

Aligning Corporate Learning & Development Plans to Business Strategy

Unpacking why so many L&D plans fail to deliver a competitive business advantage

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- A key factor in a successful L&D programme is that there is strong alignment between the development objectives of the employee and the strategic objectives of the business, with a clear view of what the expected outcomes are for the individual and business in terms of impact, performance and growth.

However, the reality is that most L&D programmes fail to impact business objectives as there is seldom alignment between the two. A McKinsey survey showed that only a quarter of respondents believe that training measurably improved their performance and only 12% of employees actually applied new skills learned in L&D programs in their work environment and job roles. Think of the enormous opportunity cost in what is lost here!

"Using the approach to learnerships as one example of this lost opportunity, we find many South African corporate organisations spend millions of Rands on learnerships for their employees as a tick-box, compliance exercise to gain BBBEE points, without alignment to the business strategy. It's a massive lost opportunity to leverage the real power of learnerships – which can and should be customised for the needs of the business and



Trent Lockstone - CEO of The Impact Sourcing Institute of South Africa, a member of Alefbet Holdings.

The logo for SA BUSINESS SCHOOL. It features a large, bold, black "SA" with a yellow triangle above the "A". Below this, the words "BUSINESS" and "SCHOOL" are written in a large, bold, black, sans-serif font, stacked on two lines.



Businesses need people who are ready and amenable to change with the right mindset, skills and knowledge to make sense of what exists in a radically changed and highly competitive marketplace.”

*Trent Lockstone, Group CEO of
SA Business School, part of
Alefbet Learning*

employees - to achieve a true competitive advantage through meaningful career and skills progression that takes the business forward,” explains Trent Lockstone, Group CEO of [SA Business School](#), part of Alefbet Learning.

Learnerships should lay the foundation of creating a learning culture within the business

For every business considering a learnership programme, its starts with working with a professional, credible training and education partner that has the best interests of your business and the people that are trained and employed at heart. Learnerships should lay the foundation of creating a learning culture within the business, that then feeds into

further education and training initiatives.

“The best way to align the corporate L&D strategy is to properly understand the business, its strategy in the short, medium and long term, and then align the roles of the functional teams in delivering on the business objectives and mission, while closing the skills gaps in getting there. Key in this is having a continuum of how the learning journey unfolds in the next years, within the context of the business strategy. This approach also goes a long way in gaining the respect and buy in of your teams to the L&D strategy – suddenly your people get to see and understand how and where they fit into the business, and how their learning and skills development contributes in the bigger picture.

“Once this is aligned, the L&D programme that is embarked upon must be customised and designed to deliver value to the organisation and its employees. What better business success story is there to tell than having your own employees developed from within into management and leadership roles from the ground up, with a deep understanding of every operational aspect of the business and the market it operates in? And then having a pool of young talent coming through, building your succession and skills pipeline.

“One of the biggest disconnects we are seeing in organisational learning is the chasm between the L&D that happens at a leadership/executive management level, versus what happens at lower and entry levels within the organisation. There is simply no correlation between the two, and hence there is no pipeline of bringing skilled people through the business, from the bottom, right through to the top,” explains Lockstone.

Two extremes exist on this front. While business success is pinned on having a solid leadership funnel, businesses often spend a massive proportion of the training investment budget on highly customised leadership training - which is only just next to development of technical skills — and often end up overspending on each senior individual. On the other end of the spectrum, there is

investment in off-the-shelf, generic learnership programmes for entry level employees – for example an NQF 4 general management course that has absolutely no customisation to the needs of the business or job roles.

L&D cannot be approached with a cookie cutter, off-the-shelf approach. “The disjoin is that there is no mapping of the L&D interventions that builds a pipeline from junior/entry levels through learnerships, right up to the top through executive training. Learning and development must be approach as a continuum rather than a ‘siloe event’. More than ever businesses need people who are ready and amenable to change with the right mindset and new skills and knowledge to make sense of what exists in a radically changed and highly competitive marketplace. This then also means that L&D cannot be approached with a cookie cutter, off-the-shelf approach.

“If an organisation is going to be spending R5 million on learnerships for 100 employees, what level of customisation is needed to make those learnerships truly relevant to the employee and their current skills and capabilities, and the needs of the business, so that the qualification obtained at the end of it is relevant in their job roles AND lines them up for the next phase of their learning journey? What do the next five years look like for that employee in the business? Does this align with the strategic direction of the business and the skills and knowledge that will be needed?

“The reality is that with the right L&D partner, every learnership can be customised to the business strategy in the same way that executive training is approached, as long as it meets the requirements in terms of notional hours and the formative and summative assessments. This means that every intervention teaches the learner/employee about the business, at a simplified and understandable level, while making the skills and knowledge learned relevant and highly applicable in their work roles,” he adds.

The next steps in their learning journey should also be mapped out as part of the process of preparing them for further learning - once the employee has honed their skills on the job and progressed in building their knowledge through learnerships and earned their qualification – what comes next in their learning journey?

“Fundamentally, it is about building a learning culture within your business starting from entry-level employees, right through to the leadership – it’s about building talent pipelines of curious, ambitious people who see their worth and value in the business,” says Lockstone.

An intentional approach to L&D will support business strategy. “Building this L&D strategy is incredibly tough but essential. In addressing this fatal flaw in so many L&D programmes, SA Business School has defined an intentional approach to how learning and development of employees should take place in a manner that supports the business strategy.

“Firstly, recognise that sometimes, learning and development is NOT always the solution and on

its own, it is not a CHANGE strategy. The objective and justification for every L&D programme should be thoroughly interrogated and fit for purpose in the bigger picture of the business strategy and mission. In a bid to tick boxes and earn credits, we often see L&D managers throwing as much as possible at their employees by way of training programmes in the hope that something will stick.

"Effective and sustainable learning always happens from the "inside-out" and starts with preparing the learner. Learning must be human-centered and cater for BOTH the individual development and career growth aspirations of the employee and organisational capability building and transformation.

"Learning is about CHANGE, STRETCH and TRANSFORMATION – in particular it's about delivering the appropriate amount of stretch or challenge for each learner/employee.

"Learning should be based on activity-centric design, in other words, practical, business-driven action learning that can actually be applied straight away and has relevance and context.

"Learning is a journey NOT an event. Use Agile Learning Design, with input from participants to build into their learning program so that there is ownership and accountability.

"Integrate multiple stakeholders – from the participant, line manager, facilitators, HR business practitioner - across all phases of learning. Finally, use real-world, business-driven metrics to measure and demonstrate the impact of learning for both the employee and the business.

"Transfer of learning and knowledge is the ultimate aim of training investment and the key to maintaining competitive advantage in today's rapidly changing operating environment. By aligning the L&D strategy with the business strategy, it means that there's no wastage of L&D investment, that employees are engaged in their learning journey and take ownership and accountability from the outset, and all role players and line managers are involved in the process. Fundamentally, it's about ensuring that 'what is learned' can actually be applied in a business that embraces the knowledge and skills of its people that are key to business competitive advantage," concludes Lockstone.

Trent Lockstone

SA Business School, part of Alefbet Learning.

+27 79 887 8638

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