

Prevent **training myopia** in your company

Prof. M Amr Sadik tells Alan Hosking how, when it comes to training, many companies can avoid functional blindness.



PROFILE

Prof. M Amr Sadik (DBA, CHRE, CHRA, MMC, CCMT) is Director of Operations IPE Management School, Paris, Egypt and Yemen, www.ipe-paris.com. He is the winner of the 2010 Talent Challenge Best Practices in Talent Management Award, London, UK, 2010 HR Leader Award, Greentech Foundation, India, 2008/2009 HR Leadership Award, World HRD Congress, India, and 2007 Best HR Executive, International Business Awards, The Stevies, USA. He has held key human resources leadership roles for over 20 years in multiple industries within Middle East and Gulf States and wins employers' awards for results and performance.

Why is training failing in organisations?

Jack Welch, the former CEO of GE, stated, "An organisation's ability to learn, and translate that learning into action rapidly, is the ultimate competitive advantage". Learning is the knowledge gained through formal and informal training, and indeed training is a reservoir of competitive advantage.

Around the world today, organisations of all sizes in all fields are striving to be the best in class, striving for excellence, adopting new management techniques and systems, as well as striving for total quality. But three different international reports – The Global Competitiveness, The Global Innovation Index, and The Global Optimism Index – show that there is no wonder that we can still see many of our current organisations have (1) floundered in terms of progress, (2) not been able to compete in the marketplace, and/or (3) struggled to survive.

One of the main reasons for such failure is simply due to narrow mindedness and an underestimation of the importance of the training role and of the "investment in people" concept.

How do such organisations view training?

To the majority of such organisations who are unable to make it but keep whining about the performance and productivity of their people, the training role/function is marginalised and not strategically viewed nor positioned, despite the fact that their success depends on a well-educated and highly skilled workforce. Thus, during troubled times those organisations' preference is to eliminate training activities and cut the budget, leaving the training practitioners asking what they have to do in such trying periods. While initially it may be difficult to speculate what training will take place, activities should not be stopped.

How should they be viewing training?

Training is by no means a luxury activity that we can spare during hard economic conditions. Given the scarcity of resources (time, money, and people), mature organisations realise it is vital to establish training priorities even in the darkest times. Training is indispensable and can become a strategic business tool if it takes into account long-term organisational goals and objectives.

The significance and value of training has long been recognised. Consider the popular and often repeated quotation, "Give a person a fish and you feed him for a day, teach a person to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." Thus, given today's business climate and the exponential growth in technology with its effect on economies and societies at large, the need for training is more pronounced than ever.

In my personal analysis organisations are seeing training function from three different perspectives, proactive, active, and reactive, that falls into macro and micro-organisational training categories. Macro organisational training takes a wider and aggressive approach that build the training activities based on vision, mission, values, and the strategic plan, whereas micro organisational training level takes a more focused approach, such as in departmental plans and initiatives.

How should the training function be viewed?

There are three views. First is the proactive view in which organisations are strategically positioning training as a legitimate business function, not an extravagance, and investing a considerable amount of time and money to advance the performance of their people through a well-structured approach and focused activities. The training activities are done in a systematic manner to ensure that people are highly competent and ready to face the market challenges, increase and improve their ability to adapt to changes.

Those types of organisations tie all HR activities such promotions, bonus and performance review to achievement in training or after attending executive education programmes to ensure that employees are carrying the up-to-date knowledge to compete.

Fortunately, I have worked with one of the international hotel chains, in the 90s, that obliged those members who were ready for promotion to general manager level to enroll and complete a two-year masters degree programme or promotion would be revoked. Another one that I was associated with in the 80s stipulated in the employment contract that the employee would be sponsored for a minimum of three weeks on an executive education programme

after completion of one year of service. Also, an international FMCG firm insisted that their sales and marketing directors must obtain certification, otherwise promotion would be frozen. They introduced a tuition reimbursement programme.

The second view is the active one. In such view, training activities are conducted on an ongoing basis in order to help fill voids with good people and to maintain the current performance and further enhance it to an acceptable level.

Both proactive and active views are meant to build a motivated and committed staff that's loyal to the organisation, attracts newcomers and creates a pool of qualified replacements for employees who leave. They encourage people to attend seminars; conferences and summits so they are aware of what others do and the new trends in conducting business. They are continuously reshaping their workforce capabilities.

The principal goal of the training function is to encourage a solid culture of learning whereas training activities, goals and objectives are integrated with the company's overall strategy and departmental initiatives. The development process factor is never ending.

The last view is the reactive view in which organisations believe that training is the solution to all of their problems, and activities are done on demand and on ad hoc basis. Training is treated as an event. They do not much believe in employee training and therefore don't bother to allocate enough budget to establish a training function and out of mimicry they allocate training funds, but they don't know how to use it.

How can training contribute to the success of the organisation?

Let's rename training and development as Learning and Development. To be effective, the L and D Strategy should be internally consistent and be mutually reinforcing with other strategies in place. It should be vertically and horizontally integrated. Vertical integration means integrating the L and D Strategy with the overarching HR Strategy and with business strategy at corporate and business unit levels, while horizontal integration means integrating L and D activity with other HR practices so that there is consistency across the whole HR area with all its activity supporting departmental goals.

In today's working environment people should be aware that they are responsible for their own learning. Organisations, through the HR function, have to create an environment where employees want to learn and relearn. Management should be educated about the importance of the training function. ■