A Quick Guide to Learning & Development
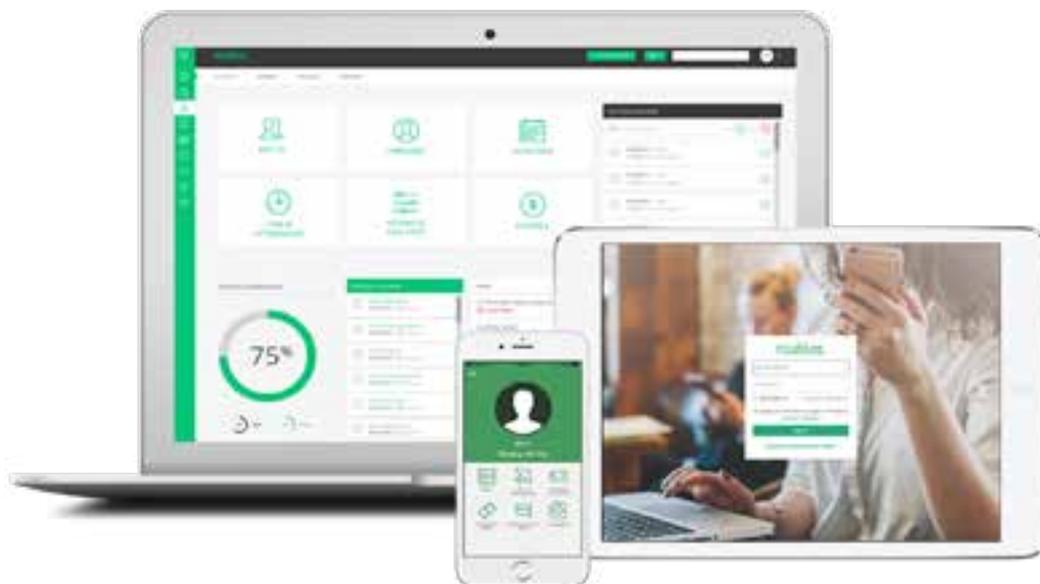
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Introduction

In the words of John F Kennedy, "Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other."

Whether it be through formal training, or from their co-workers or mentors, there are so many ways of learning and growing to help your employees reach their potential as better leaders and be more effective in their roles. However, in a survey of almost 4,300, 74% believed they weren't reaching their potential in the workplace. What's more, only 12% of employees who participate in training actually transfer the skills they learned to their job. So, while it's important to leave space for employees to explore and learn on their own, employers should also be actively engaging employees in learning and development in a more formal sense and finding opportunities for them to practice new skills every day.

Many workplaces are falling short when it comes to achieving their company goals – often a result of a lack of training and a lack of understanding of its importance. Roubler's Quick Guide to Learning and Development aims to provide a well-rounded summary of this very broad area. This brief guide will help elucidate what learning and development is and why it's important before covering how to conduct a Training Needs Analysis (TNA), how to plan training in your workplace for the best chance of success, record keeping and creating a learning culture.

Justifying the Investment

Why is learning and development important? What do you gain from training your employees?

To begin with, 1 in 3 employees will leave their organisation within a year of employment. Employee turnover, above all else, is expensive. Global Industry Analyst Josh Bersin estimates the loss of an employee could cost as much as twice their annual salary. In addition to the cost of hiring a new employee, there are the financial costs of onboarding, lost productivity, and loss of engagement from other employees. While 56% of HR managers believe training and development is essential to business facilitation, there is a gap between what should and what is being done to improve training opportunities. What's more, 7 in 10 employees say their decision to resign from a business is impacted by a lack of opportunities for development.

It's well known that employee retention is tightly connected to employee satisfaction; employees will not persevere with a job they dislike. Learning and development doesn't need to be time consuming, but if the only time an employee is trained is as a part of their onboarding package, you may not be doing the best thing for them or your business. Studies show a relationship between workplace learning and development, and job satisfaction: employees who receive on-the-job training are 30% more excited to work.

Learning and development is good for employer branding, too. Promoting your workplace training and development opportunities puts your business in an enviable position to attract more qualified, driven applicants for new positions, while broadening your internal pool of potential applicants.

In addition, it quashes the "I'm not trained for that, so it's not my problem," mentality as employees are flexible enough to excel in multiple areas. This prevents stagnation and means employees are less likely to leave jobs incomplete. In all, well-trained- employees are happier, more engaged, productive, and less likely to leave, saving your company money and time.

