

Introduction

Employee development is a driver of economic growth. Employees and organizations are part of what the Danish economist B. A. Lundvall called the *learning economy*, in which knowledge is the critical resource and the most important process is learning (Lundvall & Johnson, 1994). Learning is the currency that drives innovation. In an era of constant change, globalization, and emerging technologies, the necessity for innovation is indisputable. Examples of new thinking, new learning, and new outcomes appear along with robotics, coding, big data, artificial intelligence, and “the Internet of things,” to name a few technologies. Cyberplatforms encourage collaborative learning and problem solving. These innovations are occurring in an increasingly tight economic climate. Business and nonprofit organizations are aware of the uncertainty of markets and the emergence of new, better, cheaper and faster methods

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Learning Interventions for Consultants: Building the Talent That Drives Business, by M. London and T. Diamante

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of production, distribution, and communication. Organizations expect to hire people with the technical skills and knowledge they need at the moment. They also expect them to have basic skills, including communications, critical thinking, empathy, ethical leadership, cross-cultural sensitivity, collaboration, teamwork, and more generally speaking, emotional intelligence (Capelli, 1999).

Today's organizations also expect employees to be continuous learners, to maintain and increase their skills and competencies to keep up with the rapid pace of change and competition. Melanie Kirk, senior vice president of human resources (HR) for FreshDirect, a fast-growing online grocer, stated that companies should develop employees with as many skillsets as possible (FEDCAP Solution Series, 2016). This includes *readiness* for training—the desire and ability to learn. Learning to learn becomes a critical skill that people acquire through the experience of learning and receiving positive reinforcement for using what they learn. Employees need to realize that ongoing learning is essential for their own career stability and growth. Those who do not realize this are at risk. Employees need to take responsibility for their own career development by understanding the skills and knowledge required in the organization and by being open to learning to meet current needs and prepare for the future (London, 1996; Tannous, 2016). The organization's role in support of employee learning is to provide the enabling resources.

This book guides learning consultants in how to design, implement, and support employee development programs. The consultant's role is to provide empirically based professional assistance in the design and implementation of policies, strategies, and programs for employee development. Learning consultants may be trained psychologists and educators, or they may be managers who have functional and/or technical experience in the organization as subject matter experts. They may work with HR managers to develop performance management systems that include selection, training, performance appraisal, feedback, and career development. In a market flooded by self-proclaimed solutions of all kinds, we guide consultants as learning professionals in theory and research-based approaches in order to direct them toward what works and what does not. Training consultants assess learning needs, identifying the skills and knowledge needed

by the organization today and in the foreseeable future, the extent to which employees have these skills and knowledge, and what they need to learn to close the gap and prepare for the future.

A few words about terminology: We often use the term *learning* instead of *training*, with a focus on the learner and the role of the consultant as the facilitator of learning. The term *training* suggests specific, formal learning events focused on a technical body of knowledge. *Learning* signifies a broader concept that encompasses a wide range of goals, methods, and assessments. Learning may be self-directed and experiential. It can also be vicarious (by watching others). It occurs on the job and in structured programs. It may be achieved through one or more technologies (e.g., mobile apps), and a variety of experiences such as assessments, role-plays, and games or business simulations. Training, in the narrower sense of structured education, is still important—therefore, we discuss it as part of the learning process throughout the book—but there is much more to learning, given the impact of technology and the diversity and complexity of work experiences. The accelerated pace of information dissemination and of social and organizational change creates challenges for learning professionals.

The term *development*, often conjoined with *learning*, is broader still. It refers to ongoing employee growth that prepares employees for the future in their current job or in jobs to come. The employee's goal may be career advancement—that is, to attain increasing levels of responsibility, challenge, and compensation. The organization's goal is to retain and enhance talent in order to sustain and strengthen the organization. Development is a process, not an event. It is the ongoing activation of a capability to learn, adapt, and grow. It implies experiences that contribute to employees' general abilities and value to the organization. Supervisors and managers at higher levels of the organization may be coaches and mentors who help employees understand their strengths and weaknesses, recognize opportunities for advancement in the organization, and understand the needs of the organization today and in the future.

