

Learning Analysis to Coaching Implementation: Assess, Acquire Knowledge, Integrate in Practice

Adult Learning Needs in a Workplace Context

Unless people are familiar with the term, when I say I have a background as a learning needs specialist, I get all kinds of questions like, “What learning disabilities do you help kids with?” and “What school do you teach special needs at?”.

While these questions are understandable given the similarities in vocabulary between specialties, and these occupations are incredibly valuable, I actually focus on adult learning needs in a workplace and career context. Rather than addressing learning problems in an academic context, I assist companies and individuals to understand where the gaps are in what they need to know to get to their goals. Then, I help them find the right training to address that gap.

Identifying and Implementing Solutions

Sometimes it turns out the company needs to provide extra training on new software or a piece of equipment. In that case, I look for the best provider to fill the knowledge gap and do a short-term training that brings everyone up to speed. Sometimes, the gap includes issues like communications breakdowns, job or departmental transitions, or struggling teams, and that’s when a longer-term solution might be needed.

Larger companies sometimes have dedicated staff to regularly assess what obstacles managers and employees are facing in completing a project or moving through a workday with satisfaction and productivity. Mid-size and smaller companies are often trying to assess this on their own, without a systemic approach to the questionnaires and observational reporting process that helps bring concrete pieces of information into the mix. Whether large or small, often it’s easier to bring a third party in for an assessment because of the neutral and safe nature of talking with someone outside the company, where there will be no recriminations or negative job impacts for speaking one’s mind about what the challenges of the workplace truly are for them.

Understanding what type of solution is appropriate saves companies time and money; having someone capable of conducting an accurate and efficient process to get at the real needs is my specialty. At this point in time, we’re all lifelong learners, and every job or workplace is an ever-changing set of challenges and renewed priorities to keep up with market demands, technological changes, and cultural shifts. Most jobs require continual skills-building to stay current just with the basics, much less the high-performance output that so many high-achieving people and companies desire. Staying static with what you know, how you handle people, or the way you think about processes and challenges simply isn’t an option any longer.

The Coaching Connection

That’s actually why I became a business performance coach. I found I could help companies leverage the learning needs assessment into long-term results by providing longer-term support beyond the few days or weeks of the training workshops I located for specific, limited areas of knowledge. Having someone help integrate the knowledge with a deeper dive into the blocks on team communication, or leadership

style, or nagging worries about getting to the next level allowed for the social support, repeated actions, and solid trust to become a fundamental part of transforming workplace function and culture.

Getting people and companies unstuck, better informed, and in synch helps target the best new hires, retain employees, and create a happier workplace. Although we have a societal inclination to believe that stress and pressure are good for us, and help us to perform better, we also have plenty of studies that show how detrimental stress is to our bodies and social relationships. Often, in a business thinking mode, that's what we lose: the perspective that any business is actually heavily dependent on human relationships, and the quality of those relationships isn't always at its best under the maximum load of strain.

Bringing the people focus back to the workplace may sound "fluffy" to some, but may be just what the work doctor ordered for organisations that are clearly in a stagnant or conflicted place. Generally, productivity suffers when resentments are at a high level, people feel unheard and unappreciated, and employees are busy wondering when they can move on to a better situation. "Shut up and get on with your job" is rarely the most motivating mantra to face every morning, and the bottom line of every company is deeply impacted by whether or not the workplace is one that invites feedback, engagement, and a chance to be the best of ourselves. Sometimes, the new knowledge or learning gap is in how to create a more modern and inspiring workplace that gives managers and employees a place to shine for their top skills, creating complementary teams that share an overall agreement on values and vision but that don't require individuals to be mindless, numb cogs in the machine.

Coaching for Contemporary Expectations

In fact, I think the next frontier of the workplace is both old and new. We used to expect job security and pensions for trading our time with an employer; while that expectation has fractured with changing economic times, we now expect to be recognized and promoted, achieving the highest level of our learning and output capacity. The company is still expected to provide, and the individual is still expected to work consistently and well, but in very different ways. As work has occupied more time, it has become an increasing part of our personal identity. The companies that address this with programs on self-awareness, team-building, and communications improvements find themselves held in much higher regard by their employees, and are considered much more desirable places to work.

What do you feel you need to learn to reach the next level of your career or market position? Have you focused mostly on your customers, and need to offer something now to your employees? Are there problems that so far, you've found unsolvable? From learning needs assessment to long-term coaching, there may be issues and techniques you haven't identified yet that can help put you, your team, and your business in a stronger position, building a foundation of success for many years to come.