



NCVO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Surviving the recession:

How to train and develop your workforce on a tight budget

Introduction

In times of recession, training budgets may be the first to be cut.

Yet having a skilled workforce, both paid and unpaid, is a critical element of success in voluntary and community sector organisations. It is still vital to keep a planned approach and use the creativity that is a mark of the sector. The worst thing to do would be to bring in a scaled-down training and development programme that didn't address learning needs or align with strategic imperatives – but was just cheaper.

This factsheet gives some practical suggestions about how to keep developing your workforce during difficult times.

Internal training and knowledge sharing

The most obvious approach is that the knowledge may well already be in your organisation! Sharing knowledge is also a great way to build a sense of team identity. Why not start or end each team meeting or internal conference with an opportunity for people to deliver a mini training session, sharing their skills and knowledge?

Don't forget your trustees, either. They may well have the expertise in the particular area where learning is required. Alternatively, they may know someone who does!

Performance management

Appraisals and regular one to one/supervision meetings between line manager and employee are of course the nuts and bolts of staff development and performance. They are a key way in which managers can develop their staff and they don't incur extra costs! See also NCVO's 'How to' factsheet on 360 degree feedback.

Checking out reductions in training

Sarah Goodman from Enterprising Opportunities, a Community Interest Company, comments that 'training providers are keen to fill spaces on courses, particularly those that are not funded. Speak to your training provider for their best offer, you may get a discount for booking more than one space, late availability or even pilot schemes - you don't know if you don't ask.'

Collaborating with other voluntary and community organisations

Sharing knowledge

Do you have contacts in other organisations that are facing similar issues? If so, you could consider what opportunities there may be for your employees to spend time in another organisation to learn new ways of doing things and new ways of thinking.

Mentoring schemes

Mentors are people who are experienced in a particular field and therefore able to advise and support others. Mentoring can help develop professional knowledge and skills. Many people mentor on a voluntary basis, so it doesn't need to be expensive.

Coaching schemes

Coaching relationships can be a really cost-effective way for the organisation to foster and develop talent. Coaching can help to improve both individual and organisational performance.

Unlike mentoring, coaches do not offer specific 'advice'. They are skilled in questioning and listening but it is the coach's role to enable the individual to find answers within themselves.

Line managers can adopt a coaching role; alternatively, external coaches can be used in particular for senior staff to help them work towards a specific goal, where a formal training course is less appropriate.

Training courses

It makes sense to work with other voluntary organisations that may have similar training needs. Rather than pay for an in-house course just for your organisation, can you collaborate with another organisation to help reduce costs?

Access support from Acas

If you are seeking training on managing people, you could explore what is on offer from Acas. Go to the Acas website and search under 'support for small businesses.' Below is an extract from the Acas website.

SUPPORT FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

Acas can help you solve your problems quickly. From free Advice and Online Tools all the way up to bespoke consultancy and training programmes, we offer accurate and up-to-date information that can help you boost your productivity and profitability. Having the right procedures and policies in place can help avoid future problems and establish your reputation as an employer people like to work for.

We believe that prevention is better than cure, which is why we offer simple, practical advice through our helpline that will help you to avoid tribunal claims, plus a Mediation service to head off problems at an early stage.

We also offer affordable training on the subjects that matter to small businesses, like employing people, staff retention, handling difficult conversations and maternity and paternity rights. It's an accessible, regionally-based service, with offices throughout Great Britain with advisers who understand the issues facing the workforce.

Train to gain

Train to Gain is the Government's flagship service to support employers in England to improve the skills of their employees. The service is managed by the Learning and Skills Council and it provides specialist advice on training and skills needs, tailored for each employer. It is a free service.

In order to access the service, you can call 0800 015 55 45 or go to www.traintogain.gov.uk. A skills broker will then visit you, to work with you to find the best training solutions for a whole range of skills levels including Literacy and Numeracy, NVQs and Management Training.

Skills brokers can help you to access any potential funding that may be available and can take on some of the time-consuming tasks, such as finding suitable training providers.

Volunteers are now included in train to gain; training for volunteers now attracts the same subsidies as apply to paid employees.

The financial support on offer includes leadership and management training, where a part-subsidy (of up to £1,000) applies. The funding can be used to support a variety of learning interventions, including coaching, mentoring and action learning sets. This funding is available for organisations which have 5-250 employees.

Funding is also available for bite-sized chunks of learning in business-critical areas such as business improvement, team working, IT and finance. Again, this is available for voluntary organisations with up to 250 employees and this particular learning is only available to employees (not volunteers).

