



Learning & Development

13 Ways to GUARANTEE STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

VIEW FROM THE CLO

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Whether your company refers to employee development as a corporate university, learning & development or training team, it is imperative that services strategically align to short term and long term organization goals and objectives.

Here are 13 ways to guarantee strategic alignment of learning services—

1. **Make sure everyone knows development is more than training.** Training will accomplish no more 20% of necessary learnings. The remainder requires work experiences with real time feedback and coaching; supportive colleagues including peers, managers and mentors; documented success factors and derailers; and, alternative learning services such as coaching, learning circles, and action learning.
2. **Use a formal process to link learning.** All development activities should be anchored to core values and best-practice performance standards. Performance standards should include both competencies (level of desired skill demonstration) and work life cycles (processes followed to complete series of tasks).
3. **Conduct organization development and specific interventions.** Offering OD and intervention services builds strategic relationships across the enterprise while at the same time, expanding credibility and providing an excellent source for information gathering.
4. **Define roles for senior leaders (integral to your alignment strategy).** Every opportunity taken to interact with senior leaders enhances access to information and resources. Roles for leaders including sponsors for key programs, ambassador who always talk highly of learning services, advisors who provide access to and freely share information, as well as presenters and coaches.

5. **Obtain resonance from advisory teams.** Many organizations have an advisory team exclusive to the corporate university. While this is excellent, it is a narrow way of approaching the business. To align effectively, make use of existing advisory teams across the enterprise. This includes leadership teams, task teams, and corporate governance.
6. **Help individuals successfully transition to your culture.** Every organization, no matter where it is located, has its own distinct culture and language. When individuals join, surround them with a tailored infrastructure, an immersion process, mentors and learning opportunities to expedite awareness and comfort. This includes written and unwritten, spoken and unspoken, and common and uncommon sense behaviors. Be aware of the obvious and not so obvious culture differences. While leading Booz Allen's Center for Performance Excellence, we developed a process to ease the transition of new senior leaders who joined from outside the firm. The result was a reduction in turnover among senior leaders from more than 25% in their first year to less than 5%.
7. **Meet needs of culturally and geographically disbursed employees.** Instead of participants coming to a centralized site to receive learning services, have your learning professionals travel to them or offer them online. Putting learning professionals on the road has several advantages—they learn about the unique needs of staff located outside the central facility, cost is considerably less for one to travel, and it eliminates the sense of “haves” and “have nots”. A virtual campus, allowing anywhere, anytime access is a tremendous benefit for extremely mobile staff. Offering programs online and via VTC also allows for great reach. When using VTC, keep in mind that you can emanate a program from any location so they are not always carried live at the learning center. Rather, consider offering the live version at a small site and using VTC to provide access to all others. Again, this reduces the perceptions of “haves” and “have nots”.
8. **Build critical skills.** Long term and short term business goals may have organizations entering a new or rapidly changing market, require organization changes and reskilling or upskilling. Others may be facing new compliance requirements or a need to increase specific skills such as diversity. The corporate university can easily align and provide high value by assessing the gap, prioritizing needs (with assistance from advisory teams), and developing services for the most critical and visible areas.
9. **Forecast needs and identify gaps.** The delta between assessed and desired performance allows unique access to important information. Learning professionals have the ability to close gaps, while at the same time influencing workforce planning.
10. **Respond to trends.** Is your organization experiencing an aging population or trends in specific demographic areas? These are perfect opportunities to align and demonstrate high value. In order to do this, map the trend, analyze it, assess gaps, prioritize, and build learning interventions. Other trends to look for are common performance gaps within a job family or team. This can be determined by meeting with managers and reviewing performance assessments.

11. **Participate in emerging market strategies.** Collaborate with the business to assist in rapid learning and deployment of new products and service offerings. Learning professionals facilitate the process by working with subject experts to glean and interpret information into manageable learning solutions. Training those same experts in presentation and adult learning methods rapidly spreads learning across the organization.
12. **Quantify impact.** I cannot remember where it was first heard, but for long as I can remember, the saying “you are what you measure” has been universally understood. If you measure and reward the right behavior, you get the right behavior. The same is true when it comes to quantifying impact. Rather than measuring how many people attended, how many courses are offered, how many hours of training are delivered, measure impact as defined by your organization’s leaders. You might or might not need to calculate and assign monetary values to measures being used within your organization. This ensures your leaders both understand and take seriously measured results. By determining desired outcomes in the design phase of a learning service, measurement of outcomes is clearer and easier. This is much better than what most do—retrofit measures after the fact. When you calculate value, invest the time to communicate results to stakeholders. Once a target is achieved, stretch is further to demonstrate additional contributions to the business.
13. **Help build the business.** Building a world-class corporate university can assist the brand of your organization. Sharing best practices, hosting visits, extending services to customers and earning third party employer of choice recognition help your organization’s brand and enhances the value of the learning function.

That’s our 13 ways to guarantee strategic alignment. If you can check off that your learning group is actively engaging each of the 13 “must” items, greater success for the corporate university and even greater contributions to your organizations is ensured.



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About Ed Cohen

Ed Cohen is Executive Vice President of Nelson Cohen Global Consulting. He is a strategic talent leader who provides executive coaching, consulting in learning strategies, leadership development, and global diversity whose career has spanned 36 years across more than 60 countries. His clients have included Farmers Insurance, Infosys, Novo Nordisk, SunPower, Western Union, and Yahoo. Ed is the only CLO to lead two companies – Booz Allen Hamilton and Satyam Computer Services (now Tech Mahindra) to number 1 for learning on the ATD BEST Awards.