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# IMPORTANCE OF TRAINING AND QUALIFICATIONS

While the return on investment from the ongoing training of your staff may not be immediately visible, the long-term impact it has on your team and its results are plentiful

By Dominic Konopka

**T**he value of training and qualifications is one which is often debated. What is the return on investment?

Evaluation is typically a hot topic and learning and development teams have this built into their thinking and design. However a recent McKinsey quarterly survey, *Putting a value on training*, suggests that, although building capability is a top 10 priority, only 8% of organisations track a programme's return on investment.

The findings also suggest the importance of any curricula reflecting key business performance metrics, which I would say is a critical factor, in order for any value to be talked about and shared with the business.

There do, however, continue to be studies which align to what many of us think, which is that training and qualifications are important and make an important commercial contribution.

The 2013 report for the Department of Business and Innovation & Skills, *Review of the Economic Benefits of Training & Qualifications*, suggests that there continues to be a positive employer and earnings return for the vast majority of qualifications gained in adulthood. So if we are clear on the value that the development will bring at the beginning, we will know what to look for at the end.

## Learning and development

The word 'training' implies that this is something 'done to' an individual and, over the years, many organisations have shifted their focus to 'learning and development', which begins to imply a shared ownership around development as well as a journey that an individual may be on in order to meet both business and personal objectives.

In our company, the learning and development team has an important

role to play in building on the people-centric culture whilst helping to enable the business to bring the best out of its people and drive performance.

The induction process is critical in all businesses and plays an important role in 'on boarding' an individual into their specific job role, but also, more broadly, into a business's culture and way of doing things.

Due to the industry and sector we work in, we recognise the need to challenge negative perceptions that people may have created and we pride ourselves on our induction process as a way to demonstrate, to our people, that, as they embark on their career with us, they will be able to see and feel our ethical approach to collections and how our core values drive our behaviours both internally and externally.

An eight to 12 week induction programme provides specific learning related to their role.

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>> This encompasses technical elements as well as skills and behavioural development. In the case of our collections function, following an initial four-week programme of development in a more formal induction setting, the dedicated learning and development team leader will continue the journey with their team from the learning environment to the call-centre floor and lead the team for the remainder of the induction period, continuing to provide coaching and support.

Internal testing and verification is embedded in the induction approach and culminates with the Collection Accreditation Initiative test being taken by every individual before leaving the training environment.

#### Supporting qualifications

As people continue their 'in role' development, a number of qualifications become available and are supported by the business. These include NVQs in customer service and business administration as well as Credit Services Association (CSA) related certificates, awards and diplomas which are aligned to career paths and support people's development at both an employee and management level.

We are embarking on a journey with the CSA and exploring apprenticeships which are specific to our industry.

By the nature of our business, we have many roles that require specific development aligned to technical or professional requirements. Following a tailored induction into the business, the 'in role development' becomes more bespoke. These bespoke needs vary across functions and play a strategic role in building capability within areas such as risk, pricing and strategy. The approach taken is to continually review the competency requirements and focus on providing learning which will, in many cases, be with external associations or awarding bodies.

External qualifications, in this context, are an important investment and, whether in specialist areas such as risk and pricing or in broader support-related roles such as finance, IT or human resources, we recognise the important role these play in both supporting the technical requirements of a role and developing deeper commitment to the

business. We also recognise the importance of professional development in a person's career, whilst driving retention of those with key skills.

Internal and external learning and qualifications require an investment from the business. The return on that investment can often be quickly demonstrated within an individual's role.

The challenge any business may find is how that knowledge is nurtured within the business and shared to improve performance and broaden the capability of other parts of the business. Our approach to talent recognises this point.

## Many organisations have shifted their focus to 'learning and development', implying a shared ownership around development

Discussions take into consideration the traditional focus on leadership but, equally, focus is applied to the importance of technical expertise.

#### Employee engagement

Subsequently it is important to have mechanisms in place to support that both formally and informally. Leadership development is a critical component within our employee-engagement strategy. As we continue to embed the strategy and drive ownership deeper within the organisation, providing our leaders and managers within the business with tools and skills to do this is key.

Internal programmes of development are available and aligned against the company's values and leadership behaviours. People who have aspirations to explore management roles can be selected onto our 'launch pad' development programme to not only acquire new skills, but have the chance to develop and embed these through level 3 and 5 NVQs – level 5 being endorsed by the Institute of Leadership and Management and provided in partnership with a local college.

We understand the role employee engagement has to play in both driving business performance as well as our commitment to being an employer of choice. The role of learning and qualifications are important factors that support this. We recognise that, at a technical level, providing people with the 'tools to do their job' is one

important aspect, however the need to help people further develop and build careers in what they do, is equally so.

We continue to evolve our approach to leadership development and how we can align ourselves to external bodies that recognise excellence in this arena. Our journey continues this year with all our management community undertaking an 'engaging with engagement' programme. This is focused on the micro drivers of engagement and experiments with practical tools that managers can use, from day one, on returning from the programme.

We recognise the additional benefit that this brings in the form of challenge and innovation. Allowing people to explore what best practice may look like and understand what other organisations may be doing can only help to develop creativity and challenge what we do and how we do it.

Achieving Investors in People Gold and being placed within the *Sunday Times* Top 100 Companies To Work For in 2013 have been very proud moments for our organisation. These awards focus heavily on the employee experience and specifically talk to the opportunity people have to develop and grow within their organisation, so by nature of achieving this status we believe we are on the right track to benefit from the value training and qualifications bring to a business, both commercially and in terms of its focus and commitment to its people.

Ultimately we recognise the important role they play in driving organisational performance, and having conversations to that effect ensures everyone is very clear on the value and the important role that they play. **CCR**



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