

Top Trends in Training and Leadership Development

BY JULIE BOS



Whether your **organization** needs basic employee **training** or concentrated leadership **development**, these industry trends may contribute to your ultimate success.

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OUR EMPLOYEES are in place. Your benefits are on track. Your HR technology is up-to-date. And you've got an effective retention strategy. All indications are that your organization is poised for growth...right?

Not so fast. Without a plan for your existing talent — specifically, the right leadership development — your future may not look as bright as it could.

"The war for talent is on," says Catherine J. Rezak, chairman and co-founder of Paradigm Learning. "Although experts don't agree on the magnitude or exact future of the talent crisis, they do agree that the issues of attracting and retaining em-

ployees are growing more critical.

"The globalization of our business world makes skilled workers prime recruiting targets of companies around the world," she says. "And, as baby boomers retire and take their experience and leadership skills with them, there are fewer younger workers in line to take their place. The best organizations will attack the war for talent on many fronts as they source, hire, train and manage employees. Most importantly, they will make sure to provide leaders throughout the organization with the tools and the training to lead the charge."

The Lack of Leadership Development

Almost everyone can cite an example of a promising manager with a successful performance record who got promoted to a leadership role, then struggled and perhaps failed.

Why does this happen?

Often it's because the very factors that made these individuals successful as managers become liabilities as they became leaders. They often try to do too much themselves, instead of working through their teams. They micro-manage work activities and focus on details that are better left to others. They fail to shift their focus to a higher level and address issues that are important to their new roles.

Clearly, behaviors needed in an employee's current job are not necessarily the ones they'll need to be successful in the future.

For example, an employee may have been great at getting results, checking details, running programs and organizing projects—but that doesn't mean he will necessarily be an innovative leader who can think more strategically and abstractly.

Thus, HR is faced with the challenge of identifying those within the organization with leadership potential and helping them through the training and development phase to successfully make the transition.

"Every organization has different circumstances, but the predominant need is to look deeper into the organization — to identify leadership potential early on and to build that leadership capability that will be needed today, as well as in the future," says JoAnne McMillan, Ph.D., chief operating officer of Assess Systems, a Bigby Havis company.

That's why many organizations are closely examining their training and development efforts. They can't do it in a vacuum; they need to be aware of today's trends. Here's an overview of a few:

Trend #1: Changing Delivery Methods

It's no surprise to learn that technology is driving huge changes on the training and development front.

According to current estimates, 80 percent of today's instruction is still by live teachers, but about six percent of that is remote, mostly online. Computer-based training with no live instructor (e.g., CDs) accounts for 13 percent of training. About nine percent is by on-the-job, self-study or other means. It all demonstrates the growing range of options available to meet employees' needs and preferences.

Even though the current move in organizations has been to offer training on CDs, web-based training is not far behind.

"The delivery of training is definitely

changing," says Gary Schmidt, Ph.D., president of Saville Consulting. "Classroom training is no longer always the way to go. I'm seeing a lot more use of technology — being able to train at your own pace on the internet — which is cheaper and a lot easier on employees' schedules.

"There is a time and place for different types of training," he adds. "When you need to teach content, the Internet is a good choice; but if you need to practice skills, evaluate actual behavior and give feedback, you really need to get a group together."

Dr. McMillan agrees.

"Educators have known for years that people learn in different ways," she says. "Organizations should not abandon either face-to-face or self-paced training. You just need to carefully evaluate how you can leverage those different modalities for best use."

Rezak adds that, "Many of our clients have learned that when it's critical to engage in dialog and become committed to action, such as in a situation where major things are changing, a classroom learning experience allows for high levels of interaction and peer reinforcement."

Trend #2: Performance Consulting on the Rise

Today, very few organizations offer trainer-led classes as the only, or even major, solution to organizational challenges and opportunities anymore.

The emphasis is now being placed on providing a range of potential solutions, including in-depth needs assessments; training alternatives like coaching, planned change consultation and interventions; facilitated planning sessions; and large group processes. The training is often custom-designed around stated outcomes congruent with the business strategy.

"Organizations should think very strategically about their training and development offerings, making sure that each offering really supports the business goals," adds McMillan. "Every facet of HR — from how they select people, promote them, train them and evaluate them — should be focused on a clear target — those competencies needed to be effective in the role and which support the business strategy."

Trend #3: Faster Delivery and Just-in-Time Training

Time is money; and with the extreme pace of business today, many organizations want training delivered faster than ever.

"Instead of two-day training, they want it done in one day, and instead of one-day training, they now want half-day sessions," says Schmidt. "There's a huge push to be very con-

cise and to teach only what's required for improvement today — not what employees will need in ten years."

