



GLOBAL BUSINESS SOLUTIONS

future thinking, now

HR NEWSFLASH - EDITION 1/2017

An interesting question

Earlier this week I was asked by a client why people champions (read HR managers, training and development managers and the like) battle to advocate for training spend on soft skills. We all know how important these components (communication, leadership, conflict etc.) are, but we don't seem to get the traction in terms of approved spend for training.

I thought this was a great question, and I have spent a large part of this week mulling over this question.

I think the short answer lies in the fact that we don't feel that we can accurately quantify or measure improvement, or return on investment. And in today's organisations that are closely monitored in terms of input, output, improvement, and a plethora of other measurables, a space that cannot be measured can't be worth much.

So...

Next agenda item please.

But wait, what if I told you that it could be measured? And what if I told you how?

We can measure employee engagement.

Employee engagement surveys can be a source of incredible insight and information – if done correctly. And, in this space, my view of “correctly” is: regularly, anonymously and with both qualitative data (to uncover themes) and quantitative data. If you are going to utilise an employee engagement tool, then find one that aims to gather information that will inform your understanding of your employees' level of engagement, as well as opening up communication between employer (and management) and employees across all levels of the business. If you assess and review this information correctly, you can also further inform your training needs. Organisations that utilise regular employee engagement surveys are able to draw a correlation between engagement and productivity and performance.

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We can measure outputs

If organisations develop and implement strategic training plans, then they are able to monitor the impact on outputs.

In order to do this in a meaningful way, and to increase return on investment, it's best to take a macro view and focus training on departments or smaller groups and ensure that the training has a specific focus. While ad-hoc training is inevitable, I don't recommend that it form the bulk of training.

Managers and leaders should be supporting staff by helping them implement learning, and set goals in line with the implementation of what they have learnt. If employees are encouraged to put into practice what they have learnt, and this implementation forms part of their performance appraisals, then we are more likely to see training put into practice, and also see meaningful and measurable outputs.

We can encourage staff to “pay back the money”

A few years ago, I worked with an incredible organisation with a strong learning and development culture. We rolled out a programme that ran over a period of six months. We closely monitored engagement and outputs, and the measurables all moved in the right direction. It was incredibly satisfying.

The HR executive, training manager and manufacturing manager and I met regularly to discuss the progress and to make sure we were all on the same page. Towards the end of the six months, we decided to take things one step further. We handed each delegate an envelope with the amount that had been spent on their development, and asked them to commit to delivering improvements to the same value.

This is not something that every organisation can do and these were not first line supervisors, so we were able to really stretch them in terms of our expectation. And even then, it was a bit of a shock to the system at the beginning, but they quickly got on board. Each delegate then planned how they would do this, and included it in their personal development plans and listed it as an area of accountability.

What all of these methods tell us, is that measuring the efficacy of soft skills development is possible. Once we are able to show this by numeric data, it makes it easier for people champions to advocate for spend in the soft skills space. In addition, it means that our training spend will become more focused on particular themes and critical areas. This in turn means we are focusing on the right things and are more likely to see greater successes in the areas we need to.

And that is future thinking, now.

If you would like more information, or to continue this discussion, please email me at

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Kind regards

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