SETTING L&D PRIORITIES

DEFINE A PRIORITY
Determine what makes a priority before identifying what they are.

IDENTIFY A PRIORITY
Based on your definition, decide how you will identify them.

PLAN FOR THE PRIORITY
Where will these fit into the strategy and how will you implement?
THE DEFINITION OF A PRIORITY

The list below are a select number of ways in which you may define what a priority is. You will need to decide which of these you will use, if you try to select all then you soon find that everything becomes a priority!

- Impacts the ability to achieve project success
- Driven by the strategic plan
- Urgent AND important
- Urgent needs as defined by current challenges
- High impact and effectiveness
- Project or contract deliverables
- Upcoming opportunities to leverage
- Where the money is at
- Gaps in current skills/capabilities
- Requests from countries/staff
- Program quality
IDENTIFYING A PRIORITY

Once you have decided what a priority, start building a picture of what these priorities are. Base them on information and observances that you can later measure.

- Case studies of prior programs
- Evaluate targets vs actuals
- Organization strategic objectives in line with strategic plan
- Conversations with senior leadership
- Common themes on hitting or missing core indicators
- Key performance indicators
- Common performance or capacity issues
- Looking at high turnover in specific roles
- Upcoming needs for new projects/programs.
- Needs of critical posts
- Benchmarking with trends in the sector
- Areas of potential exposure/liabilities
- L&D specific annual surveys for all staff at all levels
There are different things that you will need to consider when planning for what you have now identified as your learning and development priorities. These might be key questions you have to ask or things that might impact on these plans becoming a reality.

**Support**

Your first question should be 'do I have leadership buy-in'. With the backing of both leaders and managers your areas of priority will be more visible within strategies but also be owned and championed by those that these priorities directly impact. Remember to **be realistic in your goals**, enable those who will lead to visualize how these can be included in their plans. Your plans should always be a part of the wider plans and strategies. Are these priorities the priorities of the organization and will they bring value to those working on vital projects?

**Resources**

All plans will need resources but who's and what resources will they be. Think about the following and begin to plot out how you might address them:

1. How will existing processes be affected in terms of time, resources, work load etc.
2. What resources are already available?
3. Looking forward, how will you sustain learning?
4. Are you keeping your plans real?
Case Study:

The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) saves wildlife and wild places worldwide through science, conservation action, education, and inspiring people to value nature. Caryn Carman explains how the organization sets its learning priorities.

Learning is at the heart of our work. It is integral to our core values as well as our organizational strategy. We know employee development helps us achieve our goals but with limited time and resources, we have to set learning priorities. In setting these priorities, our main focus is alignment with our organization’s wider priorities.

At WCS, we review proposed learning priorities within a matrix that considers cost (i.e., resources, time, budget) against level of organizational impact. We measure and evaluate the impact of learning by gathering participant and manager feedback immediately after initiatives and at regular intervals later on. We also track reported behavior changes.

Leadership buy-in is critical when setting learning priorities, so we have regular meetings with senior staff and share outcomes of our initiatives. We also need managers’ buy-in and time to succeed. Investment in additional staffing and technology is also going to be important.

One lesson we’ve learned at WCS is to remain flexible around our learning priorities, adapting them to changing organizational needs and available resources. Involving diverse staff from various levels of the organization in conversations around learning is also key, as is integrating learning into everyday activities.

At WCS, setting learning and development priorities has created an avenue for conversations around expanding staff capacity through professional development, succession planning, and performance management. As a result, our organization is positioned to be more effective in achieving its mission.
Find ways to support the conversations the organization needs to be having. Work with teams to identify their own needs and then give them the tools to address them. Set L&D strategies that allow for individual/job groups to see their personal paths to growth, which is informed by the overarching organizational needs.

Above all remember our purpose is not to grow our catalog of courses, but to grow our team’s ability to impact the communities we serve.
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