

learning & development

Managing systems, practices and activities targeted at developing the capability of an organisation's workforce

Learning and development (L&D) activities allow organisations to adapt, compete, excel, innovate, produce, be safe, and improve service. As organisations strive to reach strategic goals in both competitive and changing environments, differentiation on the basis of the skills, knowledge, and motivation of their workforce takes on increasing importance.

suggested actions

- **analyse individual and organisational needs** The delivery of appropriate learning options is essential to ensure training initiatives meet genuine needs in employee development and training budgets deliver maximum value. From the top down, corporate strategy should inform what capabilities will be required to reach the vision for future success. For example, a need for great customer satisfaction may result in training targeted at customer service skills. From the bottom up, a Training Needs Analysis (TNA) can be used to gather information regarding where training is required. TNA's can include data collection through performance reviews, focus groups, interviews or surveys as well as L&D information management systems that provide timely reminders of regulatory compliance requirements.
- **structure learning activities** The retention of learning and transfer from training to the job is related to how the training is delivered. Through formal means, optimal training delivery engages participants through interactivity with participants (e.g. ongoing assessment), appropriate amounts of content (e.g. not overloading participants), and passionate training facilitation. Informal means of learning should be encouraged and resourced considering the 70:20:10 training rule-of-thumb. That is, 70% of learning generally comes from on-the-job experience, 20% from feedback and coaching, and 10% from formal courses and reading. However, on-the-job learning needs to be facilitated by creating opportunities to practice, reflect on, and share learnings.
- **leaders model learning** Research has consistently demonstrated the importance of leadership for building a 'learning' culture in the workplace. Managers should lead by example to both understand and demonstrate best practice (e.g. regularly address their own development needs) and to facilitate on-the-job learning for others. Manager KPIs and rewards for people development can further encourage modelling.
- **integrate learning practices** It is important to view learning and development as a 'system' and not a one-time 'training' event. What happens in an organisation before, during, and after training affects the transfer of training into practice. To reinforce a learning culture, integrate learning and development into core workplace processes such as performance appraisal (e.g. development requirements), rewards and recognition (e.g. spotlight on staff successes), recruitment (e.g. attitude to learning in selection) and onboarding (e.g. highlighting avenues for development upfront).
- **evaluate** Evaluating training using multiple metrics will ensure training initiatives are relevant, effective and delivering value for money. Questions to ask include: How appropriate is the investment in relation to needs? How well are we meeting our needs? Are we achieving the desired outcome? Where possible, try to evaluate the impact on multiple individual and organisational performance criteria. For example, support for safety training could result in less accidents at work and decreased compensation claims.

case study

Like many in the local government sector, Wyong Shire Council has been facing a number of important challenges, not the least of which was turning around a multi-million dollar budget deficit. They embraced a new corporate strategy and large organisational transformation that emphasised the need to cultivate a motivated, capable, educated and qualified workforce. Wyong Shire Council's Organisational Development Partner, Linda Sutton, shared some of the Learning and Development (L&D) initiatives at the heart of the changes.

Firstly, Wyong aligned their L&D framework to the long term vision of the council, enabling them to justify budgets for L&D initiatives that contributed to this overall vision. Nevertheless, Wyong Shire Council wanted to balance the strategic needs of the organisation with a desire to "create more career opportunities and a better educated community as 45% of the Wyong community don't have post school qualifications". They focussed on accredited learning including apprenticeships and traineeships, with benefits of required supervisory involvement, a transferable qualification for employees, and financial rebates provided by the federal and state governments.

Secondly, Wyong's L&D Team partnered effectively with different arms of the business to deliver a Training Needs Analysis (TNA). This included regulatory compliance training requirements, professional development initiatives that met strategic needs, and specific training needs of teams as provided by individual supervisors. The TNA identified training needs consistent across the organisation, as well as enabling Wyong to implement budgets fairly and accurately to deliver the most effective training solutions.

Thirdly, Wyong Shire Council linked their L&D strategy into succession planning and individual performance appraisals, as well as linking leaders' performance appraisals to the L&D of their team to help embed a learning culture.

Linda acknowledges that "it is very tough to put a dollar sign to return on investment", however, she believes these initiatives have contributed significantly to Wyong Shire Council's success in delivering a sustainable financial surplus. Other key success indicators include an improvement of 14% in staff satisfaction with Wyong's commitment to ongoing training and development, as measured in their regular Staff Engagement Survey with Voice Project, securing the NSW Training Award as large employer of the year, and numerous individual industry awards (National Sports Turf Association Award for an apprentice landscaper).

useful resources

- Australian Institute of Management (2013). **Learning and Development in the Public Sector: Discussion Paper** - <http://www.aim.com.au/research>.
- **Australian Public Service Framework for Learning and Development** - <http://www.apsc.gov.au/publications-and-media/current-publications/building-capability>.
- Batterbee, G. **Learning & Development Best Practice** - <https://www.trainingjournal.com/whitepaper/learning-development-best-practice>.
- Salas, E., Tannenbaum, S. I., Kraiger, K., & Smith-Jentsch, K. A. (2012). **The science of training and development in organizations: What matters in practice**. *Psychological science in the public interest*, 13(2), 74-101.
- Leskiw, S. & Singh, P. (2007). **Leadership development: learning from best practices**, *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 28(5), 444 – 464.