

EVALUATING LEARNING IMPACT

Learning and Development is a significant investment for many companies and, in the current economic climate, justifying this expense is becoming increasingly difficult. In the recent L&D annual survey by the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD), it was highlighted that many organizations are struggling to evaluate the impact of L&D programmes on their business. This can result in what the survey also identified as ‘capability gaps’. Mercuri International is working with its clients to overcome this issue with new and easy to use competence evaluation and benchmarking tools.

➤ What is competence?

Competence can be described as a combination of a person’s skills, knowledge and attitude. These are the abilities that enable individuals to be effective in carrying out tasks. Having accurate data on employees’ competence can help HR and personal managers improve overall business management and maximize potential profitability.

When planning an L&D programme, managers want to know how they can be certain that the sales-force actually need the training they are planning. They also want to know the process to go through to create that certainty.

Ultimately, managers would love to know what makes the best people so successful and how to spread this excellence throughout the whole team.

To fully understand how each of these areas are impacting a business, a benchmark of current performance and, how this compares against ‘world-class’ performance, is required. A process is required to measure the effectiveness of key areas of the business, such as sales, management and customer facing teams. Having carried out this benchmark, the gap between best practice and your current performance needs to be identified and measured.

Considerations:

- How do you know your sales-force need the training you are planning?
- Are the competences you have defined business critical?
- Can you demonstrate an optimized training budget?

“Benchmark current performance and compare against world class performance”

With this information, it is possible to measure the value of key improvements to the business, which in turn enables an accurate view of any return on investment. A focused plan for improvement, with this information to hand, ensures the training budget is optimized and will ensure all activities are aimed at meeting key, identified objectives.

How to make competence analysis a success

When embarking on a competence analysis programme, you should always begin with the end in mind. This means thinking about what you are trying to achieve and identifying the key drivers that you must accomplish to be successful.

The next key element is to make it applicable. Often, people can see what the competence process looks like but can't see how it applies to them.

“You should take your company competence model and translate it to create meaningful statements that people can relate to specifically for their role. “

Look at the job profiles and write the competence model to meet it. You will get better insights from people if they fully understand what it means to them.

You also need to keep it simple. Many sophisticated models use intellectual language that doesn't necessarily mean something to everyone. Keep terminology and processes simple and you will get better buy-in and then better output, which will help deliver something really valuable. If kept simple, people can easily understand what they are being asked to compare themselves against.

Avoiding the pitfalls

So often we can work really hard to get a system in place but don't take the time to work out what can go wrong. Key to this is communication. The process needs to be sold from the very highest point in the organization. The analysis will be much more meaningful and successful when there is a clear message from the top on what you are doing and why you are doing it.



Start with a message to everyone to explain why it is critical to the business and to each individual. This will generate better commitment and honesty in the process, with people engaged in the process.

Another area where many companies fall down is in demonstrating the benefit of carrying out a competence analysis. They tend to think about everything from the perspective of the business and what the business will get out of it. They don't consider that in order to do this successfully, they need to gain meaningful, honest information from individual people about how they feel they perform in different areas. It is critical to make sure you provide clear statements about what is in it for the employee, making it clear what they will achieve by going through the process and how it will benefit them in the short and long term.

It is also important to avoid running the process at a time when annual appraisals are due. This can create some confusion for people because they may misinterpret the reason for doing it, which is to ensure you design the right training and development programme for them.

If your competence evaluation is done at the same time as the annual review, your team members might assume that if they mark themselves higher and don't identify gaps they may get a bigger bonus.

This all helps to engender trust, which is critical to success. You don't want people to misinterpret reasons for carrying out Competence Analysis and think there are any underlying reasons, such as testing, or to create a stick to beat them with.

“Your team members need to understand it is a positive identification of opportunities for development otherwise the process simply doesn't work, because they will be uncomfortable about being honest about where their gaps are.”

The Mercuri solution

Mercuri International's consultants work with an organization's business leaders to define an overall strategy for measuring and evaluating competence and the impact of L&D programmes. This information is combined with the results generated by the company's web-based Sales Evaluator to produce comprehensive insights, which highlights the key areas of focus for staff and managers.

The evaluation process incorporates online self-assessment, manager assessment and a facilitated validation meeting to discuss variations between the scores. Sales Evaluator provides a mechanism for defining the competences required in order to be a highly effective sales team. From this, Mercuri work with companies to assess their team against this benchmark.

The company also helps the L&D team to create the infrastructure to deliver:

- ➔ **Training**
- ➔ **Coaching**
- ➔ **Learning interventions**

These programmes maximise investment in L&D and drive the business towards its clear and identified objectives.

➤ Case Study

As part of their transformation from a long-established public sector mind-set into a team focused more on business objectives, the sales team demonstrated how leadership combined with effective training and culture change can transform sales performance. The transformation in the sales operation began with a shift in culture, a leadership approach based on empowerment and enablement. This approach was led by a Sales Director with the vision and drive to make it happen, supported by a leadership team that was engaged and motivated.

As part of the transition, the sales organization was restructured and taken through a development process that would enable each individual to develop their own vision for the future. To support the team through this process, the organization worked with Mercuri to establish their Sales Academy.

The Academy provided a mechanism for defining the competences required in order to be a highly effective sales team, then assessing the team against this benchmark. It also created the infrastructure to deliver a series of training, coaching and learning interventions that were identified, through the analysis, as the priority areas for development.

Mercuri provided the tools, methods and expertise for undertaking the competence analysis and for delivering the key training input within the Academy framework. The results of the sales transformation have been dramatic. A new business team was established and went on to increase its sales from a standing start to over £200 million in 3 years, selling new business to new customers and leveraging the potential from the boom in e-commerce.