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TRANSF

ORMERS

Annual Development Planning

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The Challenges

Many organizations make investments in employee development without planning these interventions properly and linking them to the organization's strategy and performance goals. This leads to a waste of resources, and an inability to justify investments in people development that eventually leads to slashed training budgets during periods of economic downturn, declines in performance, productivity, and innovation.

Sometimes, employees are just pooled together to participate in trainings in areas that may not be at all aligned to their specific learning needs. For others, training is just a perk - a reason to be off work for a few days, travel outside the country for a holiday or earn a travel allowance. In some organizations especially in our not so efficient public sector, some corrupt Heads of Departments pretty much nominate themselves and their privileged cronies for every training that is available (whether it relates to their work or not) only for the pecuniary benefits that they will get.

Also, some organizations send the same people on the same courses (perhaps slightly disguised by different names) year in year out. They are not able to track the previous interventions employees have received, no one is held accountable for previous learning investments and the waste of resources continues unabated.

There is also a huge tilt towards traditional classroom training to address a lot of performance gaps that could have been otherwise addressed through e-learning, mentoring, a job rotation or even a simple job aid (reputed to have the highest ROI compared to other learning interventions). Again, organizations spend so much on these classroom workshops and do not get the returns that they expect.

Finally, but not exhaustively, the process for development planning for many organizations is long, tedious, and prone to a lot of errors and short cuts. For larger organizations that are highly dispersed with reporting lines across state and national lines, the important conversations that should take place between employees and their managers hardly ever take place. Managers just struggle to tick the boxes, fill the forms, and ship them off to the HR or L&D Team days after the deadlines have passed.

The same thing happens in even smaller-sized organizations, where the L&D administrators often struggle to collate these manual forms, make sense of the various terms that Line Managers and their team members have used to describe their learning needs and then finally collate them together to create a Learning & Development Plan for that year for the organization.

While all of these are going on manually, significant man hours are lost, the quality of engagement is diminished, and the final output is slower and fraught with generalizations, short cuts, and errors. The result is a Learning & Development Plan (L&D Plan) that often does not speak to the needs of the adult learners in line with the best principles and practices of andragogy, and therefore does not create the changes in performance and results that learning is meant to create.

According to Malcolm Knowles' Adult Learning Theory which is the fundamental principle that should guide all organizational learning programs (andragogy), adults learn best and achieve the highest return on investment or expectation when the learning intervention is properly aligned with their needs, delivered just in time to meet those needs, and leads to the solution of problems/challenges/opportunities that they currently face.

So, our goal is to deploy processes that will ensure that we can identify learning needs that align to strategic and performance goals; collate and aggregate such needs without errors and unnecessary generalizations; develop a system for tracking previous learning interventions and their impact; and provide useful information for Line Managers and their teams to have enriched conversations about their learning needs and goals.

Start from the Competencies

The correct place to start with your learning and development planning is to have a well-crafted and strategy-aligned competencies framework. Competencies are the demonstrable knowledge, skills and behaviours required to succeed in every role in your organization. A Competency Framework (CF) spells out these competencies and is the culmination of a scientific process of identifying and codifying the predictors of success in any role.

So, rather than just saying that “my team member needs to improve in getting people to focus and deliver their tasks”, the CF will standardize the terms and language used to something like “my team member needs to improve in leading results”. The Competency is “Leading Results” and it will be well described within the context of the organization and the specific role to which it applies.

When Line Managers are requested to engage with their team members to identify their learning needs, the competencies will be a reference point that will be standardized for all people carrying out a specific job/role and will be consistent in language and style across various roles in the organization.

Assessing and Evaluating Competencies

Some organizations decide to carry out a baseline evaluation of competencies at the inception followed by periodic evaluations – yearly or otherwise. There are several ways to achieve this. You can run a Competency Assessment Center; Implement Competency-Based Tests/Interviews; or request employees to carry out a self-assessment of their competencies that will be validated by their Line Managers (Validated Self Assessments).

The Assessment Center is the most sophisticated way to go about this, but it requires significant time, expertise and will cost much more. Competency Tests and Interviews are effective and will be less demanding than the Assessment Center. The validated self-assessments are the fastest and most cost-effective means of achieving this, but because the inferences are largely subjective (based on what the employee and Line Manager feel), the outcomes may not be as accurate.

For organizations who want to really become learning organizations, our experience suggests that they start with a Competency Test or Assessment Center or a combination thereof at the inception to create a baseline. This is used to create the first year’s L&D Plan. Subsequently, they use the validated self-assessments each year to gauge where employees are and select interventions for the ongoing annual learning and development plans. After a few years they carry out another set of Competency Tests/Interviews or assessment Center to reset the baseline and the cycle of annual validated self-assessments continue from there.

Use Agile Automation

Many organizations still carry out this process of annual L&D Planning manually and that can be a daunting and ineffective task. Many of the Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems that exist have options for capturing competencies and carrying out competency evaluations, but because of the size and complexity of some ERPs, most organizations who have them struggle to use them to achieve

this and end up with either a fully manual system or a hybrid that uses on-line survey tools on the front-end and plenty of manual analysis at the back end.

Organizations who are faced with these challenges are keen to embrace smaller and more agile automated solutions that can either stand alone for this purpose or are integrated into a larger HR Information System (HRIS) or ERP via Application Programming Interfaces (APIs).

With the automated solutions, the competencies can be captured at the back end, mapped to the job roles, and related to the organizational chart and the specific individuals to whom those competencies relate and their Line Managers. The results of the baseline assessments can also be captured on the automated system at the inception regardless of the type of baseline carried out.

On an annual basis, employees can use a drop-down menu to carry out a self-assessment of their competencies, provide a numerical rating and have their Line Managers validate those assessments.

L&D administrators can query for the areas where the biggest deficiencies or competency gaps exist for each employee, pool employees with similar competency gaps into interventions, assign interventions (classroom training, eLearning, mentoring etc. with their costs) and create an annual L&D Plan with relative ease and comfort that can now be presented for executive approval and implemented.

An automated system will have evidence of previous validated assessments and interventions that were implemented that will ensure that for future assessments and L&D plans, this history can be properly reflected – increasing accountability and ensuring that we do not waste resources on repeating learning investments.

An effective system for L&D Planning that is driven by competencies; includes an assessment of competencies and is automated will certainly help in addressing some of the challenges that organizations face with planning their learning and development investments each year.

As we all strive to create learning organizations where there is a direct relationship between learning investments and strategic/performance goals, we must recognize the cardinal role that L&D Planning plays and ensure that our L&D planning systems reflect these best practices that we have described.

