

## **Forum for discussion: 'A tough economy creates a strong need for learning'**

**14<sup>th</sup> October 2009.**

*WDR invited a number of Learning & Development representatives from a wide range of business sectors in the South East to a Forum to discuss the most effective ways of delivering the right training in a downturn and how to achieve efficiencies in training in a tough economy.*

*Some interesting experiences were shared and best practice advice given, which was appreciated by all. Interestingly, although attendees were from such an array of organisations, the key issues were very much the same. There was a strong sense of organisations now being forced to focus on what training is really necessary and keeping in line with minimum budgets. At the same time, many organisations have been hugely resourceful and creative within their Learning and Development departments.*

Christina Dennis, Director of WDR commented on the morning event: *"Many attendees found it helpful to discuss the importance of aligning training strategies with business needs and objectives which is crucial for demonstrating focus and ROI."*

*A summary of the points that were discussed can be found below.*

### **Best practice ideas that were shared which allow efficiencies and delivery of the "right" training:**

- New methods of learning that have worked well for some of the group included webinars and video recordings from organisational leaders on Leadership Skills.
- Bite-Sized Learning is seen as more effective with people that are time constrained.
- Encourage any learning to be recognised – qualifications, certificates etc.
- Look for innovative ways of delivering training that does not take employees away from their work for too long and is low cost – eg: 'lunch & learn sessions' and 'master classes'.
- Upskilling trainers into consultants enabling them to become more strategically focussed and aligned with business needs.
- Maximising the use of internal resources using key individuals who know the business better than anyone.
- Cost effective methods of training can include Coaching & Mentoring, Experiential Learning and Train the Trainer.
- Combine learning methods such as e-learning with classroom based as everyone learns differently.
- Use job specifications to help align what the "right" training is for your staff in their current and future roles.
- If you run internal courses, in order to manage cancellations or "no shows", be assertive and explain to managers the impact this has on the way the courses are run & how it affects the experience of other course delegates.

### **Learning technologies that were discussed:**

- e-Learning is great for reinforcing compliance, CPD etc as it is more important than ever.
- The right new technologies that deliver efficiencies are a good investment.
- Any e-Learning solution must be aligned with business objectives.

- Worth considering that a number of organisations have field based workers – not all of whom will be familiar with technology or have access to it.
- Although e-Learning can be very effective when delivered properly it requires a lot of discipline as it is self-directed learning.
- The right Learning Technologies including e-Learning and Learning Management Systems (LMS) help enable processes, massively reduce administration time and allow L&D to focus on strategy.
- An effective LMS becomes a central repository of information. This will avoid any duplication and will greatly improve communication and avoid individual ‘silos’ within the organisation.

#### **Learning & Development in relation to Business objectives:**

- In a downturn all delegates agreed more than ever that L&D must be more involved with their organisations business needs.
- Job uncertainty can hinder employee motivation. Effective learning is required to maintain motivation and job satisfaction.
- L&D Teams are now smaller so the right learning is required more than ever. Efficiencies are critical for smaller L&D teams that are expected to deliver an even more effective learning solution that is clearly aligned with business objectives.
- In order to align L&D with business needs there must be a clear strategy to support talent for succession planning.
- In a downturn key skills will really impact the success of an organisation.
- Any investment in learning must be demonstrable by way of Return on Investment (ROI).
- All learning has to be demonstrated as being cost effective.
- Managers’ primary responsibility is to lead their team and provide them with the right tools, processes and procedures – all of which require Learning and Development.
- It was agreed unanimously that in order to receive funding and recognition of the L&D function– getting buy-in from the Executive Team was essential.
- Investing in People Management Skills for managers – crucially Performance Management.

*We asked the forum attendees to complete a short questionnaire to give another opportunity to share any further thoughts or ideas. Some of these results are detailed below:*

#### **What type of learning has achieved the best results for you to date?**

- On the job training and bite sized learning.
- Coaching and mentoring.
- Learning from peers.
- Personality assessments and blended learning.
- Classroom based.

#### **What have you learnt from this forum?**

- Our company has the same issues as everyone else.
- It’s essential to link training to business critical skills.
- It’s given the opportunity to think about issues and reflect on them.
- Useful suggestions about e-learning which is something that’s not been looked at before.
- New approaches to identify capabilities of own staff.