Levels of Responsibility

No man is an island, so it follows that learning and development processes are a team effort involving various levels of an organisation. The following is a brief outline of who is responsible for various parts of learning and development activities and their outcomes:

The organisation: Support at the top is essential if you want to see any level of success in your program. The business' strategic objectives should align with your training, and there should be a willingness to invest in the development of employees.

Line managers: Line managers are accountable for the performance of their teams, and as such want to see them succeed. However, beyond this, they are on the front line with employees and have the ability to identify their skills and knowledge gaps. They are also best positioned to continuously monitor success and improvement and encourage continual learning.

HR Department: HR departments often oversee all learning and development activities, whether via a dedicated Learning and Development team or an individual manager. They are often responsible for coordinating many aspects of the learning and development process, from analysing training needs, to the design, structure, and final delivery of programs. In addition, there are also training instructors. Whether in-house or outsourced, these specialists are crucial in communicating the material successfully.

They are also responsible for demonstrating and promoting the value of these activities.

Smaller businesses may not be able to justify a dedicated learning and development team within the HR department, so this responsibility may fall with line mangers.

Employees: They are accountable for undertaking any prescribed training and using new skills in their role. They should be encouraged to highlight potential areas in which they feel they need additional training or development to their line manager.

Planning for Learning & Development

Planning for learning and development in the short and long term is the best way to ensure that physical and financial resources are well managed, and outcomes can be measured. It helps organisations avoid a constant stream of responsive and expensive ad-hoc training and integrate learning and development opportunities into the wider HR strategy, business planning and goal-setting process.

Timing

Ideally, learning and development should be continuous. Imagine being an IT expert in Windows XP; you'd feel out of your depth, uncomfortable, and would struggle to assist people with Windows 2018 without in-depth training. However, constant training isn't something that is practical for some companies. However, it should always occur when:

- an employee begins work. This is also known as "on-boarding," and teaches new recruits the basics of the organisation: cultural norms, expectations, rules, and procedures and ensures they learn new systems and software.
- an employee moves into a role that requires new skills, for example for a promotion.
- organisational goals shift. This would require employees to be briefed and trained on the new skills they require.

- new technology is introduced or working methods are changed to become more efficient.
- an employee's lack of skills is resulting in poor performance.
- an employee wishes to perform to a higher standard in their position and develop their career.

Pay & Time Off

According to the Fair Work Ombudsman in Australia, if an employee is required to attend a training course, then you must pay them for their time. However, if training is a voluntary optional extra, this does not have to be paid.

If an employee wants to take advantage of other self-initiated learning and development activities, it is up to your organisation as to whether study leave or assistance is granted. Giving employees time off or allowances will likely be beneficial for employee morale and staff retention. However, regardless of how you choose to handle this, you should include details in a relevant policy (e.g. Leave Policy including Study Leave or Professional Development and Training).

Conducting a Training Needs Analysis (TNA)

Conducting a training needs analysis helps you consider the types of skills and knowledge needed in your workforce, and what kind of

training would be suitable. It should follow the job analysis and design process.

Basically, it identifies where there may be gaps between the current skills of your employees and the ideal competencies you'd like to see. Once identified, you can decide whether this is something that can be rectified in training, or whether it requires discipline or communication with employees about underperformance. Recognising these training needs helps you to make changes for a more successful organisation.

There is no one-size-fits-all recipe for conducting a training needs analysis: it should be specific to your organisation. As a basic guide to conducting a TNA, HR Managers should follow these steps:

- Analyse the job in its current form and what it may look like in the future
- Analyse the person's current skills and knowledge
- Decide on the skills and knowledge gaps
- Identify training solutions that meet these needs (it's useful to consider the three levels below)
- Evaluate performance after training

Three levels of a TNA

Organisational: This considers where resources should best be invested in learning and development activities to help achieve organisational strategic goals and objectives. It incorporates things such as an organisation's culture, HR objectives and external influences.

Task / job level: This considers which specific skills, knowledge, and abilities are needed when performing particular tasks. It looks at the position description and job analysis to determine the standards of work to be produced.

Individual level: This looks at the actual performance of an individual compared to expected performance. You can then examine whether training is the right course of action to fix performance issues.

Creating Learning & Development Plans

A personal development plan (often known as a PDP) helps managers and employees to identify the short and long-term requirements for advancing an employee's skills and knowledge.

