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How Can Learning & Development be Applied to Support Employees' Changing Career Paths?

Abstract

Employees change their career path for reasons such as passion, opportunities, and interests. Companies need to prepare to support this career transition in order to improve the efficiency of the organizations. One of the most effective ways to support this transition is through learning and development. This year's Global Human Capital Trends survey shows that more than 85 percent of respondents cited learning as "important" or "very important." Yet, more companies than ever report that they are unprepared to meet this challenge [1]. To close gaps between career transition needs and lack of preparation in organizations, HR professionals and learning specialists are being asked to offer better learning platforms and products that meet new expectations of employees for on-demand learning opportunities.

Keywords

human resources, learning and development, training, learning, career path, workforce training

Comments

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Executive Summary

Final Question

- How can Learning & Development be applied to support employees' changing career path?
- What are some leading edge L&D approaches that companies are using to train their workforce? Include case studies if possible.

Introduction

Employees change their career path for reasons such as passion, opportunities, and interests. Companies need to prepare to support this career transition in order to improve the efficiency of the organizations. One of the most effective ways to support this transition is through learning and development. This year's Global Human Capital Trends survey shows that more than 85 percent of respondents cited learning as "important" or "very important." Yet, more companies than ever report that they are unprepared to meet this challenge [1]. To close gaps between career transition needs and lack of preparation in organizations, HR professionals and learning specialists are being asked to offer better learning platforms and products that meet new expectations of employees for on-demand learning opportunities.

Theoretical background for career path

When people decide to change their careers, they consider various factors in a complicated mechanism. Over the last decade, two new perspectives on career changes have emerged and become popular in the organizational literature: the protean career model and the boundaryless career model.

1) The protean career model

The protean career centers on the conception of psychological success resulting from individual career management, as opposed to career development by the organization. A protean career has been characterized as involving greater mobility, a more whole-life perspective, and a developmental progression. In more recent renditions of the protean career model, some scholars have characterized it as involving both a values-driven attitude and a self-directed attitude toward career management.[2][3]

2) The boundaryless career model

The boundaryless career refers to the notion that today's professionals manage their own career paths, as they seize new and often different job opportunities to obtain training, enhance their human capital, and remain marketable. Thus, rather than remain with one organization and line of work over the course of their careers, individuals self-manage their careers by autonomously capitalizing on new opportunities that they believe will provide them with valued returns in exchange for performance. [4]

These two theories help explain the mechanisms that influence an individual's career path. There are several ways that learning & development can support employees based on what can be learned from these career transition theories.

Learning & Development trends in workforce training

Competency-based Training [5]

Competency-based training fits well with personalized learning. It brings increasingly scarce training resources to the persons that need it the most and avoids subjecting people to training that they really don't need. Competency-based training can lead to improvements in productivity and also integrate very well with other HR disciplines such as recruiting and selection, performance management, succession planning, and compensation. Competency development can also be linked to organization capabilities and to organization strategy.

Corporate MOOCs [6]

The MOOC learning experience can be re-imagined to serve the learning needs of corporations. Some companies utilize MOOCs to meet their business challenges. In December 2014, Microsoft trained more than 850 sellers with an eight-week customized online course. The result was outstanding: an 85 percent of completion rate and a 95 percent of satisfaction level with a low dropout rate. This course was developed in partnership with INSEAD and Intrepid Learning Inc. The secret of success was that the MOOC was well tailored to company objectives, embedded in the corporate context, and designed with learner engagement and motivation in mind.

Social Learning [7]

Social learning can be defined as the acquisition of knowledge and skills through methods that are collaborative, immediate, relevant, and presented in the context of a personal work environment. Social Learning incorporates social media, gaming, real-time feedback, and advanced on-the-job methodologies. To develop social learning in an organization;

- **Recognize** the potential of user-generated learning content.
- **Create** organizational social media platforms to harness the power of interactive learning.
- **Understand** that the line between working and learning is becoming increasingly permeable. Learning is becoming more important with the pace of knowledge creation.
- **Respond** to the millennial generation's need for development.

Benchmark

Cisco [8]

The company was interested in building a learning-solutions center: a place where you find what you need in order to do your job better. The learning model at Cisco distinguishes between "structured learning" and "emergency learning," and tries to customize each form of learning to the needs of the individual. In the ideal learning environment, each person will be able to create a customized web page, tentatively called My Future. The My Future page will serve as a learning portal.

Google [9]

Google's Googler-to-Googler program is a great example of how companies promote a learning culture by unleashing the power of its own experts. Google taps its employees to teach career-building classes as extra curriculums. Giving employees teaching roles helps to develop a learning culture in which employees work together.

Conclusion

The protean and boundaryless careers models are still developing and there are many factors which impact their adoptability and implementation. Nevertheless, they are important concepts and have implications that should be considered. Based on these theories, HR professionals should integrate learning and development with the overall talent-management system including career paths. Technology will be used to help guide learning engagements, expand access to the accumulated knowledge base, and track progress toward closing critical competency gaps.

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