

BUSINESS TRAINING A STRATEGIC INVESTMENT



Presentado por:





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Introduction

Nowadays, the human capital of an organization constitutes its main competitive advantage and its management becomes one of the greatest challenges of human resource managers. Managing talents in a company involves, among others, the development of training programs in order to increase the competences and skills of the workforce. These trainings may be considered in two different ways:

From the point of view of the organization: in this case, training consists of a set of planned activities aimed at training employees (Dubar, 2004). According to Guyot, the company aims at reducing the difference between the current situation (available competences) and the desired situation (competences that are considered necessary for the company). J-L. and Mainguet C. (2006).

From the point of view of the individual: training is defined as the direct, long-term effort made by the employee to learn, and his desire to acquire knowledge and competences to apply them to his own benefit and to the benefit of the company where he works as well. In this case, the individual's own motivation is involved since, in the training process, the individual should be conceived as someone active rather than passive.

In this e-book, I will develop the first point of view, in other words, I will define what trainings are, why they are important, and why companies should invest in them. Furthermore, I will explain the great advantages of e-learning or Live Learning, a concept of paramount importance nowadays as it lays emphasis on the exchange between instructors and participants through the Internet, going beyond the mere sharing of contents virtually.

Afterwards, I will write a second e-book laying emphasis on training from the point of view of the individual, mainly referring to the concept of motivation. Finally, I will give some advice about motivating employees in order to encourage them to take part in training programs.



1. What is training?

Training consists of a set of planned activities aimed at training employees (Dubar, 2004). It may be implemented in different ways, ranging from internships inside or outside the company or organization, training under working conditions, attendance at seminars, conferences or other types of meetings, job rotation aimed at learning new tasks, and finally, self-training. (Dubar, 2004).

Unlike education or academic systems, business training is directly linked to professional realities and depends on employment evolution, according to Claude Dubar (2004). This evolution leads companies to permanently create training offers for their employees, meeting multiple demands that should be supported by real training needs. These needs may be identified from different situations (Stankiewicz, 2007):

- Business evolution: development projects, product innovation, change of business strategy, among others.
- Identification by immediate managers of employees' low level of performance due to lack of competence.
- Personal requests by the employees, who detect needs due to new requirements of their job positions, or just due to the fact that they want to develop their own careers.

Human capital

Internal characteristic
resource of each organization
that contributes to its added
value and success.

To conclude, a company plays a key role in the organization of training programs aimed at their employees' learning, thus generating, together with goods and services, what we call "**human capital**". According to Stankiewicz (2007), the aim of training is to know, to know how, and to know how to be.



2. Why is training important?

Nowadays, economic and sociotechnical changes are faster each day. Therefore, a company must rely not only on cognitive but also on affective resources of its employees. This is so because, if we take into account the cognitive aspect, the competences and skills of the workforce in an institution are considered a major source of **competitive advantage**, as they cannot be easily imitated. As regards the affective aspect, we will see below how an employee's commitment to his company helps its performance (the importance of motivation, another affective aspect, will not be developed in this e-book because it will be further discussed in the second).

This great impact of the competences as one of the most important elements of the competitive advantage must be translated into training policies, as it allows to increase employees' skills and competences, thus improving the organization's performance, as stated by Gritz (1993, Kang, 2007).

