

New world, new skills, new staff: thrilling times for a new Adif

The year 2023 has been declared by the European Commission the European Year of Skills in order to provide answers to the growing demand for green and digital skills in a fast changing world. The aim is to showcase training and job opportunities for people and companies so that their needs and the market's are met.

These elements reflect perfectly the current situation in Adif, the Spanish infrastructure manager. The company is going through the most ambitious renovation process in its history in terms of Human Resources, whereby 50% of its staff will be renewed by 2025, around 6.000 persons, due to a massive retirement wave over the last years. The liberalization of passenger traffic in Spain and the ensuing rise in demand is also a factor for new recruits. This represents a big challenge for the company, due to the need to both train the new recruits and prepare the departure of the highly skilled professionals who have been in charge of managing the Spanish rail infrastructure for the last 40 years, while making sure the network works in optimal conditions.

The nature of Adif activities in managing and maintaining infrastructure determines why training for its employees is crucial. This is particularly evident at a time when railways are highly demanded to provide an economically and environmentally sustainable mobility. The key to the future is undeniably the digitization of our activities, a process that requires a whole new perspective that includes not only technical skills but a whole cultural change within the organization.

This cultural change is one of the key projects currently underway, whereby a group of highly connected employees are developing a strategy that is determining the behaviours that will lie at the base of the company, making sure we carry out our activities in a safer, more efficient and humane way. Some behaviours will be excluded while others will be reinforced. The outcome of this project is key to prepare the staff, both new and old, for this fast-changing world and the highly demanding situation the company is going through. The response to this bottom-up project is exhilarating, inspiring for the employees and the only realistic way to prepare a company such as Adif for the future.



Under this cultural change, Adif is working to draw more women to the company, especially for STEM jobs. Although the railway sector has traditionally been very male-dominated, the company has managed to increase female presence from 14.1% in 2018 to 18% in 2022. The positive side is women represent 33% of the Board of Directors, and 27% of all managers. Concerning STEM disciplines, the company believes that the lack of female talent in the field of engineering and technology has serious negative effects on the development of companies and increases inequalities. That is why Adif has partnered with the Royal Academy of Engineering in the "Women and Engineering" program, which seeks to motivate and interest girls and adolescents in STEM studies so that they can join the various professional specialties related to engineering. A project called "Programa Lidera" has also been launched, aiming to mentoring newly hired female employees in the company, both in STEM disciplines and in other areas.

In terms of training, not only for the new employees but also to ensure life-long learning for the longer-serving staff, Adif opened a new training center in Madrid, that will focus on training new employees in relational skills and leadership competencies for managers and supervisors. But mainly, Adif has formed alliances with universities and technology organizations to develop specialized programs and has opened its internal training to sector companies through the "Campus Adif-FFE" platform. The company aims to become a constant learning organization, where training is a natural activity for individuals that are open to change and innovation.



The Training Plan includes nearly 1 million training hours for the entire workforce, divided into three main blocks: Integral Safety, Infrastructures and Systems, and Management and Competencies. The largest percentage of training hours are devoted to Integral Safety, with 63.35%, while the rest are distributed among the other two blocks.

Adif's Technology Training Center, located in Valencia, is focused on responding to the existing technical training needs, both transversal and specialized, of all company groups. This center is the main enclave for the development of training activity and is responsible for developing the training product catalogue, organizing, planning, and executing training actions. This center in Valencia is being renovated and enlarged with a total investment of 2.1 million euros.

Overall, Adif is facing a new era, drawn by circumstances from the past, that include a very limited hiring policy for many years and circumstances from the present and the future, like digitization, AI, new skills requirements, a rising demand for clean transport such as railways, etc... A time of change for the company within a time of global change.