

FRANCIS MARSHALL

Francis Marshall reflects on the importance of timing

From the comedian delivering his gag to the expertly choreographed dance, to the decision to close a sale or embark on a merger or acquisition, timing is everything in life and L&D is no exception.

It's vital that L&D is involved strategically in organisational change. Over the years, however, I've lost count of the times that training initiatives have patently been introduced at the wrong time in a company's evolution.

Take a company that is in a serious state of flux, where a major global restructuring is taking place and where many employees remain unsure as to exactly what their new roles will entail. While L&D can play a vital role in the change process in 'up-skilling' people as they come to terms with their increased responsibilities, it's important to be sure that it's not too early in the process for L&D to roll out a programme.

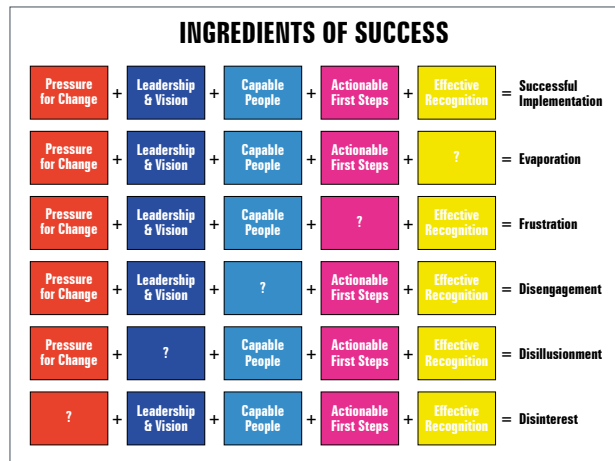
There are serious hazards if we deliver too early (just as there are if we deliver too late). Unless people are clear about their new roles, the corporate landscape in which they are operating and how they can apply what they learn in their everyday roles, L&D can add very little value, just as it can add a huge amount of value when the right building blocks are in place.

While functional training and the introduction of L&D to tackle a very specific issue is fine, with major organisational change all parts of the business leadership have to be in the same place before the rest of the business will follow.

So what are the ingredients for a successful corporate culture in which L&D can thrive? How can one know whether the timing is right for L&D to start delivering?

There is one model that I have found particularly helpful. It condenses the ingredients for the successful implementation of an L&D-focused change management programme into five key elements – pressure for change, leadership and vision, capable people, actionable first steps and effective recognition.

Together, you have the ingredients for success. If just one element falls by the wayside, however, the result can be much disappointment, as the illustration demonstrates.



Take the pressure for change, for example. You can have all the elements of leadership, capable people, an actionable programme and effective recognition instruments but, if there are no drivers for change, the result will be disinterest.

The same goes if there is a pressure for change but the company doesn't have the leadership and vision to embrace it and set out a clear path for the future. The result here is a more corrosive outcome than disinterest – disillusionment, an emotion that can often lead to a dramatic fall in productivity or an increased interest in the appointment sections of newspapers.

Other examples include frustration if the pressure for change and leadership is in place but there are no actionable steps to embark on the L&D programme, or disengagement if you don't have existing people with the necessary capabilities and skills to embark on the project.

Finally, there is effective recognition with the need for a culture in which members feel valued, engaged and inspired to contribute to a shared mission. Without this bond, all the important work carried out beforehand can evaporate.

The Hollywood actor Tony Curtis, who made his first film in 1949 and his most recent one in 2008, said that his "longevity is due to my good timing". For L&D to truly thrive, generate business value and play the crucial role it can in managing change, it must focus on timing and make sure all the ingredients of success are there.

L&D can also play an important and strategic role in establishing these ingredients of success – increasing people's capabilities, for example, or developing actionable first steps as employees undergo a change in job responsibilities.

L&D is a true game-changer in helping organisations through periods of great change. It's all about the timing! ■



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