



BUILDING A LEARNING ORGANIZATION

Consider the Intense Benefit
of Employee Education





The world economy is currently horrible. Companies are not only faced with finding means to stay profitable, they are faced with the whirlwind pace of change of business world-wide. Maintaining a competitive advantage in such an environment is difficult in good economic times. Attempting to accomplish such a feat in economies such as this could be life-threatening to an organization. To accomplish this, enterprises must become adaptable and learn as well as transfer knowledge gained throughout the organization. This constitutes creating a continuous learning and communication environment.

Building a continuous learning and communication environment is an important key to increase employee motivation. Stress levels are high with workers for fear of the economy and their jobs. However, as Wilson & Madsen state (2008) employees are not always open to new training or building new skills set. The authors go on to say that the learning must be based upon the employee's needs and not on course content. What does that mean as a leader or a learning development professional? The bottom-line is leaders must pay close attention to employee motivation if retention is high on the organization's priority list.

Creating an organization that lives on a high level of communication and education will slowly dissolve employee resistance to change. This requires commitment at all levels within the organization from the executives through all levels of management down to the general employee levels. This is about more than a new vision or mission statement. It is about commitment and demonstrable action.

Retention in such a slow global economy may not seem important for many organizations. However, research is replete with studies on the cost effectiveness of keeping skilled employees rather than looking for new cheaper labor. Ramlall (2004) states the loss to a company of a critical employee is equivalent to one year's pay and benefits at a minimum and two year's pay and benefits as a maximum. Clearly there is a serious cost to skilled or critical employee turnover even in a stagnant economy. One might and should argue that it is even more important to keep these individuals during such hard times.



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Building a Learning Organization

While there currently seems to be a glut of potential employees, skilled individuals are still in high demand. Pay and benefits are not the only reason people stay with a given organization. The ability to keep abreast of changing technologies and new methods of doing business are extremely important as employees continue their desire to be better at what they do. Personal and professional development is a high priority for workers in the midst of such profound change as is being experienced around the world. In talking about small to medium size enterprises, Ahlgran & Engel (2011) states that employers must play a key role in driving efforts towards employee's educational development beyond just job skills and in-house training.

The issue of the changing business environment that exists today must be addressed as well as the impact on employee motivation and ability to be successful if an organization is to stay healthy and competitive. It is a given that technology changes rapidly and will only accelerate. Every year more and more workers are made obsolete by new technologies. Training, re-training, and career development become an ongoing process in the business world of successful organizations. Organizations must make a major commitment to knowledge and knowledge transfer if those organizations want to maintain a competitive advantage in the global economy, Ramlall (2004).

Creating a learning organization is nothing new. However, many companies have yet to embrace the ideal to their detriment. Creating in-depth and useable knowledge is the primary basis for a firm to be competitive in the 21st Century, Ford & Angermeier (2008). It is not whether having a learning organization is relevant. It is how can a company that desires to stay competitive not create a system of gaining knowledge and effectively transferring that knowledge throughout its organization?

Investing in the development of employees both personally and professionally will provide years of returns for even smaller enterprises. Employees that feel appreciated are motivated. Employees that are motivated work harder, and are less likely to jump ship when the next offer comes along. Being a part of something worthwhile is far more important to most employees than pay & benefits. Too many organizations, especially in this the economic funk that exist now, are content with pay and benefits being the important issue when considering employee motivation and retention. Employees face the fast pace of technological change with great trepidation. It is not only management that is concerned with staying competitive. It is also on the employee's minds as well.



Organizations need to take steps to assist employees in managing and adjusting to change. A commitment to bring the current employees along in the midst of change requires an understanding of what those employees need and then designing education to mesh that need with the needs of the organization. This may include assistance in general education through employer money or tuition reimbursement for college. Some of the best colleges and universities in the world are now online and can be accessed from anywhere in the world. Assistance may include vocational training on new concepts or technologies. Investing in the human capital that an organization currently has will often produce, and has produced many times over, the best return-on-investment possible.

HOW ELSE MIGHT ORGANIZATIONS BIG AND SMALL EMBRACE THE PACE OF CHANGE SUCCESSFULLY?



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