When preparing personal development plans, the emphasis should be on employee self-development. The plans should include:

- Development objectives
- Learning and development activities to address development objectives
- Steps associated with development initiatives
- Resources required
- Timetable for development
- Commitment (financial and otherwise) required by the organisation
- Methods for measuring success against stated objectives

A good development plan will include a description of the development activities initiated to achieve the skills and knowledge requirements or development objectives.

These activities could include any of the following:

• On-the-job training
• Internal training courses
• External training courses
• Online learning programs
• Coaching and mentoring
• Shadowing or understudying
• Job rotation
• Job enrichment (more challenging tasks) or job extension (widening the range of tasks and opportunities)
• Vocational or tertiary education, e.g. postgraduate study
• Industry professional accreditation programs
• Attending conferences and seminars
• Work-based projects

Ask your employees about their goals, aspirations and how they like to learn and create a development plan which aligns with organisational and employee objectives. You can then select relevant learning and development initiatives that are industry-relevant and cater to your employee's learning style, whether it is auditory, or hands on practical experience.

It is a time-consuming task, but it's worth spending time creating a plan for success and monitoring progress over time. More qualified employees driving their own professional development are an asset to your company and make for more satisfied workers.

Types of Learning & Development Activities

Matching training and development and development activities to specific employees works like a jigsaw puzzle. It's important to match activities to the learning styles employees prefer, and offer activities that reflect the diversity of your workforce. Remember: employees who attend a type of activity that they don't respond to are not likely to benefit from the training.

Consider using 'blended' learning, wherein you combine online and offline activities to maximise engagement and break from the monotony of one type of learning.

Classroom & Workshop Training

This involves face-to-face training either in-house or in specialised training centres. It takes employees away from the noise of their workplace and provides a human element that can be missing from other activities.

E-learning

E-learning is useful as it can be self-paced based on the capabilities of the learner. It involves online learning courses, which are often interactive, including practice scenarios for learners to work through. While online options are beginning to gain popularity, companies often use e-learning to augment rather than replace classical in-house training in the 'Blended Learning' technique mentioned above.

Games

Using games to teach new materials can be more engaging than traditional activities, as it provides a structure and reward system. Learners who are incentivised to succeed often learn without realising.

While using games is a relatively new concept in corporate learning and development, it yields results. UC-Denver Business School found people who played learning games resulted in 11% higher factual knowledge than those who used other ways to learn. What's more, while playing games, it's acceptable to get things wrong, or lose, providing a less hostile environment for getting things wrong and fostering a 'try again' culture of learning.

Coaching & Mentoring

Mentoring

Mentoring works on a more long-term basis, emphasising the career progression of an individual as opposed to short-term skill learning. Mentors are often someone who has been in the field for a long time and have a wealth of personal experience to draw from. They can act as a sounding board, share their experiences, challenge the mentee to grow, and generally guide the mentee throughout their career development. They can help with:

- Technical skills: the practical application of the mentee's proficient expertise

- Personal effectiveness skills: developing communication, interpersonal, and self-management skills required in the workplace
- Business skills: expected of any professional in a business environment
- Leadership skills: which develop the ethical, governance, planning and decision-making skills required to realise potential as a leader

A mentee can be any person – ranging from a graduate recruit to a senior manager – with an identified career development need.

Coaching

Coaching's main focus is on guiding an employee to refine and improve an area of their working life. Often these goals are achieved within a set time frame designated by the coach. Just like your high school rugby coach, feedback is offered to improve performance. Coaching can be one-on-one, team coaching, executive coaching, or business coaching. While techniques may differ, coaches generally ask questions and challenge the coachee to learn from their own resources.

Coaching techniques see a workplace as a classroom, full of learning opportunities. There's a lot of hands-on learning, supervised by the coach or experienced person.

A coach can be:

- The coachee's direct line manager or a supervisor with extensive knowledge in the field.

- A dedicated internal coach. This could be a line manager or a human resources (HR) specialist.
- An external person specialising in coaching.

The selection of the coach will be dependent upon the coaching need, while the coachee is someone who has been identified by leadership as possessing a need for new knowledge or skills in their job.

