

## IDEAS@WORK:

Focus on specific outcomes and work challenges when creating development plans for your team

## MAKING DEVELOPMENT PLANS RELEVANT

**Jennifer Cramb and Helena Memory make the case for shaping professional development in response to what the business requires as well as individual career aspirations.**

Having the right capabilities within a communication function is critical to its success. But training and development can be costly and often fails to translate into improved performance. Here are three golden rules to ensure your investment in development pays off, with examples of what other organizations are doing.

### 1) Focus on outcomes

Focus development on enabling people to deliver required performance outcomes. No one can afford to waste precious time or budget so development must contribute to business, team and individual performance.

For many communication teams, being considered “high performing” by colleagues across the organization is often less a matter of “what they do” and more about perceptions of “how they do it.” But being a technically proficient communication expert is not enough.

*Example: improving client relationship management*

One communication director wanted a dispersed team to improve its capability to work with demanding internal clients and to demonstrate how it added value to the business. Development workshops used principles of client relationship management to focus on actual client programs and real scenarios. The team developed new conversations and approaches that enabled more productive working valued by internal stakeholders.

### 2) Address work challenges

Develop creative capabilities that can be applied immediately. Time and money spent on development is wasted if they don't help people do their day jobs more effectively, and colleagues are more likely to make time for development if it enables them to address immediate work challenges.

Techniques and approaches which use informal learning based on workplace experiences are highly flexible and can be implemented internally, making them cost and time effective. Examples include coaching, mentoring, buddying, shadowing, formal or informal 360-degree feedback, facilitated workshops and action learning sets.

*Example: using action learning to generate relevant development plans*

One 30-strong communication team wanted to take more personal responsibility for their own development, cross-team sharing and learning. They were being asked to deliver more with less people in a challenging change environment, with targets and pressures that left little time for development.

Meeting monthly for an hour in small groups with an outside facilitator, and focusing on current work activities, they used action learning for each person to identify their own development objectives, with colleagues supporting them through constructive questioning and challenging. Discussion allowed new approaches, sources of learning and support, best practice and innovative solutions to be shared and applied immediately.

### 3) Monitor development

Seek and use feedback to support performance improvement. Research shows that feedback and follow-up increases the effectiveness of development and reinforces change.

Management guru Marshall Goldsmith tells the story of how he successfully coached a senior Wall Street executive to make a radical change in his behavior by having the executive contract with his colleagues to get regular feedback on how he was doing.

*Example: following through on team development*

The director of a communication team wanted to increase team performance. One-to-one meetings with team members identified individual and team development needs. An initial workshop generated clarity about the team's strategy and goals and specific plans and development activities. A follow-up workshop three months later and one-to-one meetings with the facilitator after six months helped to sustain momentum and allowed for fine-tuning.

### Pulling it together

Professional development has a direct, positive impact on recruitment, performance and retention. But it doesn't have to be expensive, time consuming or complicated. It's about finding an approach that is “owned” by your team, that genuinely helps them to do their day jobs better, and that enhances their credibility and career prospects as internal communicators.

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