

Stimulating Employees' Motivation to Learn

A White Paper Abstract by:



and



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The Challenge

The Challenge – Defined

For many decades organizations have invested heavily in providing training to their employees. In 2003 U.S. companies spent an estimated \$54 billion on such training (*Training Magazine*, 2003 survey). Despite investing significant money, time and energy in their training programs, many organizations struggle with motivating employees to take advantage of these development opportunities. Classes are often only half full, and employees are lackadaisical about the opportunity.

As training and development professionals, it is important that we ask ourselves why that is. Why wouldn't employees be eager to participate in opportunities that advance learning, competency and, ultimately, opportunity? What might we be doing wrong?

As is so often the case, there is no single cause of this problem. Organizations and, yes, training functions too, are making four critical mistakes in planning, offering and managing their training activities. These mistakes are discussed below.

The Four Key Mistakes Training Functions Are Making

Few organizations are fully satisfied with their training activities. All too often, employees aren't excited about the opportunity to learn, and leaders are skeptical about the value of the training activities. To turn this around, organizations and their training functions must fundamentally alter the approach they take to planning and offering training and development activities, doing the following:

- (1) **Quit using training as a cure-all.** Inappropriately prescribing a training solution predictably leads to a lack of significant performance improvement, and eventually results in employees (and their managers) not being interested in corporate training. To avoid this, training functions must transition to becoming *development* functions. This means that they must do three things:
 - Not default to training as the solution to all development needs.
 - Have strong needs assessment skills and the discipline to always apply them before prescribing a solution, and
 - Have alternative forms of development in their tool kit

This does not mean that trainers must become experts in all of the various development options. Rather, they must develop an understanding of the

options and circumstances under which each is more and less appropriate, and be willing to suggest the appropriate solution even if it doesn't fall within their area of specialty. This would include recognizing when a situation requires a systemic solution.

- (2) **Ensure alignment between training activities and the strategic goals and priorities of the organization.** Employees and their leaders feel increased pressure to get done those tasks and objectives that they are being held immediately accountable for, and a corresponding need to forego activities that pull them away from that.

As a result, more than ever training functions must show the practical value of their offerings in growing employees' ability to work better, smarter, and more efficiently. To do this, training must:

- Clearly link to the organization's defined and articulated priorities
- Be consistent with its culture

In order to plan appropriate training offerings, training and/or human resource functions must work closely with senior leaders to identify and understand both the organization's near-term and its strategic objectives and priorities. It must then combine this with information portraying the strengths and weaknesses of the organization's talent and identify the organization's competency development needs – which will subsequently become the foundation of the training offering.

- (3) **Establish and promote the link between training, learning, performance, and opportunity.** Because employees are stretched to achieve their job requirements, training functions have to “compete” more than ever to get employees' time and attention – to motivate the employees to invest time in learning. An important factor in whether employees will be motivated to participate in and get the most from training and other developmental offerings has to do with whether the organization has successfully established a clear link between training, learning, performance and opportunity. If so, then the “opportunity cost” that the employee pays to attend a development activity is much more likely to be seen as worthwhile. The keys to establishing this link are:

- Systematically and diligently identify and prioritize employees' development needs
- Match development activities to the identified development need(s)
- Educate the employees' managers on the behavioral/performance improvements to watch for, encourage and reinforce

- Effectively evaluate the employees' performance in the specific skill(s) targeted for improvement, not in overall performance
 - Eliminate non-performance factors in awarding raises, promotions, etc.
- (4) **Make training more creative and relevant in format, content and delivery mechanism.** Times have changed, and so have the ways in which people gather and absorb information. We live in a world of *personalized experiences*, and those same expectations apply to training. We as training designers and deliverers must be willing to step away from the traditional ways in which we've designed and taught programs, and work to fit training and the mechanisms through which it is delivered to the diverse needs and preferences of our audience. We must identify and weight relevant factors such as those shown in the ***Learning Decision Model*** to make sound decisions regarding training format, content, timeframes, budgets, and measurement.

By taking the steps above, organizations can make great strides toward creating and offering development solutions that motivate employees to learn, and their leaders to promote that learning, yielding meaningful impact and value to the organization.

About OEi, LLC

OEi steers companies to maximum workforce performance by addressing three of the most influential drivers of performance – leadership skills, performance management processes, and work climate. For more than 15 years OEi consultants have helped U.S. and international companies meet their productivity and performance goals with practical, high-impact consulting, training, facilitation and change management services. Key service areas are:

- Leadership Development and Training
- Performance Management Strategy and Process Design
- Work Climate Assessment and Consulting

For more information on OEi and its services, go to www.oeintl.com

About Digital Latitudes

Digital Latitudes helps companies build E-Learning solutions that result in better-educated employees and customers, a better return on investment (ROI) than traditional classroom-based training provides, and a better learning experience for employees, customers and vendors. We specialize in:

- Interactive strategy
- User Experience Design
- E-Learning strategy and custom E-Learning course development

For more information on Digital Latitudes, visit www.digital-latitudes.com