

Investing in Training R&D

Training programs are often inside company's life. But are they really effective? There are some simple ways to improve the capability of the training leaders and also the learning skills from the whole company. Training programs are much more than classroom and training leaders.

David Creelman

Training has quietly made important advances. They were so quiet that most managers are unaware of them. They are so important that CEOs ought to step back and think about spending more on training—or rather, they should spend more on making sure that the training the company is delivering uses these advances.

Paul Russell, VP, executive learning at PepsiCo told me how he often hears at conferences this rhetorical question: “Have you ever heard anybody say the most important developmental experience in their career was a training program?” Russell is the one guy in the room who puts up his hand and shouts, “Yes, I hear it all the time!” The reason he hears it is because Pepsi has great training programs. Russell says, “Roger Enrico’s program, and now Steven Reinemund’s program, blow people away.” Enrico was the CEO of Pepsi who led the company to overtake Coca-Cola; other CEOs would do well to follow his commitment to providing the kind of training that ‘blows them away.’

What are the quiet advances that training has made? Let me list a few:

Leaders teaching leaders – One of PepsiCo’s great insights was that people want to learn from people who are successful. Who would most inspire your football team to learn: a regular trainer or an afternoon with Zidane? The same goes for leaders.

VPs were far more interested in learning from their own CEO than from any management guru Pepsi could have brought in.

Managers teaching each other – Henry Mintzberg, the famous Canadian strategy professor, realized that most of managerial learning was not about the professor imparting knowledge, but simply facilitating a place where managers could reflect on their own experience and learn from each other. He helped build the IMPM program (www.impm.org) based on that insight. He has also helped develop a very low cost version of this learning approach called Coaching Ourselves (www.coachingourselves.com).

Training delivered through job aids – In her classic book *Beyond the Podium*, Dr. Allison Rossett made the point that a lot of learning can take place outside the classroom if the right support is there. For example, if you want people to learn how to write proposals you could send them on a course. But what would be better is simply to put examples of good proposals on the intranet and let people access them as needed. Training departments don’t usually think of this as a training solution. They are not developing an e-learning course; they are simply putting examples on-line. It doesn’t seem like training but it is—and powerful training at that. Another approach is to just put the names of people



VPs were far more interested in learning from their own CEO than from any management guru.

who are good at writing proposals on the intranet: “If you are stuck writing a proposal talk to Maria or Kanai.”

E-learning – E-learning produced many disappointments, but the fundamental idea of delivering just-in-time training to the desktop is sound. Perhaps the most important idea in making e-learning work is the concept of blended learning. This simply means that for most things e-learning on its own is not enough, but as part of a bigger program it is a wonderful tool.

Simulations – In an earlier column I wrote about the work of Clark Aldrich, author of *Learning by Doing*. Modern computer-game-like leadership simulations promise to bring leaders the same sort of learning pilots get in a flight simulator. We don’t let pilots fly big jets without a lot of time in the simulator, why then do we let leaders fly big organizations without similar training?

Transformational learning – In Barbara Annis’s gender diversity workshops the primary aim is not to impart facts nor even to develop skills—it is to change mindsets. The intent of the training is to have managers walk out of the workshop seeing the world differently than when they walked in. Knowing the difference between transformational learning, and skills or knowledge transfer, is crucial.

Social life of learning – John Seely Brown and Paul Duguid’s *The Social Life of Information* explains how much learning depends on the social environment. A company with no formal training programs but a great learning workspace (e.g. places for people

to chat, observe and learn from each other) will do just fine. Again, the training department may not think it is part of its job to put white boards at the coffee stations or install long phone cords for the call centre staff, but those things are important to create a learning organization.

Instructional Design – Most of the training we got in school, and still get in the workplace, is not effective. There is a whole field of study called instructional design that seeks to correct this. Training departments need to have access to instructional design experts to check the courses they are delivering are actually designed to be effective. One word of warning: instructional design experts usually focus on classroom training; they may know nothing about and hence discount the value of the other important advances listed here.

Well, I only wanted to list three or four but here I’ve already done eight, which is too much to grasp all at once. I hope I have given the sense that modern training can do great things.

Making It Happen

Most Training VPs are so busy delivering the existing programs that there is little time for researching new ideas and then developing those ideas into actual programs. It is tough asking for extra budget so I would recommend re-allocating some of the existing training budget (and the time of some of your smartest staff) to do R&D.

Certainly, staff can learn a lot from books but there is nothing like meeting the gurus and training VPs

www.terraforum.com.br



from other companies on a one-on-one basis. If you don't have the budget to fly to meetings then you could arrange a custom webinar. The advantage of a webinar is that you can get as many people in the company to listen as you like. Even with simultaneous translation, the costs are not excessive.

It's time to take a break from delivering learning and invest some time in learning about learning. It may mean cutting back on the number of courses you deliver next year, but it will be an excellent investment.

If you want more information about any of this, please email me at dcreelman@creelmanresearch.com.

* * *

David Creelman is CEO of Creelman Research, providing writing, research and commentary on human-capital management. He is investing much of his time in helping HR VPs report to the Board about human capital.

He works with a variety of academics, think tanks, consultancies and HR vendors in the U.S., Japan, Canada and China.

Mr. Creelman can be reached at dcreelman@creelmanresearch.com

www.terraforum.com.br



ARTIGOS RELACIONADOS

Collaboration in R&D: The Emerging Frontiers of Innovation
Polarity Management - Secrets of Human Capital Management

A EMPRESA

A TerraForum Consultores é uma empresa de consultoria e treinamento em Gestão do Conhecimento (GC) e Tecnologia da Informação. Os clientes da empresa são, em sua maioria, grandes e médias organizações dos setores público, privado e terceiro setor. A empresa atua em todo o Brasil e também no exterior, tendo escritórios em São Paulo, Brasília e Ottawa no Canadá. É dirigida pelo Dr. José Cláudio Terra, pioneiro e maior referência em Gestão do Conhecimento no país. Além disso, conta com uma equipe especializada e internacional de consultores.

PUBLICAÇÕES TERRAFORUM

Winning at Collaboration Commerce

Gestão do Conhecimento e E-learning na Prática

Portais Corporativos, a Revolução na Gestão do Conhecimento

Gestão do Conhecimento - O Grande Desafio Empresarial

Gestão do Conhecimento em Pequenas e Médias Empresas

Realizing the Promise of Corporate Portals: Leveraging Knowledge for Business Success

Gestão de Empresas na Era do Conhecimento