

# Top of the class

When the VCIA wanted to check the feasibility of an educational plan for captive they turned to Cope & Associates. Thanks to a 'unique approach' Cope has helped to structure an educational product - the ICCIE - that is close to fruition



No one is better equipped to understand the importance of risk management than captive insurance professionals. And it is a skill hugely relevant when seeking the most fitting educational medium for the sector. However, as a newly mature industry the fact that it has always lacked a truly international educational standard means the successful development of an educational strategy required outside information.

Fortunately, when the VCIA decided to

investigate the best ways to educate those involved with captive sector they had help. Help in the form of Vermont consultancy firm Cope & Associates (COPE) – a group with a real regard for the risk management elements of any project.

COPE's selection took place following a competitive bidding process that considered a number of US-wide consultancy firms. "All proposals were scored by an educational task force," begins Paula Cope, "and the reason why

we were successful in the bid is down to a reputation for tackling unique problems and coming up with innovative methods and solutions." Something that an industry generally under-whelmed with comprehensive educational courses genuinely needed.

COPE's approach to meeting this unique need involved focusing on the problem from an educational point of view. Prior to the official birth of the International Center for Captive Insurance Education (ICCIE) the team of consultants realised the central question hinged around how to reach out to the global captive population and develop a new work force. "We made sure throughout the whole process that we did not miss any critical educational needs regardless of the specific field the captive professional came from such as law or accounting," emphasises Mark Heyman.

"We looked at the emerging profession and realised that full maturity could only be realised if we could construct an educational programme that was diverse enough to meet the needs of a sector with a host of different expectations," clarifies Cope. In fact the final ICCIE model has a variety of components as the result of a well-structured feasibility study which pointed to a multitude of needs and levels of stakeholders.

### Different stages

Work for the VCIA was carried out in three different stages – the first research segment alone accounting for a period of eleven months. In the early stages of this research Cope undertook competitor analysis, stakeholder interviews and

formed focus groups but at this stage were not asking about a defined educational model. "This came later," confirms Cope. Initially the firm came up with four original models and only following a test process utilising the focus groups did the ICCIE become the model of choice.

"In the early stages we were trying to identify the need for education and a unified approach to it. 'Was there a need for education?', 'Was there a market?', 'How large was this market?' and 'How much would people pay to undertake this type of course?' were the sort of question that we put to the sector," says Cope. During this research COPE found that 99 per cent of the captive industry had internet access and that many were interested in this method of education in addition to independent study. All of this preparation came up with the 'criteria of success' that defined ICCIE.

Opinion is very important to COPE. Using their expertise in non-profit management and higher education, they were able to take a concentrated look at educational governance models. "Basically," begins Heyman, "we looked at how the whole entity might be managed and who should be responsible for setting direction." COPE also used its human resources skills to look at how participants in a mentoring programme could help the students develop their professional skills. "Partnering seasoned captive professionals with new captive professionals will strengthen the entire profession and allow expertise to grow much faster," said Cope.

### Industry response

Statistical data confirmed both the necessity of an educational platform and the validity of COPE's model. Ninety per cent of those questioned believed the ICCIE was needed. Seventy-seven per cent said they would send staff to it, while an equally high per cent wanted to send staff in the first year. Given that many businesses generally operate a 'wait and see' attitude to new initiatives the figures act as a clear signpost to the pent-up need and desire to make such a programme a reality. In fact, over 74 per cent of those questioned supported the need for professional certification to represent the culmination of course completion. After the last leg of research was completed, the programme received a 90 per cent assent rate and the final approval to proceed from the VCIA board.

### What next?

Now that the VCIA has approved COPE's educational model the next step for the ICCIE is to establish its educational credentials and independence. And although Cope has finished with ICCIE, for the time being at least, it hopes to continue its relationship with the captive sector.

Apart from an initial foray producing a time management study and developing a staffing model for the VCIA the formulation of the ICCIE was the first time that COPE has worked for the captive industry as a whole, but will certainly not be the last. "As we learned more about what makes up the whole captive sector we realised it required the same services that we were already providing to clients," says Heyman.

## In focus Teaching firms how to cope

COPE specialises in three distinct areas - financial services, higher education and healthcare. It has been in business for thirteen years and with a staff of six is one of the largest independent consulting firms in New England. Their three key practice areas are research (both quantitative and qualitative), human resources and training and development via workshops and the coaching of senior management groups. COPE believes that its work for the VCIA utilised every area of this expertise.

"While working with Cope & Associates during my tenure at VCIA, I found the breadth and depth of their consulting services to be a tremendous asset to our small organisation. Our board of directors at that time unanimously selected them as our partners during a very important phase of work, and that investment has paid tremendous dividends for the membership. I greatly appreciated that COPE gave us the same respect and attention as they would a very large client." Lisa Ventriss, former president of the VCIA and currently president of the Vermont Business Roundtable

"It is so important to have confidence in your consultant. In working with Cope & Associates, Inc., I had confidence in the content and in the quality of the analyses. That's why I know the International Center for Captive Insurance Education will be such a success." Molly Lambert, president, VCIA.



COPE hopes to continue its involvement with the captive businesses by modernising the different systems that support them and by using its expertise in process review and improvement. Over the years, COPE has helped a university trim over \$100,000 from its expenses by redesigning an administrative process, saved time and money for the state's leading economic development authority by redesigning all of its loan processes, and cut \$80,000 from the expenses of a multi-state accounting firm by reengineering its core tax processes. "Everyone needs help in area of productivity improvement and this is an area where we can make a significant impact for both small and large organisations," begins Heyman. "We can also help in the area of client satisfaction surveys," explains Cope. "Many management firms, and even the other service providers, need to improve

competitiveness by asking their clientele if they are performing to the best their abilities. We can ask the tough questions and design solutions that really work for both our client and theirs."

Captive insurance can be a complex system and often requires the interaction of five to ten different vendors to get the job done. A consultant can approach this at a systematic level and make sure that it discovers what each separate component needs to do to remain competitive and how they might all interactive with each other in more productive way. "We exist to be application running in the background of other people's success," says Cope. So the next time those who make a living out of a comprehensive understanding of risk need to 'refresh' their brand they may well turn to the expertise of COPE's own set of risk managers.

## Paula Cope



Cope is a consultant and trainer specialising in organisation development and assessment; executive coaching; succession planning; quality improvement; and project management. Her consulting services and customised programmes target key

people within organisations such as: executive management, boards of directors and all levels of staff to increase productivity, build skills, and help organisations improve quality.

## Mark Heyman



Heyman is a consultant specialising in human resources, employee recruitment and retention, labour relations, employment law compliance and management development.

As a consultant, Heyman has worked with clients representing an array of for-profit and non-profit organisations.

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