Beyond ticking off a course

by Alexa Ivy

Not only do the roles people hold today shape the future of an organization, but the capabilities they develop for tomorrow also play a crucial role. As responsibilities evolve and new skills become essential, understanding employees' strengths, growth areas, and career aspirations gains increasing importance for long-term workforce planning. For Marport, this perspective raised a practical question: how could individual development goals be followed systematically while also providing meaningful input for career and succession planning?

The Horizon Training and Development Portal was created in response to this need. Its name reflects the philosophy behind the platform: the horizon represents both where employees stand today and the direction they aspire to pursue. Horizon bridges these two points by connecting team members' current roles, capabilities, and advancement needs with their future goals.

This approach is particularly relevant in an organization with over 1,000 staff working across different operational, technical, and managerial roles. With a 530,000-square-metre site, five berths, and an annual handling capacity of 2.3 million TEUs, Marport, a container terminal in Türkiye, requires not only operational continuity but also a structured approach to developing the people who will take on future responsibilities.

When spreadsheets aren't enough

Marport had already been managing training processes digitally, but personal skill-enhancement planning relied largely on Excel files and email correspondence. As the procedure expanded, its limitations became apparent. Different versions of individual development forms (IDFs) circulated concurrently, revisions were hard to differentiate from final documents, and development data could not easily be standardized or connected with training, promotion, and succession decisions. The issue, therefore, was more than administrative. Valuable information about employees' strengths, growth needs, and career ambitions existed, but transforming this information into a consistent organizational asset required structural change.

In 2024, IDFs were integrated into the existing portal, and their completion and approval processes were digitalized and linked directly with learning. Training budget approvals were also moved into the system. Development was no longer treated as a collection of separate forms, course requests, and conversations, but as an interconnected process.

Today, Horizon has 360 users and is primarily used by white-collar staff. Personalized accounts are also created for workers in shift-based operational departments where shared user accounts would otherwise hinder individual tracking.

From where to where

At the heart of Horizon is a simple principle: people should take ownership of their own development. The IDF starts not with a training catalogue, but with reflection. Employees first consider "Where am I now?" by assessing their current role, responsibilities, strengths, and areas for advancement. They then move to "Where do I want to be?" by defining short- and long-term career aspirations. And finally comes the practical question: "How do I get there?"

This last step translates ambition into action. Team members define development objectives, specific actions, learning methods, and target completion dates. At least two development objectives are required, with at least one tied to Marport's eight leadership model competencies.

Development methods are based on the 70-20-10 approach: 70% through experience and learning by doing, 20% through coaching or mentoring, and 10% through formal training. This helps move the conversation beyond the assumption that attending a course automatically translates into skill enhancement. A new responsibility, a mentoring relationship, or experience gained through a project can be equally important parts of the journey.

Once employees define their goals, the framework becomes collaborative. The worker and manager meet one-on-one to discuss the form. Managers can suggest revisions, add development needs, or recommend different learning actions. Once both sides agree, the form proceeds to the human resources department for final review.

Horizon creates a common framework in which employees can share their advancement expectations and needs with their managers, while managers can follow their progress and provide regular feedback throughout the process.

A cycle – with continuous added value

Team members can access Horizon directly from their computers or through Limon (Liman Online), Marport's internal employee app, which itself received one

