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Training and Development in the Spa Industry

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Introduction

This chapter outlines the importance of training and development to the success of a spa business. It provides evidence of how a well-supported training and development programme can improve profitability, staff loyalty and customer satisfaction. The human interaction between the spa consumer and the spa employee is a critical part of the customer experience, and a motivated and happy workforce is critical to the success of a spa business.

Training and development is one of many investment activities a spa business can use to improve its performance. However, investment in this area is often the first activity to be cut when budgets are tight. It is critical that training and development departments and spa managers can demonstrate that strategic investment in their staff has a high probability of success in helping to achieve organisational goals and contributing to improved business performance, if they are to be prioritised ahead of other investment activities. Robust quantifiable outputs are required that focus on the extent to which organisational objectives are achieved.

The importance of training and development

Successful learning organisations include how they plan to manage and develop their human capital in their corporate strategy. Training and development forms part of the strategic priorities of a successful learning organisation, with tools designed to measure the impact and demonstrate the ability of training and development to improve organisational performance and support business decisions. Businesses that link training to specific impacts are more likely to invest in their workforce because they focus learning opportunities on appropriate people and business critical activities where it will have most impact.

An innovative learning organisation requires investment in knowledge to generate and develop new services, products and processes (Figure 13.1). The outcome from that investment creates new knowledge, information and ideas which over time become obsolete and the whole process starts again. This cycle of investment and knowledge creation develops a learning culture within organisations. According to Casillas *et al.* (2010: 163) "Learning is the process of acquisition, integration and interpretation of new knowledge with the objective of later use". A spa business must have the ability to renew knowledge, create new ideas and be innovative. This requires a workforce with multiple skills, competences and problem solving abilities.

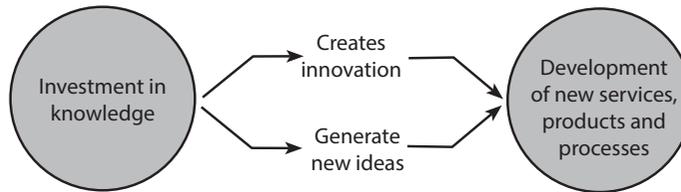


Fig 13.1: Learning culture

All organisations need to develop and change and they can only do that if their workforce develop and change with them. In a highly competitive environment such as the spa industry, new knowledge needs to be learnt and applied more quickly than its competitors. Many successful organisations are familiar with David Kolb's (1984) concept of learning as a continuous process of experience, reflection, conceptualisation and experimentation and embrace this as part of their training and development strategy

Training and development is one of the main ways in which organisations maintain and improve their intellectual capital. The quality of service, reputation and the ability to grow the business is highly dependent on the workforce. An untrained or poorly trained workforce costs an organisation more to support than a well-trained workforce. Therefore it should follow that investing in human capital makes good business sense. A research report for the American Society for Training and Development by Bassi *et al.* (2000) demonstrates a strong connection between workplace learning and financial measures, and that the quality of an organisation's training affects its value.

Businesses must be able to measure the impact of training and development to show how investment in organisational learning creates value for the organisation. Without impact measures, investment is unlikely to be forthcoming. According to Sonal Uberoi (n.d.), Director of Spa Business Consulting, spa businesses are reluctant to invest in training. Spa businesses do not want to take people out of their business for training unless it is going to make their business more successful. Global Spa and Wellness Summit report (GSWS, 2012: 84) suggest that spa businesses need “a proactive approach towards talent, leadership and human resource development” in order to address the management talent gap in the industry. They confirm that education, training and workforce development should be a key priority for the industry and that training and development requires quantifiable evidence on return on investment (ROI). This helps the business meet its strategic priorities, provides competitive advantage and increases profitability.

The creation of a learning culture in a spa organisation requires formal and informal learning opportunities as part of a strategic approach to training.

Formal learning opportunities include training courses and events away from the day-to-day activity of the workplace. This provides access to new information and concepts and brings people together to share ideas, collaborate on projects, solve problems, meet new people and build knowledge together. Formal learning opportunities are commonly used in the spa industry as they have the advantage of standardising a base of knowledge required by the business. For example, formal training programmes for product training, health and safety standards, policy and procedures etc. Structured formal education programmes, from NVQs to degree programmes, allow individuals to build on existing knowledge, develop new knowledge and skills and prepare them for promotion.

Organisations using formal learning as part of their training and development strategy would benefit from providing opportunities for staff to transfer their new knowledge to the workplace in a supportive environment in order to gain maximum benefit and ensure that training and development is not seen as separate from work. All too often investment in training is wasted because there are no mechanisms in place to support and monitor the transfer of new knowledge into the business.

Informal learning in the work place involves a combination of learning from others and learning from personal experience. At its simplest, informal learning can be implicit, unintended, opportunistic and unstructured. Providing structured opportunities for informal learning would include mentoring, action learning sets, communities of practice and, moving more towards the formal learning, would be coaching. According to Eraut (2011) the types of informal learning opportunities in the workplace is important because the learning opportunities exist in the challenge of work itself and learning from others. Eraut found that employees learned more through work than from formal organised learning events when the right conditions were put in place to enhance the learning opportunities. Eraut provides some examples of informal learning in the workplace.