

Learning at Work

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The changing economic environment presents challenges to businesses, and an unstable economy means that there is increased pressure to demonstrate the value of Learning and Development activities. The changing environment also means that individuals need to develop new skills, behaviours and attitudes to become flexible, capable and willing to seek personal development.

Within Wing Tai Retail, the Learning and Development division works with the functional units of various departments to ensure the right skills and beliefs are embodied by employees so that they can perform as expected. The changing environment, however, means that new strategies need to be adopted, which has led to Wing Tai Retail forging two learning and development partnerships with the Institute of Technical Education (ITE) and the Workforce Development Agency (WDA). These partnerships help with upgrading technical competencies, designing quality curriculum and assessment, recruiting, training, and retaining employees.

The value of learning on the job, however, is the most impactful learning methodology, which has led Wing Tai Retail to make learning more experiential. As an international brand, intercultural and diversity skills are also crucial for the future. The question is – how to help employees learn and apply learning at the workplace for continuous progression? Wing Tai Retail has developed a scheme to link workplace learning to performance enhancements and professional advancement.

The challenges faced in implementing workplace learning are responding to the demand for Return on Investment, measuring KPIs (Key Performance Indicators), inadequate facilities and subject matter experts, as well as the prioritization of limited resources. The role of the manager, then, becomes very important, but they need to be empowered with the relevant skills and support. There is a need to have greater integration between coaching, organisational development and performance management, before giving line managers greater responsibility to drive organisational change and progress. It is therefore important for companies to be in touch with their employees' attitudes and behaviours.

One key factor is the rise of the internet and access to social media. This means that learning and development should no longer be “top down”, with employees as passive receivers of information. Workplace learning is “bottom up” as people turn to blogs and twitter for information. Companies need to be aware of these changing dynamics so that the needs of all parties can be met.

Learning and talent development activities are expected to be more closely aligned to business strategies and demonstrate return on investment. This means that learning and development personnel need to seriously consider structural changes in their roles and responsibilities. There needs to be a shift from thinking about individual competencies to organisational capabilities; from people management to strategic development, from static curriculum to dynamic agendas and integrated strategies for development. But are we ready?