

Stop wasting your development dollars

Every year, billions of dollars are spent on employee development, yet 62 per cent of businesses report they are without the skills they need to grow and succeed. It is estimated by the American Society for Training and Development that organizations in the United States spend nearly two-thirds (US\$78.61 billion) of the total spend on the internal learning function, and the remainder (US\$47.27 billion) is allocated to external services.

Despite employees attending training sessions in record numbers, these reports also indicate those billions do not always improve the workplace because the skills often do not transfer to the actual job. When staff members fail to apply what they were meant to learn, organizational leaders are frustrated by the obvious ineffectiveness of these costly training initiatives.

While leaders at organizations want to develop their people and are willing to invest in them, they are puzzled when employees don't change behaviours following training. In addition, leaders and employees who want to develop are frustrated when they can't use what they have learned during their training.

Often, more time is spent considering workshop content than whether employees will be able to implement new learnings once the training is over.

While most leaders believe that once you learn something, you should change your behaviour, development requires the conscious application and repetition of new skills over time. It also requires that any emotional barriers to learning are addressed. In addition, how we feel about our learning experiences and our ability to keep using new skills when we feel uncomfortable or embarrassed to try are key factors to the success of learning.



■ GUEST COMMENTARY

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Few trainers and educators understand how the brain develops and what it actually takes to create new habits. Often it includes changing emotionally driven behaviours and unconscious habits that get in the way of development and behavioural change.

While we love to learn about how to improve and develop ourselves, taking in such information is a passive activity — actually changing our behaviour is an experiential one.

Based on an integration of the latest findings in brain development and century-old personality type theory, we now understand these two activities are governed by different areas of the brain.

As humans, we are meant to develop. However, we are likely to continue to waste our training budgets when we don't expect those tasked with our development to understand the mechanics of our mind, how our brains develop and how emotions get in the way of the successful implementation of new learnings.

By looking at some common beliefs about

training, you are better prepared to set up the circumstances for sustainable development to happen.

Employee and leadership development programs should be thought of as personal because employees are — first and foremost — people. Performance and capability are ultimately dependent not only on what people know and can do, but also on how they feel, their attitudes, their levels of emotional maturity and their psychological needs.

The personality of the employee and how his brain is wired affects how he will engage in the learning process.

Finally, programs need to change from cognitive and information-driven approaches in a workshop or training session to ongoing, experiential learning activities that engage the emotions of employees positively in various settings, including the workplace.

If these critical pieces are left out of training and development efforts, organizational leaders will continue to be frustrated and workers are unlikely to reach their full potential. And loss of potential translates into losses for the bottom line.

As former General Electric CEO Jack Welch once declared: "If you're not thinking all the time about making every person more valuable, you don't have a chance. What's the alternative? Wasted minds? Uninvolved people? A labour force that's angry or bored? That doesn't make sense."

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