CASE STUDY COURTESY OF TRAIN TO GAIN

ST GEORGE'S CRYPT, LEEDS

St George's Crypt has been a charity since 1930. Today it employs 45 staff, who together provide day-care facilities and night shelter for more than 200 homeless and vulnerable people each day. The charity recognises the need for staff development and has a small budget for it, but as Fundraising and PR Director Martin Patterson explains, finding the time to source and schedule staff training is a problem. "We aim to provide useful and relevant training opportunities for our staff, but often, because of the intensity of the day-to-day workings of a very busy shelter, we simply do not have time to identify training needs."

Martin was put in touch with Sarah Criddle, Skills Broker for Leeds and Bradford, who explained that St George's Crypt could qualify for funded NVQ training, which would be sourced and organised on their behalf.

Sarah says: "As with many busy organisations, St George's Crypt does not have the extra time needed to source training. Because it is a charity, cost is also important. "Train to Gain can be helpful to organisations in this position, because it provides experts to source the right training. They also ensure that it is delivered in a useful and timely way, and investigate whether the organisation can apply for funding," she adds.

Six St George's Crypt staff are now studying for qualifications at NVQ Levels 2 and 3 in a variety of areas, including customer care, retail and IT.

Martin says: "The Train to Gain service has enabled us to move the issue of staff training up the priority list, and we hope that this is just the beginning for us. With so many different types of training required here, this service is invaluable to us."

CASE STUDY COURTESY OF TRAIN TO GAIN

High Leigh Conference Centre

06.10.2008 East of England Hospitality

Company Profile

High Leigh Conference Centre, located in the heart of the Hertfordshire countryside, is a not-for-profit organisation owned by registered charity The Christian Conference Trust. The well-established centre employs around 50 people from dining room staff through to management. It hosts over 450 conferences a year and offers residential facilities for 200 guests as well as a self-contained day conference centre.

The Skills Challenge

A waitress at Hertfordshire's charity-run High Leigh Conference Centre has been given the opportunity to increase her skills and train to be a receptionist with funding from Train to Gain.

Assistant Manager Kirsty Anderson decided to investigate what further training might be available for members of staff after it was spotted that Calamity Buttler, one of the centre's dining room staff, was increasingly being asked to help out on High Leigh's reception.

The centre had not offered training schemes for its employees before and Kirsty was unsure where to start in identifying and sourcing relevant training. After receiving information about the Learning and Skills Council's Train to Gain Programme from a colleague she decided to contact them and enlist their expert help.

How Train to Gain Helped

A Skills Broker from Train to Gain visited the centre to explain more about the programme and carried out a skills analysis worth £500 for free. Kirsty tasked the Skills Broker with finding appropriate training which would help Calamity make the transition from working in the dining room to working in reception and enable her to work towards a qualification.

The Train to Gain Skills Broker recommended that Calamity would benefit from undertaking a Level 2 NVQ in Customer Service and put Kirsty in touch with colleges and training providers in the area which offered the course.

Train to Gain provided funding which enabled the charity-run centre to give 21-year-old Calamity the opportunity to study for the NVQ qualification. Calamity started the course at Hertfordshire Regional College in January and is expected to successfully complete the course within the next six months.

Paul Storey, Skills Development Director at the Learning and Skills Council East of England said: "We are delighted to have been able to help a charity-run business like High Leigh Conference Centre to be able to provide training for one of its employees.

"Many charities or not-for-profit organisations may previously have been put off training their employees because of the costs which can be involved. Train to Gain is able to help by providing some funding itself and by using our expert skills brokers to research all other funding options available to the organisation."

Kirsty believes the training that Train to Gain sourced has not only proved beneficial for Calamity but also for the conference centre itself.

Kirsty said: "The training has boosted Calamity's confidence and has shown her that the hard work she carries out is recognised by us. It also reinforces the quality of care we can give to our customers."

Self-directed learning methods

Many organisations are becoming to be more innovative and creative about how they organise learning and development, to reflect current pressures on time and finances. Some organisations give staff what is called 'protected learning time', to develop themselves outside of the traditional training course. This could include the following inexpensive methods:

- Increasing knowledge and skills by reviewing information in a book, publication or the internet. If they want to learn more about a business or management issue, for example, they could try the Government's website, www.businesslink.gov.uk.
- Accessing the Open University Open Learn website, <http://openlearn.open.ac.uk>. This website gives free access to OU course materials. There are hundreds of free study units, each with a discussion forum. It is possible for learners to study independently or join a group and use the free learning tools to work with others.

