

UniSA Strategic Partnerships Newsletter Autumn 2008

Why Organisations are Taking a Greater Role in the Education of Employees

During the process of researching and gathering data for my PhD thesis, one of the questions explored in the research was the purpose of organisations offering corporate education programs for their employees.

The following presents the percentage of responses from the 79 global respondents to the quantitative research. As organisations may have multiple reasons for offering and supporting their employees in corporate education programs, the question invited respondents to indicate multiple responses.

- 86% of respondents indicate the role of their corporate education programs is to build the skills and competencies of their employees. Increasingly with globalisation, rising levels of competition and new technologies, there is growing pressure on employers to nurture and support their employees to manage the changing demands on their roles and try to develop an edge over competitors.
- 65% of employers are trying to promote consistency in their corporate education and training, rather than have different employees undertake diverse educational programs with varying degrees of relevance to the organisation.
- 59% of organisations are seeking to link their corporate education and training programs to the organisation's corporate goals. This means the education and training programs are strategic in nature and by linking the programs to corporate goals they are contributing to the future development of the organisation through the development of their employees.
- 53% of respondents indicate the corporate education programs are part of a broader strategy to create a learning organisation. This is an area of growing importance as industry evolves to the 'knowledge economy' where globalisation and increasing competition are placing greater pressures on organisations to be innovative and generate new opportunities to be globally competitive.
- 51% of respondents indicate the role of their corporate education programs is to facilitate change in their organisation. Interestingly, research conducted during the mid-1990s by Fresina (1997) found the primary reason for corporate education was to facilitate change. Now, it would appear organisations regard change as a constant, but still utilise corporate education as means of facilitating change within an organisation.

Fresina, A, (1997) The Three Prototypes of Corporate Universities, *Corporate University Review*, January/February

Other reasons nominated as the role of employer sponsored corporate education programs include:

- To improve an organisation's ability to compete by improving internal communication and understanding, provide a mechanism to identify and select future leaders and enhance employee retention.
- To ensure a focus on issues relevant to the organisation's industry and its own activities.
- To enhance an organisation's position as an 'employer of choice' to attract and retain the best available talent in a tight labour market.
- To promote and strengthen the values and culture of an organisation.

If you would like more information about this research or the findings, please contact me by email: Lindsay.ryan@unisa.edu.au

Lindsay Ryan, Director, UniSA Strategic Partnerships

Who Invests More on Employee Training and Development: Government or Private Sector?

Research by IRS Employment Review in the United Kingdom finds that the amount invested by organisations in employee education, training and development varies between industry sectors. However, what is surprising is the extent of variation between the private and public sector. Private firms, on average, spend 2.75 times more on employee development than the public sector. However, this is consistent with another finding in the research that the amount allocated for education, training and development of employees appears to reduce as organisation size increases.

Formal classroom training, one-to-one coaching and external conferences were seen as the most successful means of providing education, training and development for employees.

Over 90% of the organisational respondents used external providers to develop and deliver their education and training programs, while over 80% expect line managers to carry out at least some education and training activities.

UniSA Strategic Partnerships - Corporate Education Consulting Services

UniSA Strategic Partnerships offers a Corporate Education Consulting Service to assist organisations to adopt a strategic approach to the corporate education and development of their employees.

While most organisations are effective with the planning and coordination of corporate training programs to address operational and competency training requirements of employees, it has been found that very few have the internal

resources to understand and develop a corporate education program at a strategic level.

When approached strategically, corporate education can be an effective means for an organisation to:

- Attract and keep good employees;
- Facilitate the development of innovative and fresh ideas for the organisation, such as new products, new services, new markets and new channels to market;
- Address succession planning issues, particularly with an ageing workforce;
- Engage employees with the organisation; not just have employees who are attendees or observers at work.

Our Corporate Education Consulting Services can work with your organisation to identify future strategic priorities for employee education and development and assist in developing a customised program to address the developmental requirements of your organisation.

Our approach is not one-size-fits-all. Every organisation is unique and each corporate education program needs to address the developmental needs of both individuals and the organisation collectively.

Some of the more innovative corporate education programs involve providing employees with a sound educational framework, supported by:

- Work-based projects and challenges for participants to learn through application, rather than just learning theoretical concepts.
- Experiential learning, including the opportunity to make mistakes, within a supportive learning environment.
- Senior managers as guest speakers and topic specialists – engaging employees with senior management and learning from their leaders.
- The opportunity to lead team projects and develop a range of leadership skills while building collaborative networks across their organisation.
- Virtual learning environments where employees can interact, exchange information and experiences and learn from their colleagues and peers, regardless of where they are physically or geographically located in an organisation.

You will find our corporate education consulting fees highly competitive and reflecting good value-for-money.

For more information, please contact: Lindsay Ryan, Director UniSA Strategic Partnerships, (08) 8302 0803 or email: Lindsay.ryan@unisa.edu.au

FROM THE JOURNALS

Jorgensen, B (2005) Attract, Retain and Innovate: A workforce Policy Architecture Adapted to Modern Conditions, *Foresight*, Emerald Group Publishing, Volume 7, Number 5, pages 21-31

Jorgensen's research investigates a workforce policy response to emerging social and demographic trends, looming workforce skills shortages, ongoing and rapid change in the business environment, and the growing complexity and changing nature of work. In particular, Jorgensen challenges the articles and papers of popular writers who suggest the emerging problem of attracting and retaining employees can be addressed by the creation of strategies that target unique generational characteristics, especially Generation Y. Jorgenson claims that popular literature lacks appropriate academic rigor on which to base workforce policy decisions and, in fact, the academic literature rejects the notion of treating different generations in the workforce differently.

Instead, Jorgenson finds academic research evidence that 'employers of choice', who recognise the importance of employee talent as a source of competitive advantage, are looking to attract and keep their employees by tailoring employment policy to reflect the dynamics of modern society. Approaches used by progressive organisations to attract and retain employees might include:

- Offering career development opportunities;
- Providing challenging, inspiring, enjoyable and flexible work;
- Providing progressive employee benefits;
- Paying attention to healthy workplace practices;
- Improving incentives for employees, and
- Encouraging participative and open communication.

Jorgensen suggests that a key element underpinning the 'employer of choice' concept is employment branding, the defined package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided to employees and identified with the employing company. "Focused employment branding initiatives aligned to the strategic needs of the organisation and tailored to the needs of the labour market will provide the means to attract new workers and retain institutional knowledge and specialized skills. These initiatives are supported by a range of measures including the provision of customised work arrangements and flexible careers, higher levels of investment in life-long learning, the adoption of multi-age employment practices, paying attention to the social quality of organisational life and the adoption of a mode of arrangement that emphasises collaboration, participation and flexibility."

According to Jorgensen, evidence exists of a link between the productivity of high performing organisations and the effective satisfaction of values such as: autonomy, participation in decision-making, and employee participation in job design. Furthermore, in a rapidly changing global environment, organic

organisations that feature less specialisation, flatter hierarchies and less formality are shown to be more appropriate and effective than bureaucratic organisations.

If you would like more information about any of the articles in this newsletter, please do not hesitate to contact the team at UniSA Strategic Partnerships unit.

Regards

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