USING LMS REPORTS AS A STRATEGIC PLANNING TOOL

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If your company makes use of a Learning Management System (LMS), take some time to think beyond the standard compliance and attendance type reporting that you typically come across. Many training, learning and development and human resources professionals quickly move on from analysing LMS reports because the initial data that is presented seems limited, presents limited visibility on business training spend and is not relevant to supporting business planning and strategy. It is very easy to get frustrated by the weakness of LMS reporting to go beyond the basic data, but it is the data within the reports that is actually underestimated.

By allocating some time and energy it is possible to apply basic business analysis to create the real picture of what is, and then what should be taking place in a company's learning and development plan. In many cases, the business decision behind choosing a Learning Management System is based on criteria such as:

- Range of functionality;
- Efficiency of presenting online learning content;
- Ability to manage the administration of course allocations and attendance;
- Automation of corporate compliance and ethics training material and reports and
- Compatibility with inherited systems.

These criteria are very important. Often the potential to use LMS reports as a strategic learning and development tool for analysing real-time training trends, and planning for the future is not part of the decision making process, and it should be.

Know Your Training Landscape

Do you really know your training

landscape? Accounting type reports that present the bottom line total spend on training, departmental spend and types of providers are easy to generate for most companies. The problem with simple line items in an accounting report though is that strategic decision makers can't get a picture on what type of training is taking place. That is, everyone knows that departmental managers are using their training budget, and that people are attending training.

How does the strategic management team know that the training activity meets the current and future needs of the business? What is the real business impact of time and money spent on compliance and ethics type training, versus business leadership or technical skills training? As a decision maker, would it be valuable to know that compliance type training took up 26% of your company's training time when business leadership took up 14%, or personal business development was in single percentage points of time?

A critical challenge for effective LMS reporting is the ability to present training reports that are relevant to business objectives and highlight how to better align training with business needs and support real workforce development.

Get a Bird's Eye-View

Use your LMS Report to get a bird's eye-view. If you can find the time to categorise training courses according to business themes, such as business and project leadership, technical skills or compliance and ethics, it becomes possible to start creating a trend analysis by filtering for those themes by using the data from a standard LMS report.

Being able to view the trend of specific training themes can be valuable to strategic decision makers who understand the importance of a healthy balance of training throughout the organisation, or what skills will be required for future projects.

For example, a trend analysis of training could help in giving business

units specific training targets to aim for. Business units within the organisation could make better decisions about balancing spend and time on the ratio between business and project leadership type training versus technical or professional skills.

Because compliance and ethics type training is often not negotiable, a trend analysis could help determine whether too much time is allocated to this type of training and how to become more efficient in presenting compliance type material. Taking the analysis a step further, it is possible to use the data from an LMS report to identify training trends and activity between different business units within an organisation.

Analysing and Presenting Metrics to Strategic Decision Makers

Regardless of what LMS your company may be using, it is important to acknowledge the need to move beyond basic measurements of training spend and attendance, to information that is relevant to business units and the organisation as a whole. Information such as total learning hours, the number of courses accessed, attendance and assessment scores do not really add value to strategic decision makers. LMS reporting needs to present potential learning paths that will empower decision makers to ensure that their workforce is appropriately skilled for future projects.

Allocating some time to the analysis of the data that is already in your LMS is an opportunity to move beyond reporting on training that is taking place for the sake of training, and to provide information that can provide answers on the impact of training on business.

The skills to create reporting templates and then the motivation to perform business analysis will need to reside within your team. Being able to extrapolate reams of data and then present the information in a format that is easy to understand is a particular

type of skill that shouldn't be taken for granted either. Making the complex look simple and digestible takes time, skill and an inherent awareness and knowledge of the business, its history and its future objectives.

If we start considering the ideal type of report that trainers would be interested in, where we breakdown the analysis of training according to Bloom's Taxonomy or Kirkpatrick's model, that's another story altogether. But it is possible. We just need to spend some time with the LMS data.

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