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L&D: key lessons from 2022 to look forward to 2023

The article presents an analysis of what worked and what did not work in the L&D sector, and reports lessons learnt from 2022 to focus on in 2023.

Living and working during the pandemic and its economic and social consequences has pushed companies to prioritise employee flexibility and fulfilment. Companies are re-examining training strategies, workforce models, values and culture, often driven by employee demands. L&D leaders are responding to constant demands for growth and development and are grappling with the pressing challenge of future-proofing their organisations. For example, these companies are seeking new ways to make skills development more aligned with career paths, internal mobility and retention, bringing a new sensitivity to employee well-being, diversity and inclusion. In this article we try to understand how the L&D sector is evolving, analysing data from the recent report " **2022 Workplace Learning & Development Trends**" published by the Society for Human Resource Management. The article gives attention to data that explain the general situation of the L&D sector, which training objectives are most important for companies, what problems employees encounter in receiving training and companies in providing it. Finally, it reports some recommendations that emerged from the study.

The situation in the L&D sector

Regarding company training, **75% of employees are satisfied with the training they receive from their employer** and believe it is relevant to their current work environment (76%) and sufficient for their role and career development (68%). Only 11% of employees are dissatisfied with the training and development on offer. Interestingly, regardless of general satisfaction, **55% of respondents say they need further training to perform their role to the best of their ability**.

On the company side, the **main challenge in the L&D sector is to fill the skills gap**. 53% of HR managers say they face a skills gap within their company. Of these, just over half, 51%, say that employee training is the main way to tackle the problem compared to hiring new employees (32%) or using freelancers and freelancers (17%). Retraining and skills upgrading are two of the methods used by companies to address the skills gap. The main distinction between the two is that the former adds new skills, while the latter builds on existing ones. Interestingly, there is a tendency to invest in retraining and refresher courses. In fact, 36% of the companies surveyed by the report say they already offer refresher training and 59% plan to offer it in the next 12 months, while 37% already offer **retraining** courses and 56% plan to offer them in the next 12 months.

Company strategies

In order to achieve a higher level of engagement and to encourage employees to be motivated, satisfied and productive and to feel that they are in the right place to reach their full potential, it is common for organisations to set **L&D objectives**. The most important training goals for organisations during 2022 according to HR managers are the following:

- 92% Strengthening a **positive** employee experience
- 88% Creating a diverse, fair and **inclusive** work environment
- 87% Creating a **highly skilled** and change-ready workforce
- 87% Improving employee **engagement**
- 86% Creating a **growth** mindset
- 86% Closing the **skills** gap
- 82% Reducing employee **turnover**

According to HR managers, the most important training objectives for organisations include enhancing a positive employee experience, creating a diverse, fair and inclusive work environment, improving employee engagement and creating a growth mindset in their organisation. These goals are fundamental to creating work environments in which employees and the company can thrive, but only if training works efficiently and effectively for both employees and the organisation.

The most common frustrations

a) of employees
Despite a general satisfaction with corporate training, more than half of the respondents stated that they need more training. Examining the issue in more depth, it emerges that the most common frustrations that employees say they have with company training are as follows:

- 33% find it difficult to maintain **motivation** for training.
- 25% quickly **forget** the training material.
- 25% lack the time to **complete** the training.
- For 24%, training is not **relevant** to their role.
- 21% think that the training content is out of date.

Basically, a third say that it is difficult to maintain motivation for training on the job, while a quarter say that after completing the training, they quickly start to forget the material. Employees also say that there is a lack of time to complete training at work, the training is not relevant to their role and training content is not up-to-date.

b) Companies
Organisations face several obstacles in delivering effective training. Interviewing HR department managers, the report found that the most common problem, cited by 35 per cent of HR managers, is **access to the right training content suited to their needs**. Furthermore, more than a quarter of HR managers (26%) say they do not always have the support of leadership for training. In fact, spending money to train employees in an increasingly dynamic labour market, where workers are not necessarily looking for a long-term career in one company, may seem like a risky investment. 33% of HR managers cite inadequate training budgets as another obstacle to providing training opportunities. However, 67 per cent of organisations expect their learning and development budgets to increase in the coming year, and 57 per cent say their budgets have already increased since the beginning of the pandemic, suggesting that organisations are placing increasing importance on L&D and seeking to include it in their business strategy.

How to make L&D more effective according to employees

When asked how training can be made more effective for employees, the answers were as follows:

- 38% want training that is more **relevant to their job responsibilities**
- 32% **more up-to-date content**
- 32% **more social training**
- 31% **more independence**
- 30% **shorter sessions**
- 24% **'gamified'** training
- 20% final **evaluations** on completion of the course
- 18% training more aligned with **principles of diversity, equity and inclusion**

The report data shows that **employees want to be sure their time is well spent**. Many want training more in line with the work they do and to be sure that what they are learning is up-to-date. Training should include a social element such as group sessions. Importantly, many employees want to have more control over their training programmes: they want access to training that best suits their career progression and interests, and they want to choose methods that suit their learning style. The conclusion is that organisations should understand and try to meet the training needs and desires of their workforce with regard to training content, timing and delivery methods. Indeed, L&D initiatives must be aligned with employees' personal goals and the organisation's corporate objectives.

The report's recommendations

To align L&D initiatives with employees' personal goals and the organisation's corporate goals, the report makes a number of recommendations that emerged from the study

- **Create a learning culture** where employees actively learn, encourage others to learn and share what is learned, and where leadership is at the forefront of making training a priority.
- **Align training with corporate objectives**. Employees must have the skills to succeed in their position. At the same time, it is good not to neglect soft skills and other personal development that employees can also use outside the work environment.
- Make sure that your L&D meets the **needs of employees**.
- **Emphasise the value of L&D programmes** by explaining the L&D vision, strategy and offers to employees and what the positive results are for them and the organisation.
- **Keep learners motivated** by using technology to make lessons engaging and accessible, and even incentivising learning by rewarding participants.
- **Retain acquired knowledge**. Actions could include:
    - Setting learning objectives and monitoring progress.
    - Providing resources for continuous reference.
    - Refresher courses.
- **Evaluate and test L&D** through four levels of training evaluation:
    - Evaluation of feedback: Are employees satisfied with the training?
    - Learning assessment: Have they acquired new skills?
    - Behaviour change: Do they apply what they have learnt in the workplace?
    - Return on investment: How did productivity, performance, loyalty or other metrics change as a result of the training?

Conclusion

The report shows that the L&D sector is still in great turmoil, but that the available technologies do not fully satisfy either employees or companies. The former, despite being generally satisfied, feel they need more training. Companies, on the other hand, have problems finding the technologies that meet their needs. The main point that emerges from the report is that some time is still needed. Companies are still trying to discover what it takes to meet the new training needs and desires of their employees. Only on the basis of these discoveries will L&D companies be able to develop and improve technologies to fully meet these needs in the coming years.

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