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In these fast-paced, demanding times, organisations are increasingly focused on workforce performance and bottom-line results. The poor return on investment of typical training interventions – reported to be a low as 10 to 30% of intended returns (Pfeffer, 2000) – has led to increasing skepticism amongst executive decision makers. As a result, executives are seeking HR stakeholder commitment and clarity about the pay-offs of employee development in terms of performance, results and pay-back timeframes.

So why do so many typical training interventions miss the mark in delivering outcomes? Here are six of the more common development derailers and the steps you can take to ensure your interventions get the results you need.

1. Not starting with a clear end in mind. Often stakeholders only have a one-dimensional view with regards to the outcomes they're after, but it's important for an organisation to be very clear on the ultimate outcomes they want from a development solution. If they are large outcomes, you need to question what a realistic expectation is, in terms of the effort for return equation. For example, if you invest one or two days into an underperforming sales force are you realistically going to change their commitment, knowledge, skills and behaviours to the extent that you need to in that limited time? Like any other business investment you should go through the process of developing a business case with clear financial and non-financial outcomes that clearly articulate the context, the investment required, the return expected and the payback timeframes.
2. Failure to look at the bigger picture. Change does not happen without significant effort. When asking people to adopt new or different behaviours it is important to consider the environment they're operating in. Reliable development initiatives link knowledge management practices (such as intranets, knowledge repositories, decision support tools, knowledge-based products and services, collaboration tools, internal sources/groups of expertise) with organisational processes and multi-level, long-range development initiatives.
3. Too much talk and not enough action. Some organisations value smart talking and thorough planning to the point that it hinders effective action. Getting caught up in planning, defining and measuring the problem, means that many solutions end up under committing to the effort that's actually required to deliver solid outcomes.

Complex problems and issues can also result in the consultation being more prominent than the action required. Consultants can be intellectually impressive with their exposure to complex business models, theories and cases. However, there is also the threat they can paralyse an organisation with over analysis. Whether internal or external, it is very important to ensure you are working with people with a solid track record who value practical action and outcomes equally.

4. Not committing to the long-term. Change doesn't happen overnight. In fact, it takes several months to embed a new habit or behavior. For this reason, stand-alone training solutions are one of the least effective development interventions. More effective solutions contain a multi-dimensional view and feature three key elements which are critical to ensuring learning is transitioned back into the workplace long-term.

Experience: This is the ability to quickly apply learning "on the job". It should be weighted at 70% of the total development focus. Consider: The Maximus development framework uses methods such as: team business projects, secondments, audits and reflective activities and scenario-based learning with business coaches.

Exposure: This is about being aware of new and alternative philosophies and beliefs. It is essential to individual development and should be weighed at approximately 20% of the total development focus. Consider: providing networking opportunities, syndicate group discussions, exposure to external industry events and peer-to-peer group coaching sessions aimed at sharing knowledge learning and expertise.

Education: This reflects formal training and education. While this isn't the sole component to development, it is crucial and should be weighed at approximately 20% of the total focus. When developing educational programs allow for individual learning styles, ensure high levels of stretch and challenge, commit to action planning and utilise methods that translate theoretical knowledge into practical tools. Consider: integrating processes into your overarching solution such as toolkits of proven frameworks and methodologies. These will enable participants to quickly apply their learning back in the workplace.

5. Poor measurement of progress. Any development intervention should add value by meeting the original business need. A solid measurement model considers success at each stage of the solution. For any progress to be clear and visible, you should be able to answer questions like?

- Was the development solution designed well?
- Did the facilitators/coaches/sponsors of the program engage the audience, and encourage participation and interaction at all levels?
- Did the participants enhance their skills, knowledge and attitude?
- Did they successfully use their new knowledge and integrate it back in the workplace?
- Did it actually achieve the desired results for the business?

6. Inability to work through obstacles and fears. Being aware of any obstacles and/or fears in the workplace requires a level of self-awareness and self-discipline to be able to work through them in a development environment. For this reason it's important to spend time becoming more enlightened about one's self. Most leadership programs contain a significant portion of time allocated to understanding "self".

Development solutions are supposed to be exactly that: solutions. They should meet all organisational and business requirements and have the successful outcomes promised. Now you know what to avoid when planning for the development of performance, results and payback that process will be a lot easier. Contact Maximus International to discuss your development strategy.



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