

Why outsource learning

Stop all investment in training and start investing on learning, suggests Indraneel Mukerjee



Contrary to the prevalent belief that the current economic scenario has led to a cut in training budgets, there are reasons to believe that a lot of wasteful spend continues to happen on training.

Last week, a trainer friend of mine was cribbing about having to do a “leadership training” assigned to her by a “consultant” without knowing what the objective of this training was.

When she asked the consultant what the objective of the program was, he reverted with a great deal of surprise saying the client has already given a sheet of document which mentions what she needs to cover. Why does she need to know the objective? On her persuasion the consultant called his contact person in the clients’ place (who happens to be a training coordinator responsible for logistics) to enquire about the objective of the program, this person also drew a blank. And this was not just a one-off program but several batches of such leadership training are supposed to be rolled out.

The client is a household multinational name in the software industry contributing close to a fourth of the training spends in the country today.

If this is the situation with corporations who are supposed to be having well-laid down global L&D (Learning and Development) practices and policies, what is happening with small and mid-sized corporations, could be anybody's guess.

If we were to scratch the surface and explore a little deeper, the three fundamental questions we need to ask are:

- a) Is there a C-level involvement in deciding L&D strategies and practices of the organizations? Or it is left as a not so ‘hard’ a business agenda to be dealt with by self-styled L&D “experts”?
- b) Are the internal L&D organizations and their managers held accountable and measured for business impact of the training and development initiatives? Or is it enough for them to score certain checklist items on the training plan?
- c) Are organizations clear about what it takes to enable enterprise wide learning or are just content with archaic models of one-way one-too many “delivery” of training for individuals?

A few tips and recommendations that may help the business heads be more prudent with their L&D spend are:

1. Don't rely on the traditional training needs analysis - based individual development driven training initiatives. The basic premise of such a method – “we know what we don't

know” - itself is fallacious. Instead, commission a sensing-based discovery exercise which starts from the enterprise learning needs.

2. Invest in enhancing the learnability and learnability™ of your employees. Once the face of the vessel is turned upwards, not much of investment would be required in terms of formal learning initiatives as learning will pour in naturally and informally from all touch points of work life.
3. Invest in uncovering the innate potentials of your people. Once they become aware of what they are good at, you can't stop them from ‘pulling’ learning to leverage these potentials.
4. And finally, your leaders are your best coaches. Invest in enabling them to learn how to influence and facilitate the process of learning and you will find your subject matter experts become awe inspiring ‘gurus’. You won't need to outsource much of the skill development initiatives.

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To conclude, it may be worthwhile examining whether all of the internal L&D processes need to be carried out in-house or is it that some of the processes are best outsourced, not only for cost effectiveness but also because your business is not about learning and there is someone whose business is. Processes like enterprise learning need discovery, learnability enhancement, potential mapping and grooming of learning leadership are perhaps best done by those whose core competency and therefore business is learning.

As they say, “Do what you are best at and let others do what they are best at”. A healthy partnership between the two can lead to a healthy spent on business-relevant learning.

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