

A business lens for learning and development

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29 May 2018

In a 1998 Harvard Business Review article, Professor Dave Ulrich controversially called the business human resource function "ineffective, incompetent, and costly". He also accused HR professionals of lacking knowledge or experience with empirical assessments.



Two decades later, however, this outspoken University of Michigan professor was ranked as the No. 1 Management Educator and Guru by BusinessWeek, as well as the most influential thinker of the decade by *HR Magazine*!

As an important partner and role-player in the human resource camp, organisational learning and development must guard against being ineffective, incompetent, costly, value-sapping and fearful of quantitative, measureable results. In fact, with the increasing investment that companies are making in the learning and development of their people, L&D needs to provide business with quantitative, measureable results that prove their effectiveness, competence and the value they add to the organisation.

It's a tricky situation for L&D practitioners. For years we've been reporting on activities: showing how effectively we've identified

needs; the great L&D solutions we've found to meet learning needs; how many people have completed our learning and development programmes; and how well people experience and rate our interventions. Business remained unimpressed by our "warm and fuzzy" reporting, instead demanding facts and figures that demonstrate a clear return on the generous investment made in the learning and development of their people.

As predicted by Prof. Ulrich two decades ago, organisational learning and development needs to earn the respect of business leadership and their spot at the boardroom table by talking numbers and proving their value. While a host of courses are available to teach L&D practitioners how to be effective facilitators, assessors, moderators, skills development facilitators or instructional designers, few opportunities exist for L&D people to upskill themselves on thinking business, partnering effectively with leadership, and proving in black and white how they add value.

The [Wits Plus Organisational Learning and Development short course](#) has been tailored to provide the L&D professional with foundational knowledge about the L&D landscape, legal compliance, and how to identify and address learning needs. The course then delves into hard business reality - strategy, budgets, analysis, reporting and partnering with leadership. The focus is on objectives and results: quantitative, measureable results that offer proof of the value L&D adds to the organisation.

It is not impossible to show the numerical, factual impact of learning and development on business success. It simply requires organisational L&D practitioners to look at their function with a different lens - the same business efficiency and performance lens worn by organisational leadership at the boardroom table. This is the lens that Prof. Ulrich has been challenging human resources to wear for years, and the lens that has seen him become an inspirational thought leader for those who dedicate their lives to the learning and development of people in the workplace.

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