



A Publication on  
**Strategy,**  
**Innovation,**  
**Communication**  
and **Change**



TRANSF

**ORMERS**

## Corporate Learning in the Age of Social Distancing

By Omagbitse Barrow FCA

### Overview

With the widespread contagion of Corona Viruses (COVID-19) that we have experienced in 2020 and the possibility of future pandemics in future, even if we are able to find a vaccine and efficacious treatment for COVID -19 (which may take several months or up to a year), lock-downs of varying degrees and social distancing will become a part of our work culture in the immediate to medium term (now - 2years or even longer). Organizations therefore need to be cognizant of this and begin to re-think their employee development approaches based on this reality.

### Key Issues

In addition to the obvious limitation to physical meetings that this portends, organizations will be faced with the following issues, considerations and goals:

- ❑ **Affordability:** The attendant recession from the pandemic challenges us to ask: Can we afford to continue to retain our workforce as presently composed, and for whatever workforce we can retain, can we afford to continue to train and equip them?
- ❑ **The Innovation Imperative:** To get us through the recession, we need to innovate, and this requires a significant investment in learning, so we certainly cannot afford not to invest in employee development.
- ❑ **Technology:** Do we have the right technology and tools to give us the learning we need, and can our employees use the technology appropriately? Are there



local providers who can provide us this technology and platforms to use? What investments do we need to make in technology for our organization and for employees working remotely? What is the quality of internet infrastructure available and how does it affect our plans?

- **Mindset:** How do we deal with the mind-set shift from physical training to virtual learning especially in organizations where physical training is considered a “perk” more than anything else? How do we facilitate in the mind-set change that is required?
- **Quality:** How do we ensure the right quality of content and delivery, and how can we use this as an opportunity to improve the quality of our learning providers and content - to move from “contractors of training” to quality training partners?
- **Context:** Can we find service providers that can give us the local content and context that we need?
- **Development Time:** How rapidly can we develop virtual learning programs and begin to deploy them once we decide to do so? Can we find partners who understand the issues and work with us?
- **Impact:** Can we create virtual learning programs that will still give us the impact we want and potentially create a long-term paradigm shift away from the more expensive (and un-sustainable) physical training to which we have become accustomed?

## Options Available

While reflecting on these, organizations should be mindful of the options available as follows:

- **Virtual, Facilitator-Led Workshops:** These are workshops delivered as live events via webinars to participants in various locations. The Virtual class is facilitator led with video, audio and screen-sharing options available. This is the closest you can get to a physical class. Learners can interact with the facilitator, interact with each other, take quizzes, polls and share case studies and information together. Certificates of Completion/Competence will be issued.
- **Self-Paced E-Learning:** This could either be off-the shelf, on-demand courses that are available on public Learning Management Systems (LMS); customized courses on internal LMSs or a hybrid where the organization purchases courses and makes them available on their in-house LMS. Self-paced learning means that individuals can access the courses at their own



pace and will not have the benefits of interaction with a facilitator/colleagues in a live environment. It allows for tests and assessments and for the LMS Administrator (L&D Department) to track attendance and participation. Certificates of Completion/Competence can also be issued. Content will be delivered using podcasts, audio, videos, animations and other Interactive E-Learning tools. Learners can go back to material weeks and months after to learn some more.

- **Blended Learning:** Organizations can create the opportunity to combine the Virtual Facilitator Led Programs with Self-Paced E-Learning to enjoy the best of both worlds. Shorter classes with Facilitators (which would be better considering our internet capacity and power issues) and then extended learning on the self-paced program after, with feedback and engagements thereafter in the Virtual Facilitator-Led Classroom.
- **E-Coaching:** Organizations may also engage trainers and consultants as e-coaches to support learners in structured one-on-one or small group coaching conversations to deal with practical work challenges and learning needs in addition to the aforementioned using virtual meeting platforms.

These options and combinations are by no means exhaustive, but the most important thing is that organizations and individuals must brace up to the realities ahead of us and start to think and act fast in response to these challenges.

The workplace has changed, and the way we learn must also change. Difficult times like these require a high degree of innovation, therefore pulling the plug on employee development is certainly not an option. Rather, we should be pushing for more learning and more employee development by exploring some of the issues raised and the options available.

One of the clear advantages of this paradigm shift is that hopefully organizations and employees will start to value training for what it really should be - an important tool for achieving organizational strategy and not just something that we all do as a perk; to get time off work; earn a travel allowance; or to ramp up the certificates in our closets and CVs (which are in some way useful).

In time, employees who participate in such programs will develop what Prof. Pat Utomi of the Center of Values in Leadership in Lagos, Nigeria describes as the “pedagogy of the determined” (the pursuit of self-development by those who are determined to succeed) and embrace the imperative of micro-learning (using learning to solve day to day problems).



## References:

1. “Basics of E-Learning”, Hartley and Sekhon, ASTD Press, USA, 2014
2. “Human Resources Management for Your Small Business”, Omagbitse Barrow, Be Better Books, Abuja, 2015
3. “Keep your People Learning When You Go Virtual, Peshkam and Petriglieri, Harvard Business Review, April 2020
4. “Pedagogy of the Determined”, Pat Utomi, YouTube, April 2020

Enquiries in relation to this publication may be made to Learning Impact NG, Abuja Nigeria via email: [info@learningimpactmodel.com](mailto:info@learningimpactmodel.com) or to the author at [gbitse.barrow@learningimpactmodel.com](mailto:gbitse.barrow@learningimpactmodel.com) + 234 805 195 3276