

How to make training effective

SKILLS: Look beyond the obvious

HR professionals are responsible for 20% of a business's performance. Competitors can quickly copy services and products, but it is harder to copy the quality of an organisation and its people — this is according to the latest Human Resource Competency Study, the most influential body of research in the HR field globally.

The research shows that there is a strong call to HR leaders to look carefully at their training programmes heading into the year. It challenges them to make their training as effective as possible in building a strong organisational culture with skilled people that can deliver sustainable bottom-line gains.

According to Fiona Ross, a founding director of Cape Town-based Learn to Lead, a corporate training company that specialises in experiential training solutions, there are four key elements to bear in mind as HR leaders consider their options for developing programmes for staff.

The first is to think beyond the obvious and take a holistic approach in the delivery of training, she says. "HR needs to implement 'blended learning' programmes — this simply means to have customised training programmes available that encompass a range of delivery avenues — such as theory and information sharing, group work, online training and face-to-face practical training."

Secondly, programmes must be developed in line with the needs of the organisation, says

Ross. According to the human resource competency study, HR interventions can have a powerful effect on organisational culture, but this must also take customer expectations into account.

"When a company talks about its culture, they usually talk about it from the inside out, but the strongest corporate cultures are linked to customer expectations. For instance, if Intel wants to be known for innovation, it needs to build innovation into its HR practices," says Dave Ulrich, professor at the University of Michigan's Ross School of Business and one of the lead researchers on the human resource competency study.

Ross explains that in her experience, many HR departments often have to settle for budgets cuts if the company runs into financial issues.

"It is not unknown that the reason for many budget cuts is because HR training modules are often not created in line with the overall objectives of the company. This is one of the key factors in setting up the budgets — know what the company's overall needs are and encapsulate the programme to meet those needs," says Ross.

Thirdly, Ross says that organisations must caution against losing their creative edge, particularly as they get bigger. "It's easy to get caught up in the necessary administration of the business and as a result training solutions



Fiona Ross talks about building skills.

can become routine and uninspiring," she says. "The best way to tackle of this problem is to bring back that creative spark and energy by finding the right training programmes that can engage and stimulate staff, creating a cultural shift in the organisation rather than just meeting a short-term need."

Faizil Jakoet, call centre manager for investment giant Allan Gray — a client of Learn to Lead — says that he found that traditional training methods are on the way out.

"The response to the traditional approach is often that people are not excited about learning. Offering a creative, experiential approach gets people's attention and gets them excited about learning," says Jakoet.

A fourth factor that Ross says is important for companies is measuring return-on-investment — this she says needs to be thought through quite intensively, as measuring return-on-investment for training and development has been a sticky issue for companies.

"We are partnering with UCT on the monitoring and evaluation of our leadership programmes this year. Hopefully, we will see some new innovations developed around measuring return-on-investment in 2008 as this is quite important."

Simone Pedro, training and development practitioner at retailer PEP, also a Learn to Lead client, adds that paying attention to feedback from staff and recognising that they are engaged and motivated are factors not to be dismissed. "If the training programmes are holistic and practical we see the results in the employees themselves. It usually is evident in discussions with their supervisors or managers," says Pedro.

For more information, contact Fiona Ross on 021 447 2055. — Supplied.

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Key Competencies
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