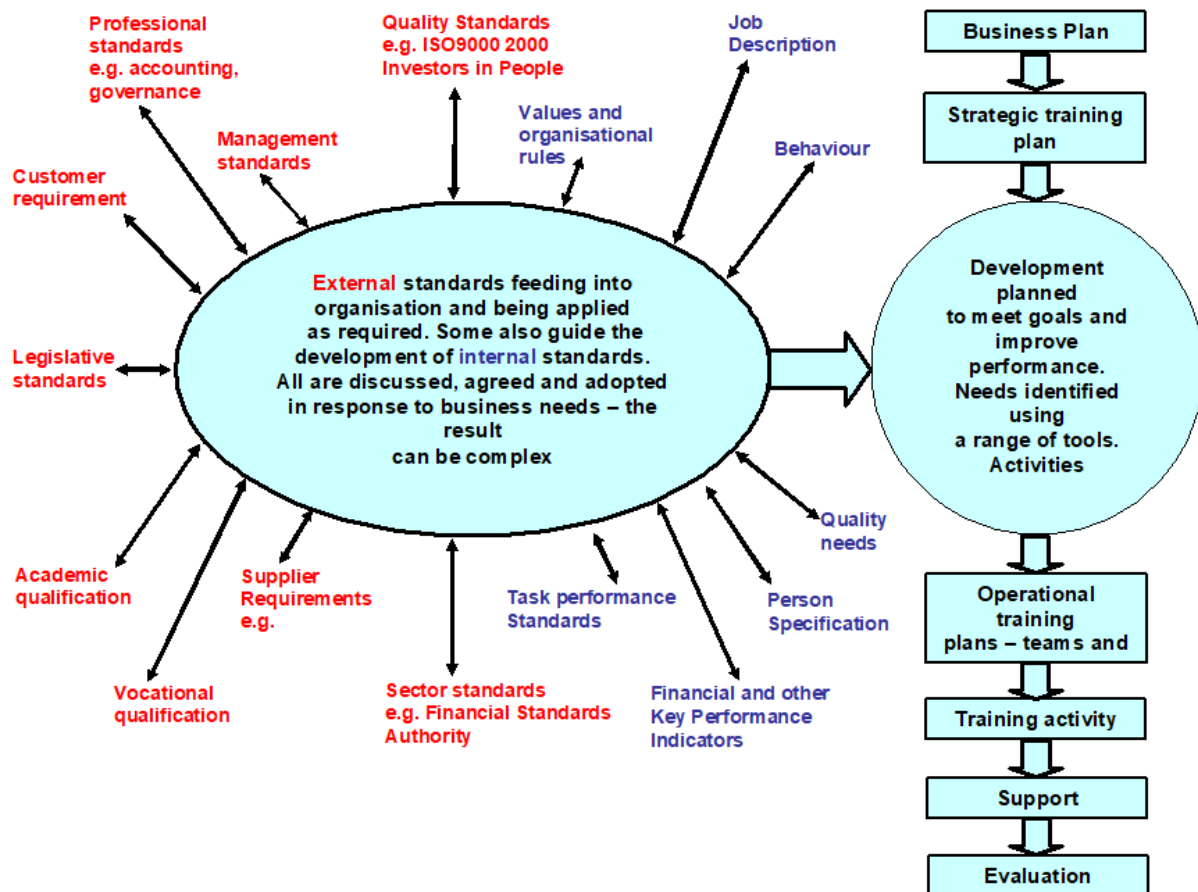**Guide to effective learning and development**

Employee development is concerned with all aspects of providing learning and growth opportunities for staff. In the main it is aimed at ensuring that people can do their jobs well. This diagram outlines the business drivers for development.

Professional standards e.g. accounting, governance

Quality Standards e.g. ISO9000 2000 Investors in People

Job Description

Management standards

Values and organisational rules

Behaviour

Customer requirement

Legislative standards

External standards feeding into organisation and being applied as required. Some also guide the development of internal standards. All are discussed, agreed and adopted in response to business needs – the result can be complex

Quality needs

Academic qualification

Supplier Requirements e.g.

Task performance Standards

Person Specification

Vocational qualification

Sector standards e.g. Financial Standards Authority

Financial and other Key Performance Indicators

Business Plan

Strategic training plan

Development planned to meet goals and improve performance. Needs identified using a range of tools. Activities

Operational training plans – teams and

Training activity

Support

Evaluation

However, personal development for the purposes of succession planning is also key to consistent performance overall. The best organisations support and encourage people to develop beyond their current roles and to achieve their full potential.

People learn in many different ways, but in the workplace all types of instruction, formal training and activities beyond the day-to-day task should be included. For example, acting up and project work are both highly developmental activities and should be recognised as such with appropriate discussion of what learning could take place.

Training in its widest sense might be said to include all managed learning in the organisation. Examples include: -

- Induction
- On job training ('sitting next to Nellie')
- Internal courses
- External courses
- Assessed vocational courses
- Briefings and presentations

- Coaching and mentoring
- Conferences and seminars
- Self-study or eLearning
- Secondments and projects

This list is not exhaustive, but all are 'training' activities that require organisation and might therefore be part of an internal training departments' tasks.

Managers should be fully engaged with the development of their people. They should always be seeking to stretch individuals and at the same time providing an appropriate level of encouragement and support.

Identifying Training Needs

Overall training needs should be driven by organisational strategy. The identification of needs should align with organisational purpose and plans, addressing gaps in knowledge that exist now or will do so in the future. At the higher level, learning needs may be more general, but will become increasingly specific as they are identified at group, role and individual level.

There are many ways of identifying learning needs, some analytical and structured and others responsive to events or situations.