Online courses are another form of self-directed learning. Staff can access the courses from their own desktop at a time that suits them. Such e-learning is a great way of reducing overheads and it is also possible to track how much progress is being made. Learners can choose when and where they do their training which makes it time efficient – and good for the environment too!

Online courses are not an instant fix, however. You need to be sure that your staff or volunteers will respond well to this type of learning. You'll need to check that any e-learning system is appropriately designed for your organisation, allowing for appropriate monitoring and follow-up.

Case study - VSO

VSO – volunteers

Piers Cardiff, Training and Development Adviser at VSO, is part of the team responsible for the training and learning of volunteers at VSO. The volunteer training team work on a tight budget, so cost-effective ways of delivering learning are vitally important. Work related training courses have been reduced and VSO has moved towards using non face-to-face learning support for volunteers, including e-learning courses.

VSO first started using e-learning in 2006. Prior to this, it already used self-directed learning packs to support volunteer learning overseas. E-learning has become part of VSO's blended learning strategy, using a range of media, to recognise that people learn in different ways.

VSO uses the free software Moodle as a platform for its e-learning courses, which cover a range of areas including: HIV and AIDS awareness; international development dilemmas; organisational development; and small business skills. Moodle also allows learners to interact with one another and to share learning using tools like electronic message boards, wikis and a resource database.

The key advantages of using e-learning for VSO is that learning can be delivered to volunteers in various parts of the world in a cost-effective and interactive way.

The disadvantages are as follows:

- * Some volunteers only have access to very slow internet connections, which makes learning via the internet virtually impossible. In these circumstances, VSO has created the courses on CD roms or memory sticks.
- * There is a wide range of skills and experience amongst VSO volunteers and not everyone engages with e-learning as a medium.
- * Whilst the training team can review how long people stay on particular web pages, it is still something of a challenge to monitor learning activity.

Generally, though, VSO considers that its e-learning strategy for volunteers is a successful approach.

VSO - staff

VSO are implementing a number of learning and development interventions for staff which are designed to be both effective and cost effective. Ruth Jolly, Head of Learning and Development, describes the following:

e-learning

VSO offers e-learning for both technical and core skills training. VSO is a member of the Charity Learning Consortium, which enables voluntary organisations to: have access to a large portfolio of eLearning courses at a low cost; network; and discuss best practice in the charity sector. VSO makes use of the provision available from the Charity Learning Consortium for its e-learning programmes.

Management skills

VSO is looking to work with another NGO to develop a tailored, modular approach to management development in the production of e-learning materials. Working with another organisation helps to make the approach more cost-effective, as well as enable the sharing of ideas.

Learning from each other

There is a strong emphasis at VSO on learning from each other, for example via mentoring, secondments, lesson-learning stakeholder conversations and short-term placements.

Talent management and development

VSO is undertaking a large-scale piece of work to develop and retain talent within the organisation. A new section in performance appraisal prompts line managers and staff to have a conversation about career aspirations and readiness for promotion. This supports other existing processes (development conversations, 360 appraisals, gaps recording etc) which will lead to an organisational-wide mapping of talent including the identification of individuals with high potential. A dedicated personal development plan will then be produced for these individuals. Managers will be encouraged to actively seek out development opportunities for staff to deepen and progress their experience. The development opportunities might include shadowing, coaching, project work and short-term overseas placements. VSO actively looks first to internal staff to fill vacancies and will intentionally encourage applications from those identified in succession plans once these are in place. It is conceived that the talent management programme will be a cost-effective way of developing individuals and the organisation.

Induction

VSO used to offer a residential induction programme for new programme staff. It was a comprehensive offering delivered in the UK, which has been revised and is now being piloted in a shorter form with more focus on in-country and in-region induction.

Tips for other voluntary and community organisation

Ruth Jolly has the following suggestion for other voluntary and community organisations, who wish to provide high quality learning and development in a cost-effective way:

- *Encourage staff to share learning and knowledge via on-the-job coaching.
- *Share ideas, costs and resources with other voluntary organisations - join the various networks and consortia that are available and learn from each other.

Further information

Train to Gain

0800 015 55 45 or www.traintogain.gov.uk

ACAS : www.acas.org.uk

Open University Open Learn: <http://openlearn.open.ac.uk>

The Charity Learning Consortium: www.charitylearning.org

Fact sheet written by Wendy Blake Ranken

Human Resources Consultant

wendy@blakeranken.clara.co.uk

www.wendyblakeranken.co.uk