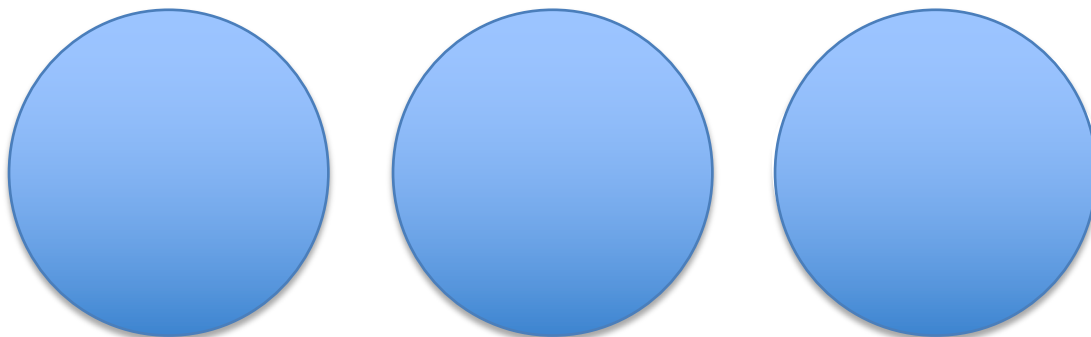
Measurable Benefits

Both programs provide the opportunity to employees to grow in the organization, be trained, developed, be competitive and take up higher responsibilities. The programs remove stagnancy among the staff and generate enthusiasm and zeal. The multi-skilling of staff also provides management with flexibility and availability of trained and competent manpower for all tasks. This has had commercial benefit when Alba has faced challenging situations.

1. Skills Matrix Assessment and Development for Non-Management Staff

Since 2013, a total of 1,250 non-management staff have completed their assessment and development and thereby won promotion, taking up the responsibilities of higher positions. The program is ongoing with more than 260 completing or working their way through their assessment in 2017. A landmark year was 2014, when 399 staff were promoted through this scheme.

Figure 7: Skills Matrix Assessment and Development for Non-Management Staff



Source: Alba



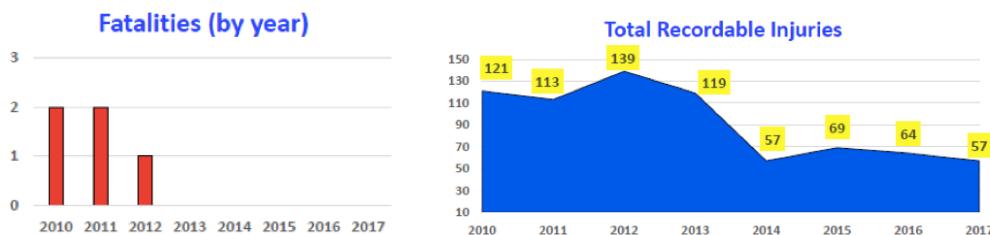
Previously it could take years for an employee to gain promotion from Grade 5 to 6, for example, because of a restricted number of vacancies at Grade 6.

Now employees are promoted as soon as they complete the necessary criteria — irrespective of whether there is a vacancy.

Advantages of Skills Matrix

- It helps departments identify and plug competences gaps in different skills through specific training.
- It encourages employees to learn more and more skills, resulting in:
 - Overall improvement of shop floor competency level.
 - Multiskilling, permitting job rotation.
 - Higher productivity.
 - Higher levels of employee satisfaction.
 - Better safety records (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Fatalities by Year and Total Recordable Injuries Data



Source: Alba

- Alba is paying for the technical know-how of the employee, rather than the length of their service.

2. Training Development Program for management staff

In the last five years, the number of management staff who have completed their TDP and achieved promotion has grown every year — and in 2017 Alba promoted 400% more managers than in 2013:



Figure 9: Training Development for Management Staff Data

Year	TDP	
	Ongoing	Completed
2013	50	9
2014	88	21
2015	98	31
2016	105	30
2017	116	45

Source: Alba

These managers are trained and developed in value-added knowledge and skills before they are promoted — compared to previously when Alba’s management staff earned higher responsibility and pay only thanks to years served. The modular, carefully structured TDP program ensures more-rounded, more-valuable development.

Overall

Overall, Alba’s Skills Matrix and TDP programs have had a very positive impact on the organization and its goals.

- Alba has been able to promote non-managerial employees on their knowledge and skills, rather than solely length of service — increasing value to the business.
- Staff are motivated by having clear steps to progression.
- Alba can train and develop managers identified for future leaders’ positions, resolving concerns about having people ready at each level — a very important consequence.
- These leaders are performing better, leading their departments/sections to improved results.

Alba has achieved very impressive results thanks to multi-skilling, higher standards and well-rounded leadership.



Figure 10: Increase in Metal Production Despite Plant Capacity Issues

Metal Production in Metric Tonnes	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Total	890,217	912,700	931,427	960,643	971,420	981,016

Source: Alba

Figure 11: A Similar Growth in Sales

Metal Sales in Metric Tonnes	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Total	890,291	919,722	931,526	951,944	974,014	978,195

Source: Alba

Alba’s corporate mission is to emerge as one of the largest single site smelters in the world by reaching production of 1 ½ million metric tons per annum when Line 6 expansion is completed in January 2019. This can only be achieved by implementing its core values of operational efficiency, global competitiveness, social responsibility and superior customer service — values promoted by TDP programs covering areas from production to marketing to client care.

Alba’s specialized training and education for all employees — providing an unrivalled environment for self-growth and achievement — has made it a preferred employer in Bahrain.

Figure 12: Preferred Employer in Bahrain.



Source: Alba

What Alba learned from this process:

- That employees are galvanized by having a clear path to promotion and progression that recognizes their competencies and skills — with the ability to try again after six months if they do not succeed first time.
- That preparing an approved matrix of knowledge and skills for every non-supervisory job across an organization requires time-consuming attention to detail — but the reward to Alba is job profiling that ensures multi-skilling at every level.
- That multi-skilling employees increases Alba's overall technical ability in the aluminum smelting industry, as well as improving flexibility in the business through rotations.
- That managers and leaders thrive from training that covers both professional skills and managerial/soft skills — and that the number of promotions achieved after TDP (a 400% increase on 2013) proves that Alba has an exceptional talent pool.
- That Alba derives both competitive edge and added value by paying employees on the basis of what they can do, rather than simply how long they have been in a function.

Conclusion

Competencies and skill development programs are tailored to:

- Alba's corporate interests.
- Departmental requirements.
- Individual progress.

They are founded as much as possible in real-work situations. Alba plans to continue with the approach described above to grow all its employees, educate its future leaders and equip them with the knowledge and skills demanded from the very best. This will remain a core priority for the years to come.



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