It is probably fair to say that no one process of identification is right in a given situation. Rather a blend of methods should be used to cater for the varying levels and many variables that exist.

Whilst needs can emerge from almost anywhere, the process used for identification is a 'top down – bottom up' because it starts at strategic level and ends with individual learning. This means that any process must recognise and take into account the individual issues of development. Development activities should flow from, and be part of, the organisation's business planning process. The list below sets out some of the information sources from which strategic development needs may be identified: -

- Customer satisfaction surveys
- Business performance statistics and reports
- Competitor analysis and comparison, e.g. SWOT analysis
- Management feedback on employee needs, including from appraisals
- Training Needs Analysis, skills audits, staff assessment centres
- Staff feedback on training needs
- Policy and strategic priorities
- Legislative pressures

All of these factors may feed into the planning process which should also capture and record development needs. However, often external factors lead to the development of internal standards in a quite complex process.

Arranging Training Activities

Before any training or development activity is started, you should decide on what the outcomes and benefits will be. This is to ensure that you fully understand the value and focus of the spend involved.

The planned outcomes translate directly into the points that require evaluation after the event and help to get the best from the activity. Sound evaluation is important and is required for recognition as an Investor in People.

The first consideration is to ensure that the training to be provided will meet the identified development needs, perhaps by being aligned to specific goals in the business plan.

Whatever process is chosen or recommended, it will also need to meet the organisation's training and development policy and fall within planned budgets.

Once the identified need and training process are agreed, you can research, book or set up the actual activity. This will depend upon the type of training to be used.

Factors that affect individual learning in and out of the workplace

For learning to be effective, organisations must recognise and work with the four main criteria which affect individual learning: -

1 - Activities that meet the learning objectives - at the most basic level, can an activity be arranged that matches the need? Also the type of training envisaged must suit the desired outcomes. For example, practical skills require practical learning activities whereas theoretical knowledge may require class room training. The main issues around objectives are: -

- Strategic fit.
- Timescale – is there time to do it and will it impact upon the intended objective in the right timescale?
- Cultural fit – especially relevant to any development around behaviours and attitudes such as interpersonal skills?
- Is there a need for new knowledge, or is it that the current level of understanding of policies and procedures is insufficient?
- Is learning need really around knowledge or skills, or are there issues brought about by a lack of confidence?
- Is the requirement around common problems? If so, developing a clear understanding of these via discussion may be all that is required.
- Are fresh ideas and perspectives needed? If so benchmarking with other organisations or using outside trainers become key options.

2 – Transfer new knowledge into the workplace

There is clearly little value in training people if the knowledge is not transferred into the work place. Therefore, a culture which values development and ensures that people are both encouraged and supported to use new knowledge is important. This is the reason why

ownership of development and proactive cooperation from all levels of management is vital for success.

There may also need to be further support by the creation of working conditions which are 'safe' for new learning to be tried out.

Transfer of knowledge can be supported in various ways. Managers have a key role here and can have a major impact on development processes. They need to: -

- Ensure that there are opportunities for new learning to be used in the workplace, with appropriate support if needed.
- Encourage people to take risks because making mistakes is often how we learn. Limiting this aspect will significantly block development so managers should develop a 'no blame' culture.
- Review progress regularly and for long enough to consolidate learning and ensure new behaviours are embedded.
- Feedback on the progress and impact of development to support new learning and to plan the next steps.
- Set a good example – if managers do not learn and develop or encourage other to do the same, why should other team members do so?
- Encourage self-reflection - reflection is an important part of learning. After any development activity and before using the new knowledge, it is very useful to reflect upon the impact of the learning and how it can be transferred effectively into the role.
- Delegate - in any organisation, work is delegated by leaders and managers. Delegation can be very developmental and can be used specifically for the purpose of facilitating the use of new learning.
- Coaching and Mentoring - these are processes which enable individuals to move towards achieving their full potential. Both are supportive in nature and offer opportunities to analyse, reflect upon and take action to improve aspects of performance.

3 – Make the resources available

Resources include the required financial support as well as time, adequate venues and people. Resources that need to be taken into account when planning training include: -

Finance for outside training, time away from work (e.g. cover or overtime) and accommodation.

- The possibility of any outside funding.
- Accommodation for classroom courses and workshops.
- An appropriate environment for on the job type training.
- Equipment.
- Trainers with the expertise to design programmes deliver training, coach people and offer other appropriate support.
- Availability of outside courses in the right place and at the right time.
- Standalone or library resources.

- In-house coaches and mentors.
- In house specialists – i.e. in organisational specific skills.
- On job trainers.
- ICT resources.

4 – Understand how people learn (often by making mistakes)

Generally, of all the ways in which people can learn, they do so most effectively by doing the job with constructive feedback and coaching. This is especially true of adults.

It is also important to understand that people will make mistakes (and learn from them) so the ethos must be one where an element of risk taking is encouraged and mistakes are acceptable. A failure to do this will stifle development.

Training always needs to align as far as possible with the basic principles of adult learning: -

- Motivation – for training to be effective, people need to be motivated to learn. Their perceptions of value, preferred learning style, how the event is sold to them and practical factors such as time away from home will all be important.
- Meaningful – the learning must be useful, relevant, interesting and pitched at the right level.
- Actively involving – this gives people power and control which increases their commitment and speeds up learning.
- Goals – people need clear goals so that they can define success and have a sense of purpose.
- Feedback – balanced and regular feedback lets people know how they are doing and recognises their progress.
- Capacity to learn – pitch the content and pace of learning to match people's needs. Overstretching people impacts upon retention.
- Review – repetition and discussion helps to embed knowledge.