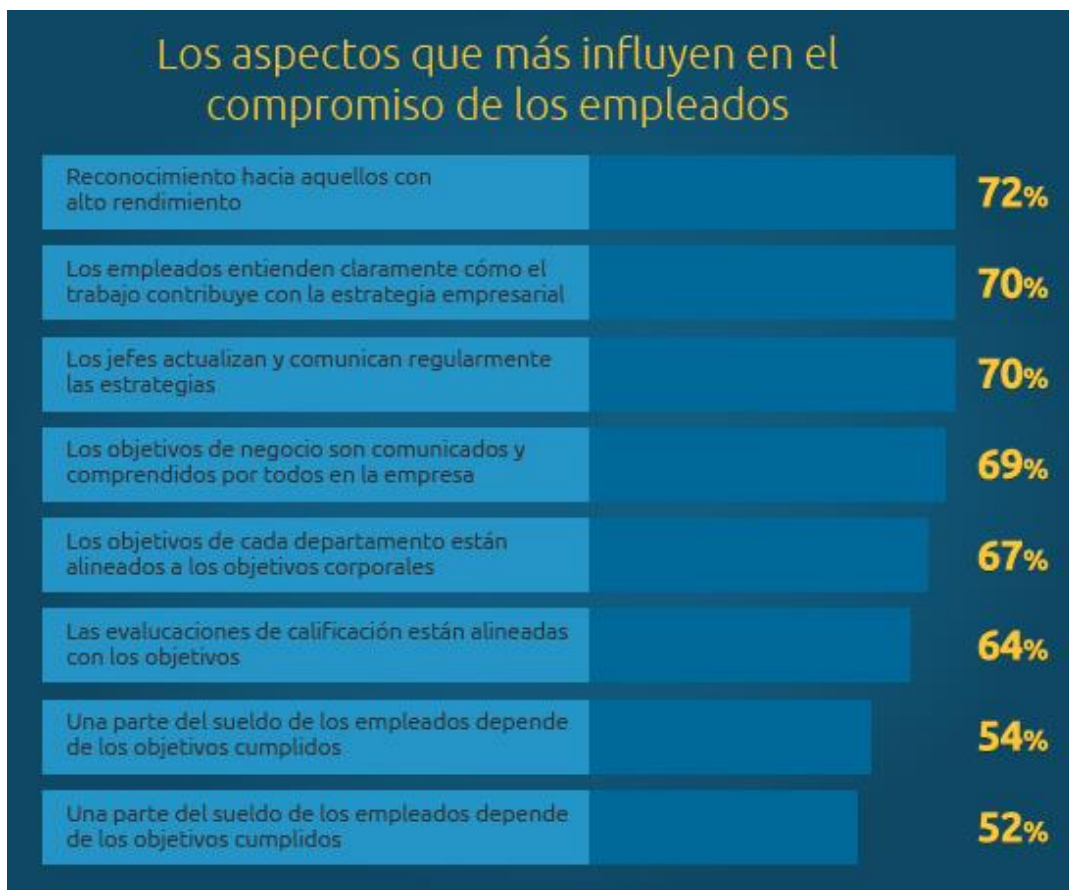
For this reason, it is important that companies' managers stop considering training as a burden or a cost. Training should be considered as a **profitable investment** from the economic point of view, and as a way to adapt the workforce to technological and organizational changes as well. According to the Harvard Business Review report "Taking Measure of Talent", the connection between the financial performance of a company and its strong talents management practices, such as trainings, is clear when they are directed towards true business needs. In this sense, a study carried out by McKinsey & Company quoted by the above mentioned report, reveals that those companies that proved to have strong global talent management practices have obtained considerably greater profits (almost 30%) than those making less decisions related to the human capital. Furthermore, a report carried out in 2011 by Aberdeen Group, quoted by Harvard Business Review, shows that those companies that carry out a human capital management have achieved an annual income increase of 11%, and a 6% improvement in the revenue per employee on a year period.

Besides, training employees is a way of **fostering and increasing their commitment** to the company. This commitment, in turn, allows the organization to reach expected results.

This is so because the increase of employees' commitment leads to customer satisfaction, therefore increasing the company's profits.

The following graphics, obtained from another Harvard Business Review ("How engaged employees drive business results") depict the way in which training and employees' development, directly connected to business objectives, may have an impact on people's commitment (Picture 1); and how this commitment has, in turn, influence on customer satisfaction (Picture 2).

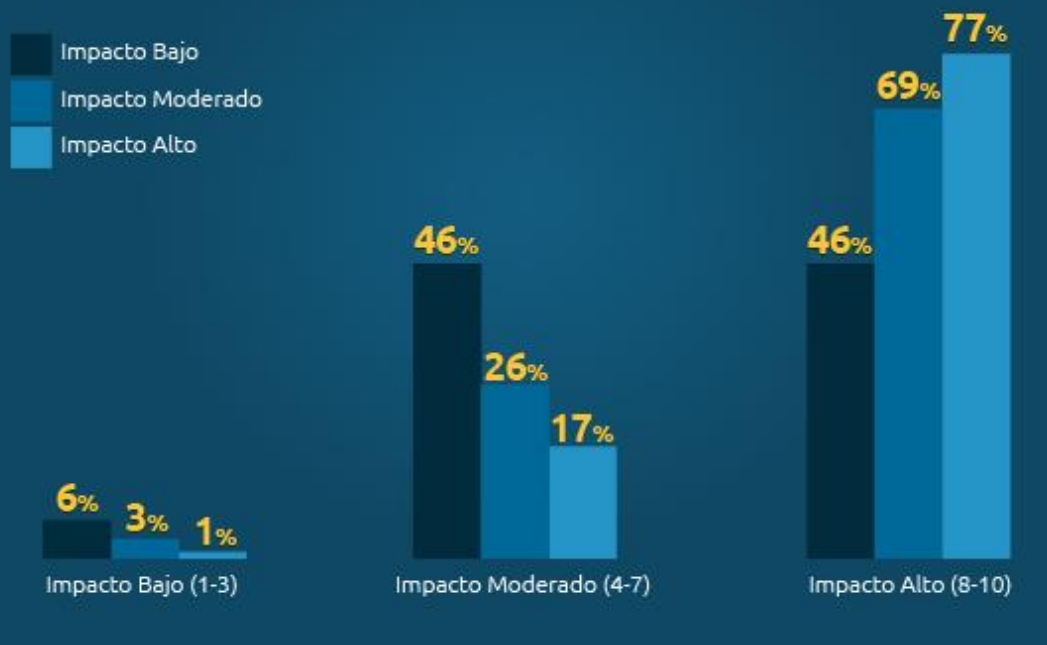
Picture 1




Picture 2

Impacto del compromiso de los empleados en la satisfacción del cliente

¿En qué medida los empleados comprometidos con la organización impacta en la satisfacción del cliente?



