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Learning for Organizational Development: How to Design, Deliver and Evaluate Effective L&D

by *Eileen Arney*

Kogan

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The book “Learning for Organizational Development” makes for an interesting read, encompassing a wide range of pertinent themes drawn from the fields of both organizational development (OD) and human resources development. The relevant aim is to offer a textbook that is accessible to a diverse audience, including practitioners in the area of learning and development (L&D), scholars and students undertaking relevant academic work as well as line managers that undoubtedly find themselves actively involved in building, fostering and nourishing knowledge in their organizations. Incorporating an open learning environment is key to future development of any business. Such knowledge is invaluable for any business seeking to enhance staff development and upskilling and producing targeted and tangible performance driven results. For managers and human resources practitioners, the book can serve as a guide to building a corporate culture that supports continuous learning; for business students and employees, the book can help them build confidence in and develop accountability towards their learning.

Equally, there is an appreciation of the developments and rapid pace of change in the contemporary business environment. The advent of extremely fast internet and the integral role of the knowledge economy presently in business at regional, national and international level have caused massive changes in professional learning and development. The book introduces a number of practical case studies, which help readers gain insight into how they can unleash the power of individual and team learning with the use of modern day learning technologies. L&D is explored in the book as an emergent field of study with distinct theories and methodologies, a formal business function that contributes decisively to talent acquisition, talent management, employee engagement and productivity.

In summary, the book’s perspective seems to be pitched at the right level to offer not only an introductory or more advanced reading for those seeking a “user-friendly” but still comprehensive reference on the topic of L&D but also a practical tool for readers that would like to gain insights on how L&D not only functions in companies but also supports and strengthens corporate strategy and its realization.

The initial chapters provide a useful and informative background that progressively set the scene for a more in-depth exploration of how learning unfolds, develops and can be managed within the parameters of any company. Initially, the first chapter begins by establishing the basis for OD in the “real-world”, its history and rise to prominence owing to



the evolution of both micro and macro factors. The second chapter examines the relationship between OD and talent management, exploring the interplay and integral nature of the two. There is a good overview of how the processes must be interlinked effectively within the context of creating a talent pool, supporting and motivating employees to not only develop their potential but also tangibly apply it. The ensuing chapter takes the discussion a step further by looking more closely at the leadership potential and importance it carries for organizations and again the indispensable contribution of L&D. There is a good introductory discussion of leadership, the nuanced differences between leading and managing, the part of L&D in enhancing the former through the creation and expansion of leadership and management development programmes to support staff. The following part looks more into the practical side of implementing L&D and particularly the role of facilitation. It not only offers a summary of earlier academic work on facilitation but also looks at the necessary skills required when supporting training activities at both individual and group levels. Quite useful is the part that seeks to make the reader contemplate about their own development as facilitators and the inherent need not only to hone and develop their skills but also the recognition that this must be ongoing. Leadership development according to the chapter falls within leading self, leading others, leading managers, leading the function and finally within leading the organization. This holistic approach to leadership development can help readers gain self-awareness, engage and influence others and ultimately build organizational capability and culture. In a similar vein, Chapter 5 analyses the role of coaching and mentoring (C&M), examining its significance for organizations, the required skill set to effectively implement C&M interventions, how to actual carry out these interventions and develop as both coaches and mentors. The approach to present a holistic perspective of these features, covering not only the organizational aspect but also the individual and professional vista is very useful and helps readers to not only reflect but also deliberate on how they can take onboard the learning from the book.

The penultimate chapter explores the always-complicated issue of evaluating L&D, particularly in the rapidly transforming landscape of knowledge economy. As before, the chapter starts off with a useful overview, introducing some of the basic concepts and systems and then moving on to the more applied side, also looking at some of the main challenges organizations and L&D professionals face when trying to quantify the value and effectiveness of L&D. The chapter also introduces key performance indicators based on education and training data that allow the assessment of knowledge and skills (or human capital) gained through the formal process of L&D. The argument for developing L&D evaluation methods is predicated on the need to demonstrate business impact and positive return on investment.

The final chapter provides a concise piece on current and future developments in the field.

Overall, the book is a compact but well-rounded reading that caters for not only individuals with a scholarly interest in the field of L&D within organizations but also practitioners and managers alike. The text is accessible in terms of both language and content but with the necessary academic rigour and currency. There is a reasonable balance between theory and application with some embedded case studies to better showcase the practical extension of the analysis. The book critically emphasizes the importance of L&D in modern organizations, strategic L&D as a distinctive capability when organically aligned to the business strategy and the characteristics of L&D strategy. Other important aspects of applicable theory are the process of L&D underpinning the concept of the learning organization, the different forms of L&D activities and finally leveraging big data in L&D. Equally, the logical structure of kicking off each chapter with a useful introductory section,

gives readers a good background that is suitable for not only less advanced readers to acquaint themselves with the field but also more advanced learners as it enables them to refresh and reinforce their understanding. Similarly, the focus on individuals and their own contribution to L&D through a variety of possible functions, transplants the much-needed urge and attention in self-development and continuing development, which is quintessential for a successful career and future employability. Concluding, the book provides a good balance of theory and application, which would make it good reference material for both undergraduate and postgraduate level, either as part of a more generalist Business Management curriculum or equally for more specialist courses on L&D and people management.

Konstantinos Biginas

*Department of HR and Management, Coventry University – London Campus,
London, UK*

Vlasios Sarantinos

*Department of Bristol Business Management, Business School,
University of the West of England Bristol, UK, and*

Antonia Koumproglou

*Department of HR and Management, Coventry University – London Campus,
London, UK*