Individual learning is acquiring knowledge and skills that are needed now or in the near future to perform work (i.e., training) and building

capacity over time to assume increasing responsibility (i.e., development). *Team learning* involves team members learning about each other and how to interact to meet changing conditions. *Organizational learning* enhances the readiness of the organization as a unit to work effectively and, when needed, change goals, policies, and programs.

We distinguish between three learning processes: adaptive, generative, and transformative learning. *Adaptive learning* is about incrementally building skills and knowledge using the more traditional training method of a teacher passing down information to a student. *Generative learning* is more focused on learners figuring out how to apply skills and knowledge themselves, integrating knowledge and experiences to arrive at new ways of working. *Transformative learning* is frame breaking—for instance, shifting to a behavioral style that supports a transition to a new business strategy, leading others using new tactics to underscore the reinforcement of new competencies (i.e., talent development), changing one's assumptions about how to enhance workforce motivation, and questioning what and how one operates personally toward achievement of new goals (Mezirow, 2000).

Building on theory, research, and practice in the psychology of learning, HR development, and organization change, we articulate a five-step process for learning design and delivery:

1. assessing needs of individuals, teams, and organizations—similar to an initial clinical intake, identifying needs and considering when and how the client may benefit before proceeding;
2. contracting with clients—setting learning objectives in relation to the broader goals of the organization, conducting more in-depth needs analyses, and establishing a contract for Steps 3 through 5;
3. designing and beta testing learning methods;
4. implementing the learning intervention(s); and
5. evaluating the interventions for continuous improvement.

These steps may repeat over time, possibly in a cycle, for instance, where the evaluation becomes the needs analysis for further learning. Also, we discuss opportunities to use social media and other electronic

and mobile technologies for learning, offering case examples and recommendations for application.

This book is for consulting psychologists and those new to consultative roles. We also intend the book to appeal to nonpsychologists, such as learning consultants, corporate-based facilitators of learning, and others who are interested in specific aspects of training and development, such as instructional design, learning efficacy, and/or experimentation with emerging technologies.

Throughout this book, we use the terms *consulting psychologist*, *learning professional*, *training professional*, *facilitator of learning*, and *consultant* interchangeably. We use the term *client* generically, whether the learning is aimed at the organization, team, or individual. The client may be the organization as a whole or one or more teams within an organization. Of course, consultants work with individuals. This could be the CEO, another “C” level executive (e.g., chief talent, learning, or training officer), a team leader, team members, or subject matter experts. These clients may act on behalf of themselves to increase their own learning, that of their unit, or the entire organization.

In Chapter 1, we describe the perspectives that consultants bring to learning interventions. They can design, deliver, and evaluate learning in the corporate classroom, online, and on the job. In Chapter 2, we focus on the science of learning, examining seminal theory and research that show the value of learning interventions to individuals, teams, and organizations. Chapter 3 describes five steps for creating training design and implementation: needs analysis, contracting, design, implementation, and evaluation. Chapter 4 focuses on the practice of learning, describing learning interventions for adaptive, generative, and transformative learning. We cover learning that helps people adapt their behaviors as they acquire competencies that are immediately applicable for improved job performance and for longer-term transformational change. Chapter 5 covers integrating technology into learning interventions, for instance, examples of blended approaches for in-person and self-paced e-learning. Finally, Chapter 6 offers recommendations for learning professionals, the challenges they face, and directions for the future.

We offer examples throughout the text, and each chapter includes one or more cases. These examples and cases exemplify the importance of needs analyses. In addition, they show how evaluations can improve learning methods and outcomes. The cases highlight the limitations of real-world practice, for instance, that learning design and implementation are constrained by resources, timelines, leaders' goals, and organizational culture. They also show that learning interventions are part of, and contribute to, broader organizational initiatives. As such, learning professionals are not merely service providers but also facilitators of organizational change.