

The Evolution: Training to Learning

Modern organizations are making dramatic changes in the way they develop the knowledge and skills of their workforce so as to retain key talent, remain competitive and ensure long-term profitability.

We analyzed a recent research program on the elements of corporate learning that delivers the highest levels of business impact. Our findings have potential to provide valuable guidance to the corporate learning industry.

During the next millennium, the most fundamental shift will reflect a redefinition of training itself. Recently, training is provided for employees, this will be replaced by learning that employees initiate themselves. Training for the masses will be replaced by highly customized, just-for-me learning.

Today, corporate learning organizations provide two types of solutions - "performance-driven" learning solutions and "talent-driven" learning solutions.

The first type, "performance-driven" learning solutions, drives near-term competitive advantage. These programs help the organization with timely, urgent problems. Few examples of performance-driven learning solutions in organizations that drives immediate and measurable impact - a blended learning program to assist sales and service people understand a product rollout, a coaching program to help managers understand how to deal with a business downturn or shift in employee demographics, or an e-learning program to help employees understand how to use a new IT system.

The performance-driven programs success is driven by few operational skills: performance consulting (clearly diagnose the problem), needs analysis (understand the nature of the audience), content development (build interesting and engaging content), program management (deploy and manage the program effectively), e-learning (implement new technology where needed), measurement (measure results and find areas of improvement). These six operational skills are significant to make performance-driven learning successful.

Hence, most training professionals and CLOs realize that they must continuously work to improve and update their processes and skills in these areas.

“Talent-driven” learning solutions, the second type of corporate learning solutions, help to focus on “long-term” competitive advantage, enabling the company to grow, adapt to change, attract and retain great people, innovate, focus, and meet customer demands. These long term strengths are not developed through “performance-driven” learning. A multi-tier leadership development program is the archetypal example of a talent-driven program. Examples can be a complete sales curriculum (such as Cisco or IBM’s end-to-end sales training program, which takes place over years) or a corporate wide quality and process improvement program (such as GE’s Six-Sigma, Caterpillar’s new manufacturing process program, and Rockwell Collins process improvement program). These talent building programs go far beyond the development of skills. They focus on deep-rooted competencies, behaviors, and culture. They must be integrated with career development models and performance management in order to succeed. And they take years to build and mature, demanding a long-term investment.

These talent-driven learning programs provide more intangible benefits (employee flexibility and satisfaction, engagement, innovation, retention), but far greater impact over the long term. In fact, our research found that in 2008 learning organizations are focusing very heavily in this area, driven largely by the tremendous shifts taking place in the demographics of the workforce. The development of talent-driven learning solutions causes stress: you need large capital investments, you must centralize more of your L&D resources, and you must partner far more closely with HR and talent management teams.