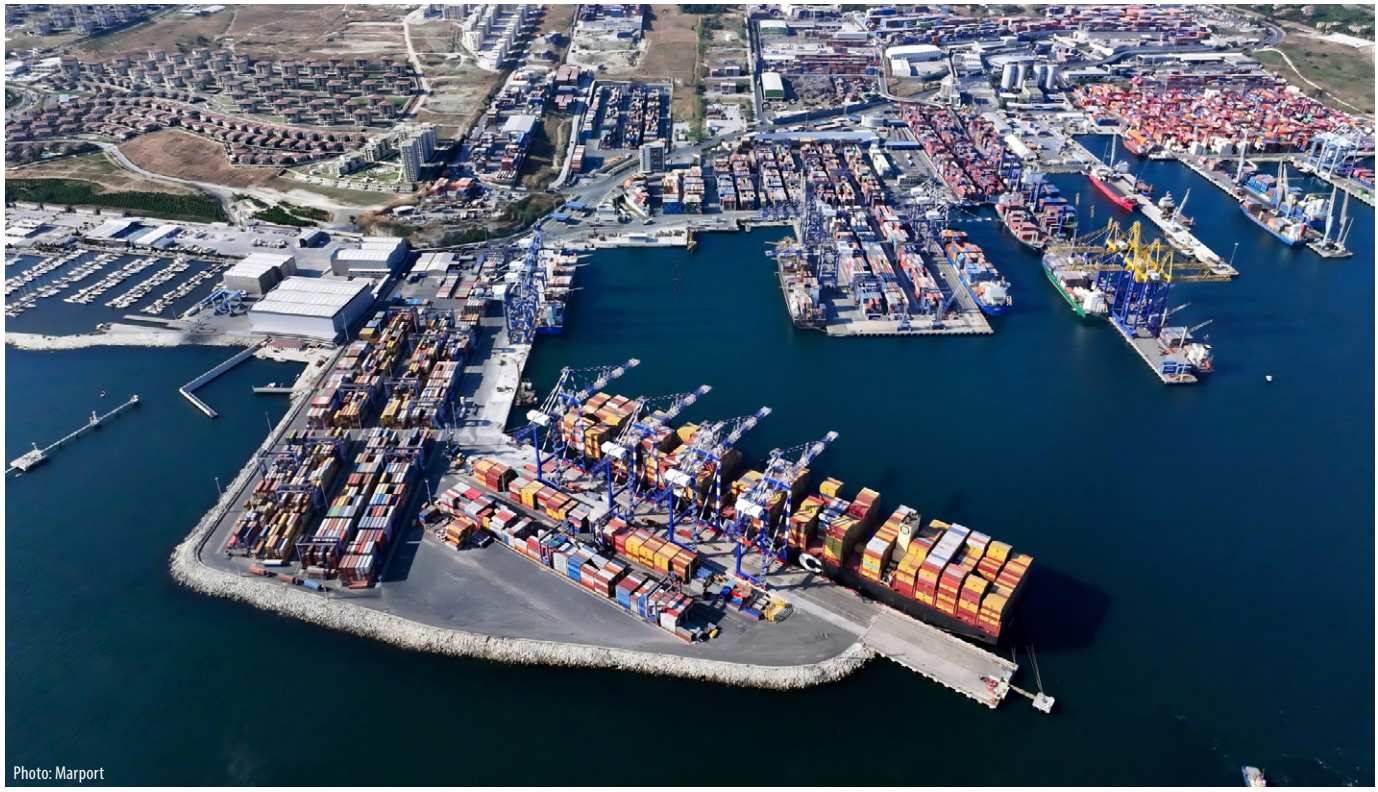


Photo: Marport

Silver and one Bronze Stevie Award in 2021. Horizon is also integrated with SAP, allowing current staff information to flow automatically into the platform.

Individual growth and training processes are connected within the same structure. Development needs identified through IDFs can become inputs for the annual training plan and budget, while training requests, approvals, and records can be followed through the system.

The effectiveness of this approach is also evaluated beyond mere attendance. Immediately after a program, employees evaluate the training and the trainer. One month later, they assess how the acquired knowledge and skills have translated into their work; two months after the training, their managers provide their own assessment based on observed changes. Development is therefore not considered complete when a course ends.

The same principle applies throughout the year. During the interim evaluation period, workers update the status of their development goals, while managers can review progress and identify areas where additional support may be needed. What was once primarily an annual documentation exercise becomes a continuous cycle of planning, action, feedback, and review.

For HR, Horizon has added strategic value. When development information is structured and traceable, it can help answer broader organizational questions. Which capabilities are emerging within a department? Where are the gaps? Which employees may be ready for greater responsibility? Which critical positions require stronger succession pipelines?

IDFs, training histories, and interim evaluations provide a common data foundation for career management, talent pools, and succession planning. This makes development relevant not only to the individual employee but also to organizational continuity.

The impact is also visible in the way these processes are managed. Manual documentation has been reduced, training requests and approvals have become more structured, progress is easier to follow, and feedback between workers and managers has a defined place in the annual cycle.

This year, Horizon received two Bronze Stevie Awards: Achievement in HR Technology at the Stevie Awards for Great Employers and Achievement in Digital Transformation Excellence at the International Business Awards. For Marport, the recognition reflects the approach behind Horizon and the way personal growth, training, feedback, and workforce planning have been brought together within a single structure.

Developing the system itself

Horizon began with a practical need to make development processes more manageable. Over time, it has created a structure that connects employees' individual capability-building goals with training, manager feedback, and HR procedures. Team members can define where they are, where they want to go, and the steps they need to take. Meanwhile, managers and HR can follow the same development journey and use this information in longer-term planning.

The platform continues to evolve. Infrastructure work is underway to manage training budgets through Horizon and to track employees' professional qualification certificates within the system. The next stage will build on the data and interactions already created, with a focus on strengthening talent pools, identifying succession needs for critical positions, and further integrating employee development into workforce planning. ■

MARPORT

Marport, whose history dates back to 1996 when Limar began its operations in the Türk Ambarlı Port Complex, is nowadays one of Türkiye's leading container terminals by being able to take care of 2.3 million TEUs per year. The company has developed Horizon, an internationally acclaimed training and development portal for its employees. Go to **marport.com.tr** to learn more.