

Training – Why You Need to Invest in Your Employees

Training can include everything from teaching employees basic reading skills to conducting advanced courses in executive leadership. A lot of training is focused on upgrading and improving an employee's technical skills. Other popular training areas are developing interpersonal/relationship skills (whether this is to negotiate better with clients or handle conflicts with prickly people), improving problem solving skills and developing skills to enable an employee to step up within the business (as part of a career management or succession plan).

What are the benefits of training?

- Results in greater job satisfaction for employees and increases motivation
- Improves efficiencies in processes, resulting in increased profitability
- Ensures that your business has the capacity to adopt new technologies and methods, helping you remain ahead of your competitors
- Increases innovation in strategies, products and/or services
- Decreases employee turnover
- Enhances company image and reputation
- Proactively addresses risk management
- Useful when introducing multi-skilling, which enables employees to cross over to other areas of work

There are many reasons why a business may undertake training, including the need to fill gaps where there are a lack of skills or experience; making sure that new employees are suitably inducted and have the necessary skills to perform their job functions; keeping your business at the competitive edge; as part of a succession planning programme or scheme to develop high-potential employees; or ensuring that managers and other senior executives have the skills to effectively lead their teams.

How do we maximise training effectiveness?

- Ensure there is a need for training – are there gaps in performance? What skills, knowledge and abilities does the business need to achieve its long term goals?
- How will training achieve goals for the business and/or employee? Sometimes training is NOT the answer
- Ensure learning objectives and outcomes are aligned specifically to the development and/or growth of the business and employee
- What are the expectations related to training? For the business, the focus may be on improving performance, increasing productivity, or gaining or maintaining a competitive edge. For the employee, the focus may be on increasing skills and knowledge, increasing promotion and career opportunities, or increasing confidence, self esteem, job satisfaction and motivation
- Where will the training take place? Internal – on the job training through shadowing, observation, giving greater responsibilities, working on a new project, use of a knowledgeable mentor. External – workshops and courses teaching theory and knowledge outside the immediate scope of the work environment

- Ensure all training is transferable to the workplace - training doesn't stop at the end of the course; it should be an ongoing process. Measure the impact that training is having on either your employee or the business
- Joint responsibility - who should pay for employee development? Arguably, it is the responsibility of both parties. The employer needs the new skills/abilities to add value to the business, and for the employee the new training will be beneficial in their current and future roles
- Put a performance management framework in place around training. Create targets and goals that the employee will be endeavouring to achieve as an outcome of the training
- Make training part of the job – make training a positive learning experience by supporting employees undertaking training
- Ensure employee and management buy-in. If employees are not motivated by training they are unlikely to gain from the experience, and if management do not support employees to develop their skills back in the workplace, the relevance of the training will be undermined
- Everyone learns in different ways - we have different motivations, we come from differing backgrounds and have different experiences – the learning experience should consider the specific needs of each employee

Methods of training

Training is often classified as formal or informal and on-the-job or off-the-job. Traditionally training was planned and structured. Recent evidence indicates 70% of workplace learning is unstructured, unplanned and easily adapted to situations and individuals. Most informal training is employees helping each other out by sharing information and solving work-related problems.

On the job training includes job rotation, apprenticeships, understudy assignments and formal mentoring programs. A main drawback of on-the-job training however is that it often disrupts the workplace; so organisations invest in off-the-job training. The fastest growing means for delivering training is computer-based or e-training. One advantage this method of training offers is the flexibility to deliver training anywhere and at any time and the speed and efficiencies that come with this. However, it can be expensive to design self-paced on-line materials and many employees miss the social interaction provided by a classroom environment.

Given everyone learns in different ways i.e. the way we process, internalise and remember new and difficult material is not necessarily the same as others do. Examples of different learning styles are reading, watching, listening and participating. Some people absorb information better when they read about it, others learn best by observation. Listeners rely heavily on their auditory senses to absorb information and people who prefer a participating style learn by doing. Training must take these different styles into account to ensure individuals receive the maximum benefit from the time they and their employer invest in training.

Training needs must be assessed to ensure the right fit for the organisation and the employee. This involves identifying the specific training needs of employees through their ongoing performance and development programme and alignment of employee skills with business goals. Is the employee's performance suffering due to lack of skills? Either skills they never

had to begin with or, due to changes in the organisation or business environment it is necessary to up-skill the employee. Employee training may also be part of succession planning for the organisation or due to restructuring or promotion. The business may look to training as a result of new technology, systems, processes, products or services, legislative changes, or a need to change the organisation's culture to improve business performance, for example.

Training may range from safety training, diversity-in-the-workplace training, effective customer service skills, computer up-skilling, assertiveness training, task/job specific skills or induction training. Any which way, training forms an important part of the employee workplace experience and is a core component of how businesses seek to improve performance and achieve their goals. As organisations flatten their structures, expand the use of teams and continue to break down traditional departmental barriers, employees need mastery of an increasing variety of tasks and knowledge of how their organisation operates. As a result the need for and use of training as an underpinning business tool looks set to continue into the foreseeable future. Encouraging staff to actively participate in all aspects of training helps to reinforce the accountability of them delivering against their objectives with their new and improved skills and knowledge in hand.