That doesn't mean that just-in-time training should be shelved.

"Organizations should definitely rely on just-in-time training to help meet their current business goals; but they also need training that helps prepare for tomorrow," states McMillan. "They need to find that balance — between immediate needs and those employees will need for the future."

Trend #4: Realization that Training Volume Does Not Equal Success

Say your organization had 90 percent compliance for employee training, but your CEO still complains about lack of performance efficiency — or worse, loss of talent to the competition. Could you still justify the training investment? Probably not.

"In the past, HR professionals assumed that providing training would automatically lead to greater productivity; but that assumption is under a lot more scrutiny now," says Schmidt. "HR needs to take a little more time to do its homework and do several things: identify the exact type of behavior change that leads to productivity and performance outcomes; identify which employees have those types of skills — or the potential to develop them; and select targeted training programs that will be a catalyst for that behavior change."

Trend #5: Increased Measurement of Impact through Results

According to a recent report by the Learning Resources Network, 77 percent of organizations measuring training success use reaction measures (i.e., learners' reaction to the training program); 36 percent use learning evaluations (i.e., measuring the learning that has occurred); 15 percent evaluate on-the-job behavior change as a result of the training program; and eight percent measure results (and how they affect the organization's bottom line).

Unfortunately, the last two levels are hard for organizations to measure and thus, are used infrequently. Regardless of the difficulty in getting solid measurements, organizations still want to see more results from their training.

"Look at any function within the organization — sales, marketing, finance — and they all have very hard metrics," says Schmidt. "And yet, it's much more difficult to come up with good, hard metrics demonstrating a return on a training investment. To do so, organizations need good measurement tools to know where they are starting, where they want to end up, and a good dashboard to allow them to see if

they are getting there.”

The good news is that there are plenty of quality tools out there — specifically, a combination of up-front assessment tools (to zero in on good leadership candidates), competency modeling (to identify employees’ leadership models), workshops and mentoring programs (to provide feedback and coaching) and 360-degree feedback tools (to verify that behavior changes are actually taking place).

Trend #6: Taking Succession Management to the Front Lines

Organizations today need frontline and middle managers who keenly understand the business and who accept leadership accountability for driving results, managing teams, developing talent and leading change.

“More and more organizations are recognizing the need to identify who has leadership potential in their frontline workers; and for middle management to identify and accelerate development of potential frontline leaders — not in the technical skills, but rather in the relationship skills,” says Jim Concelman, vice president of leadership development at Development Dimensions International. “This type of succession management has been happening at the executive levels for awhile, but now organizations are starting to recognize the necessity at lower levels, as well.”

Trend #7: Development Plans are Becoming Increasingly Individualized

Gone are the days in which training efforts were merely a catalog of classes. Today’s experts recommend interacting with potential internal and external customers to learn their individualize needs, and then develop custom content to help them achieve the desired outcome.

According to Dr. Schmidt, “We know that people are individuals, so it’s important to focus on individual development plans, and have quarterly follow-ups on those plans to make sure we’re seeing actual behavior change that demonstrates that plan is being followed.”

“We must also consider the areas the individual is motivated to improve on,” he says. “If someone hates conflict or hates crunching numbers, it would be really hard to develop someone’s skills there. But when we know what really motivates them and tie those motivators back to their performance outcomes, it makes training go much more smoothly.”

Trend #8: More Virtual Team Leadership

Another recent trend is the rise of virtual team leadership, particularly in the realm of IT



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Think about it: most large organizations have an IT group and more than a few have chosen to outsource various technology-support functions to other countries.

However, once the team is geographically dispersed, some organizations are having trouble working as a team.

The problem isn't necessarily technology. After all, there's plenty of video conferencing and web-based software that can help. The problem lies more with the lack of leadership skills — and the failure to charter a good team.

“To be effective, you need to get the team to agree on mutual objectives, boundaries, roles, communication and conflict resolution,” says Concelman. “That’s not a technology issue. It’s a matter of team leadership — the art of understanding team dynamics and using the right people skills.”

Organizations in this dilemma often need a two-fold solution. First is teaching people how to become better team leaders and understand the dynamics of an interdependent team. The second is training those leaders how to use their skills through distance technology.

Putting It All Together

Traditional classroom training is no longer the exclusive opportunity to learn. The age of training that includes training CDs, online learning and blended learning is exploding.

In the end, it all comes down to knowing what your organization needs, when it needs it and who will be leading it. By paying attention to the latest training and development trends, you can better leverage your training efforts to make the largest possible impact on your organization for years to come. ■



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