Coaching is generally suitable to address the following needs:

- Management development
- Leadership development and grooming for senior positions
- Helping technical experts develop better interpersonal or managerial skills
- Developing an individual's potential and providing career support
- Developing a more strategic perspective after a promotion to a more senior role
- Handling conflict situations so they are resolved effectively

Not all employees are suitable for coaching interventions. Some lack the self-awareness or emotional intelligence required to be successfully coached. In addition, some learning and development needs aren't suited to coaching. For example, completing repetitive tasks, or particular specialist skills which require practice.

Tracking Learning & Monitoring Success

Keeping track of the learning and development activities of your staff is vital. It's the business's responsibility to ensure that staff have the requisite training and certificates required for their position. In certain industries, failure to ensure this may result in a penalty. As such, it is always better to err on the side of caution by remaining abreast of the relevant laws for your business. There is no such thing as having too much data!

Your learning and development records are your key to understanding the success of the activities on a group and individual level. Group statistics such as attendance and overall productivity gains are important in understanding how well initiatives are working. Individually, an employee may have completed training in order to remedy a performance issue. If their performance has not improved, alternative actions may have to be considered.

What Records to Keep

As a matter of best practice, records of learning and development activities should include:

- Training date
- Training provider
- Evidence of employee attendance
- Any relevant certificates/licenses/evidence obtained
- Cost of training

- Whether the employee or employer paid for the training
- Results (if applicable) of training e.g. test scores
- Date for renewal or next training course

Keeping a record of learning and development activities can help when it comes to financial reporting and accountability: the records can be used for analysing return on investment and managing learning and development budgets.

Record Keeping Methods

E-learning platforms & Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS or HRM)
You can record learning and development activities directly on the e-learning platform (if you are using it) and in an employee profile in your organisation's HRIS or HCM. These systems may be linked to the payroll function where learning and development information is used to calculate higher rates of pay for employees with specific skills.

Excel spreadsheets
Whilst not the most technical of recording systems, don't underestimate the power of the humble Excel spreadsheet in keeping track of learning and development activities. However, you must ensure that maintenance of the spreadsheet is conducted when employees undertake new activities and include all relevant fields mentioned above. Passwords and security measures must be put in place to maintain confidentiality.

Establishing a Learning Culture

Workforce culture is a major component in retaining talent who love to learn. Establishing a healthy, knowledge-hungry learning culture creates more innovative, driven employees. But it does take time.

Promoting Learning and Development

Promoting learning and development initiatives is an organisation-wide enterprise, however line management is the best place to start. Make professional development a very visible and integral part of performance management but prioritising it in the process and offering opportunities to document plans and successes.

If you have the means at your disposal, also consider using the organisation's intranet to promote learning and development by (a) having a dedicated learning and development portal; and (b) publicising the achievements of staff members in learning and development.

If your organisation lacks an integrated system such as this, an office whiteboard or even rewards scheme for employees with high results in training makes for good initiatives to incentivise staff.

Addressing Objections

While absences are sometimes unavoidable, some employees could be objecting to programs by failing to show. If this is the case:

• Communicate the benefits of learning and development.
• Highlight the link between attendance and performance appraisals.
• Acknowledge attendee completion.
• Ensure the activities are current and relevant to employees.
• Encourage line managers to reinforce the importance of the activities in building skills and knowledge.

If non-attendance is being used as a way of skipping work, you may wish to mark these absences as "unauthorised," or unsatisfactory workplace performance, which can be referred to HR for resolution.

In some organisations, senior managers are reluctant to invest in learning and development programs for their employees and are concerned about the amount of time they need to complete training. HR Managers could take the following approaches to this:

• Reinforce the link between learning and development and achievement of the organisation's strategic and operational objectives.
• Promote learning and development as an important recruitment and retention tool.
• Outline the benefits of learning and development to managers, e.g. acquisition of current industry knowledge and skills, the appeal of highly skilled and knowledgeable employees to customers and clients.
• Show managers how learning and development can help to correct poor performance in employees

Conclusion

An entire industry and countless professions are dedicated to learning and development - we've just covered the tip of the training and development iceberg in this guide. However, we hope you've discovered that by spending time conducting a training needs analysis, and creating learning and development plans, you are showing employees you are committed to furthering their professional growth. The road may not be smooth, but with the right planning and training tools, it is an investment worth making, both for your employees, and company as a whole.

If you are interested in learning more about e-learning and online training, our partner GO1 has an extensive library of valuable resources. Visit them at: https://www.go1.com/blog

You can also find out more about Roubler's integration with GO1's e-learning platform at: https://roubler.com/online-learning-management-software-system/

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