

# The evolution of training and development programmes

Contributed by Steve Wood, 2007

Steve Wood puts the case for well thought-through programmes that are fully in line with organisational strategy - and properly funded.

How can an organisation to achieve long-term success with training and development?

What are some ways to measure the success of training that's been undertaken?

The performance and productivity benefit to organisations of offering effective training and development programmes has been proven in research. It found that they can be highly motivational for individual managers and, implemented correctly, can make an intrinsic contribution to their management and leadership capabilities. This is likely to have a positive impact on the organisation's bottom line. However, getting the content, delivery and quality of these opportunities right will determine their success. Too often, management development is delivered in the form of ad hoc training days, or addresses individual needs with no thought to what contribution these new skills will have for the organisation.

These approaches can be very restrictive and limit the company's vision, which must then be tailored to the skills and competencies of its employees. Training programmes should be designed to both address individual needs and complement the strategic direction of the organisation.

Research by the Chartered Management Institute (CMI) found that from an organisational perspective the need to drive company strategy was one of the most significant factors behind implementing management and learning development (MLD) programmes.

It is therefore surprising, considering the importance of this issue to senior management, that in a further report almost half of individuals said their organisation did not have a specific training and development budget in place. This would suggest that despite companies' acknowledgement of the importance of training programmes, many are unwilling to make the commitment when it comes to funding these schemes. Without sufficient support, MLD is unlikely to contribute to the organisation's long-term strategic goals and objectives.

## Achieving success

Considering corporate aims before the skills and competencies that will be needed to achieve them adds a new layer of complexity to providing facilities managers with learning and development opportunities. And bearing in mind that an organisation of thousands may have less than 10 individuals dedicated to staff training, it is understandable why increasing numbers of organisations in the FM sector may look for external help. Working with training providers and organisations like the CMI, as part of a strong and long-term partnership, can offer these companies help in aligning individual training needs with their overall goals and strategic purpose.

To achieve long-term success, a good-quality learning and development provider should work with the organisation to form a thorough understanding of its corporate culture. This is why it's unrealistic to expect sporadic courses and one-off training days to have any lasting effect on either the individual or their company. Before effective development programmes can be designed, there should be an assessment of the company's overriding mission and current competency levels.

This will identify the skills needed to achieve corporate goals and any gaps that are preventing the organisation from being able to fulfil its potential.

This knowledge can be acquired through a variety of different processes including appraisal reviews, staff attitude surveys, business performance indicators, individual training requests and talent management audits. For example, the Institute will often run a 360-degree training analysis. This is a questionnaire that collects information from a cross-section of individuals from one organisation. The results are then used to tailor learning and development programmes to align managerial development to what the organisation is trying to achieve.

Applying close analysis of skills and competencies will identify the barriers preventing the organisation from achieving its goals. These might be in the form of how the company is structured, its communication channels, its various processes or specific individual needs. For example, one particular manager may feel frustrated and de-motivated if they are unable to manage time efficiently. Another may be having difficulty in getting a team to work together.

Whatever the problem, the training provider should then take a holistic view and translate the needs of the individual into content, usually in the form of learning modules, which align the issues identified with the strategic direction of the company.

Too many organisations fail to take this approach to the content and materials they use to develop their managers.

Without a thorough understanding of what the company is trying to achieve, no training provider will be able to deliver a programme that delivers long-term performance and productivity gains.

#### Options for learning and development

In 2005, the CMI's research quashed the old myth that leaders are born rather than made. It found that the best managers were created through a combination of innate ability, job experience and in-house and external qualifications and MLD programmes. With this in mind, it is important that training schemes are structured in a way that allows managers to put theoretical learning into practice within the workplace. For example, by dividing modules with intervals by six to eight week application periods, managers have the opportunity to practice the leadership skills they have been taught.

During these application periods, it is useful that managers should be assessed and monitored as to how they are applying their new skills. This does not have to be done through a formal process. Appointing individuals with a mentor or work partner to discuss their progress will keep lessons learned during the modules fresh and consistent.

Training providers may even offer one-to-one telephone coaching, or train line managers with the skills to support individuals on the programme, so that the period in between formal training sessions is fully integrated with the daily roles and activities of individuals.

Applying the lessons learned in training and development programmes to daily activities and situations will enhance managers' commitment to the course and maximise its chances of making significant impact to the organisation's corporate goals. Offering individuals the opportunity to achieve recognised external professional or academic qualifications as part of the development programme may also be seen as a major benefit to individuals and, as a result, inspire high levels of commitment from individuals.

#### Qualifications

MLD programmes provide an excellent platform for organisations to offer their managers routes to various accreditations, such as NVQs or MBAs. These are not only highly beneficial to the organisation, which can use its managers' qualified status to raise its corporate profile to existing and potential customers, but also to the individual for whom the accolade will be recognised across the industry throughout their future career.

Ideally, the programme should have the flexibility to offer qualifications to managers across all levels of the organisation, from newly promoted supervisors to highly experienced chief executives. So while team leaders may opt to take specific modules that count towards a professional or academic qualification in the future, more senior managers will be looking to finalise this process by taking modules that offer the final credits needed to achieve their completed qualification.

In line with the content and delivery of the MLD programme, the qualifications package should also be aligned to corporate vision and the organisation's strategic direction. For example, if the initial assessment has identified a particular skills gap, training providers should aim to offer qualification modules that address this need.

#### Evaluation

MLD programmes and professional or academic qualifications have little value to the organisation if they do not deliver marked business performance improvement. Be it through lack of time or resources, too many organisations fail to appreciate the value of MLD because they don't pay enough attention to the initial and ongoing assessment of training needs or properly evaluate the results. Measuring the impact of learning is the only way to assess the quality of any development programme.

Research by the Institute, which questioned organisations on the business measures used to assess the importance of MLD programmes, found that achieving business objectives and improved profitability were most important. However, there was also recognition that these factors were difficult to measure so improved customer satisfaction and productivity tended to be more widely used. MLD providers should work with the organisation to establish the key measurable improvements to be achieved by individuals and the organisation.

Measurements might include increased sales, reduction in errors, reduced staff turnover or improved customer satisfaction. Whichever are applied, they should be directly aligned to the organisation's initial reasons for implementing the programme and, ultimately, look to achieving its strategic goals. There are various ways of measuring and evaluating the impact of MLD.

A balanced scorecard approach can be a useful way of evaluating the impact of development programmes on financial performance, internal operations, innovation and customer satisfaction. In addition, regular staff feedback, such as the CMI's 360 degree questionnaire, are a good way to track the progress of training schemes across the organisation and give individuals the opportunity to give feedback and feel included in the implementation of future development opportunities.

Ultimately, for development to deliver lasting change and have a significant impact to company strategy, it needs to be

ongoing. Coaching and assessment should continue after course modules are completed so that what is learned is applied and makes a valid contribution to the company's goals and its future success.

#### About the author

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