

Survival of the fittest

“Ensuring your workforce is in good shape for the future”

As Darwin said, “it is not the strongest who survives but the one most responsive to change”. How responsive is your organisation? How responsive are you? Is your workforce in good enough shape to survive the natural selection process?

Susan Grandfield is a personal effectiveness consultant and coach with Mentor Group. She specialises in enabling individuals and teams to achieve their potential through highly interactive and participative workshops and power sessions and through 1:1 coaching. Over the last 6-12 months she has been closely observing how organisations are reacting to the current economic situation in relation to developing their workforce whilst working with clients on projects such as “Developing a Coaching Culture” and “Service Excellence”.

In this white paper, Susan lays out the 3 key themes which she has identified as creating a formula for success:

1. the need for **adaptability**
2. the requirement for **efficiency**
3. the desire for **engagement**

The aim of this discussion document is to share Mentor’s experience and thoughts with you so that you can identify what you could do to equip your workforce and your organisation for short-term survival and long-term success.

■ **Adaptability**

The overwhelming message at the G20 summit in London in April 2009 was how much the world has changed. We now face a more uncertain future, therefore we need to be able to adapt to new challenges and to be comfortable with continuing ambiguity. It is the people and organisations who are best equipped with the skills and mindset to be able to adapt quickly who will survive now and in the future.

Now is an ideal time for organisations to review and re-define the key competencies, skills and behaviours that they need from people in order to survive in the short-term. Many organisations are working with a reduced headcount, but that does not need to mean a reduced skill set. Helping people to identify their strengths and apply them in a wider variety of situations will help them to realise their potential. Coaching is recognised by almost 70% of organisations as a vital part of this.

Being adaptable is not just about skills, however. It is also about mindset i.e. people’s willingness to adapt. Managers and L&D professionals have a role to play in helping people to understand the need to be adaptable and the benefits of being flexible, both in the deployment of their skills and in working practices. Challenging people’s beliefs about their capabilities and the role they play in an organisation can result in more resourceful, confident and effective employees.

■ Efficiency

Time and money have always been perceived barriers to developing people, and it appears that this view is even more prevalent given the current reduction in resources (both financial and human) in many organisations. The key message communicated at the Davos summit in January 2009 was that organisations now need to be able to do 20% more with 20% less. This could feel like an impossible task, but that is exactly where people development and efficiency come together.

There are many ways to develop people to enable them to be more productive and resourceful. In today's world of social networking, virtual training rooms, e-mentoring, "just-in-time learning" and so on, there is a multitude of ways to develop people more economically than traditional classroom based training. The CIPD survey ("War on Talent" 2009) highlighted a 42% increase in the use of e-learning. Web 2.0 and even 3.0 are becoming common language in organisations, and it is important that L&D professionals keep up to date with the latest developments in technology-enhanced learning, especially with the entry of Generation Y into the job market.

At Mentor, we have noticed a marked increase in the number of requests from clients to offer technology-based solutions alongside more traditional tutor-led development, and the amount of "menu driven training" we are delivering is decreasing. We are also getting a positive response from clients when we offer to develop their L&D teams and their managers in order to carry out some of the training and coaching in-house. The CIPD have found that 61% of organisations are increasing their focus on the role of the line manager, in order to provide on-going development to their workforce in a more efficient way.

This need to be more cost effective is also notable by the increased emphasis on evaluation and the ability to demonstrate return on investment. Organisations need to demonstrate that the time and money being invested in developing people is delivering clear business benefits. Starting off with a clear understanding of the need (why development is necessary) and the goal (what we are trying to achieve) will make evaluation much easier.

■ Engagement

More than ever, organisations need to engage their workforce. Believing that people are "happy to have a job" is a short-sighted view, and could result in a lower level of performance from people in the short-term, and potentially a mass exodus of talented people in the long-term. It is vital to engage people now in order to gain their commitment and trust; success in this area will result in a more effective workforce now and a more dedicated workforce in the future.

Although employee satisfaction appears to have increased recently, the reality is probably that people are fearful of the lack of alternative employment and perceive their current job to be their best option. People want to feel safe and secure, above all so successful organisations are the ones which demonstrate to people that their skills are valued and that there is a future with the organisation.

Developing career paths to show employees the opportunities available to them will help to motivate them, and encourage them to look at how they can diversify their skills (become more adaptable, see above) and become more marketable. Career paths are changing and the traditional approach of moving up the organisational hierarchy is much less common today. People entering the job market now are likely to have up to 15 jobs in their career, so organisations should be demonstrating the variety of jobs they can offer recruits.

Generation Y are already a significant factor in the increase in technology-based learning and communication. These under-25's are also demanding more variety in their jobs, the opportunity to widen their experience and skills, and the ability to be more flexible in how, when and where they work. Engaging this group of people requires a shift in thinking and practice by employers.

There has also been an increase in talent management programmes which enable managers to identify talent, and provide them with the support to nurture that talent for the future. 88% of organisations see coaching as a vital part of their talent development programme (CIPD 2009).

■ **Summary**

The overall message across a range of business is that people are the differentiating factor which will determine the success or failure of an organisation, and now is the time to act to ensure that your organisation is able to attract, develop and retain the best people.

Commitment to developing people must come from the top and must be demonstrated right through the organisation by every line manager. L&D professionals can gain respect and add real value by demonstrating a varied approach to learning and development and a clear return on investment.

The prevalence of technology, coaching and in-house training solutions will continue to grow and will enable organisations to provide effective development to its workforce.

Survival of the fittest means being one of those who is more responsive to change and we believe that the 3 themes of **adaptability**, **efficiency** and **engagement** will equip organisations with the talented workforce they need to survive.

■ **About Mentor Group**

Mentor supports leading organisations to ensure they achieve and exceed their business goals. We specialise the areas of organisational development and change, leadership and coaching. Our unique strategic approach based on proven methodology (ADE) enables us to fully understand the business requirements and align our solutions to ensure a return on investment.

To contact Mentor, click on to our website – www.mentorgroup.co.uk – or call us on 01582 842077. Susan Grandfield can be contacted directly on 07940 386 358, if you would like to discuss the content of this white paper further.