Finally, according to the first Harvard report ("Taking Measure of Talent"), those companies that are already implementing policies regarding the management of human capital have already noticed their impact on different areas, such as the increase of the above mentioned commitment, and a decrease in turnover, as well. When it comes to the latter, in order to represent the savings that reducing turnover could generate, it is important to know that the total cost of losing a job position caused by turnover may range from 30% to 150% of the annual salary for such job position, in accordance with Saratoga Institute and Hewitt Associates. In this way, the company Sysco, for example, was able to increase employee retention from 65% to 85%, therefore saving \$50 million on hiring and training costs. Finally, the Harvard Business Review states that human capital management decreases the possibility of having problems related to the retention of high



performance employees in 18% and related to the retention of critical employees in 33%, and increases the possibility of becoming a high performance organization in 18%.

As a result, we may say that training is a **win-win** logic because, on the one hand, the company can **facilitate future developments** and **contribute to its objectives** (Permartin, 2005); and, on the other hand, people can increase their productivity and **keep their "employability"** in the labor market thanks to the improvement in their competences and skills (Ng. & Siu, 2004, in Kang, 2007).

Employability

Employability is the set of knowledge, skills and competences that allow a person to maintain their working possibilities within the market.

Turnover

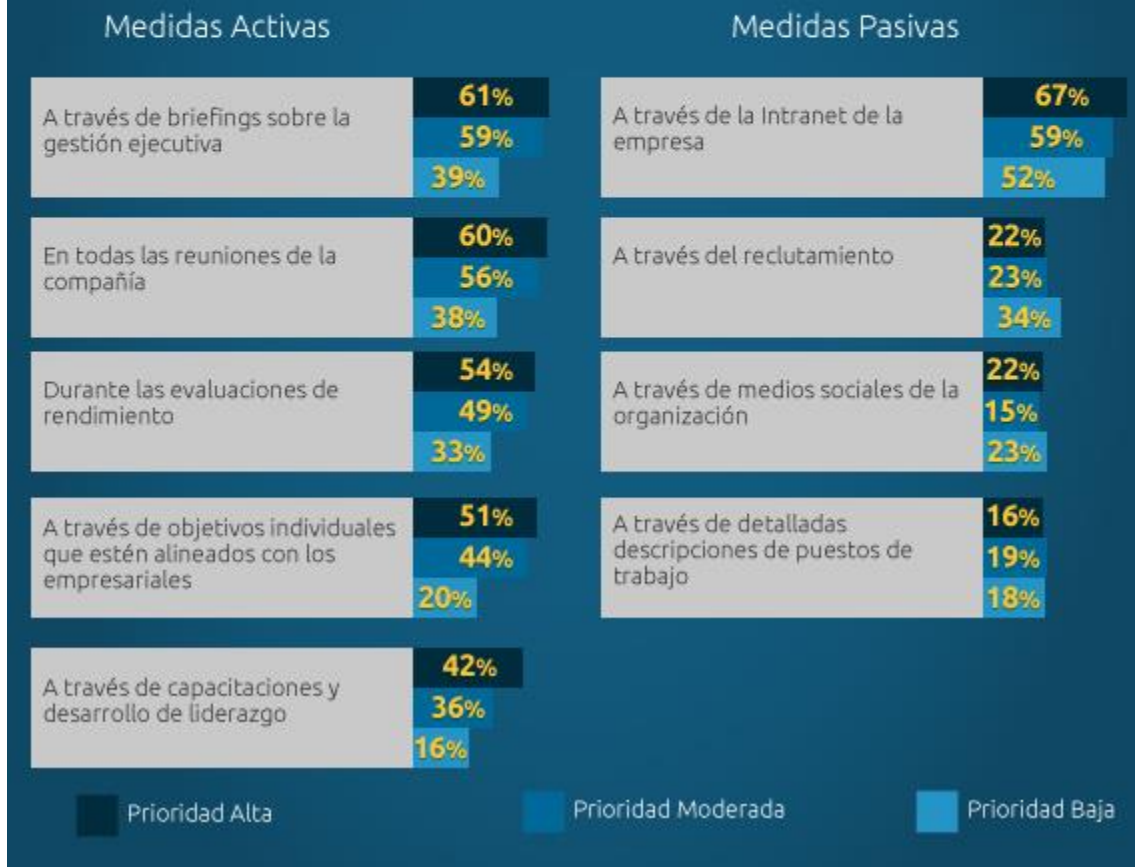
Turnover refers to the staff rotation within an organization. A high turnover rate indicates that something is not working in your company. It could be considered as a sign of a negative working environment, stress, or the company's incapacity to gain employees' loyalty.

Trainings contribute to the business objectives because they are not only carried out to train employees in their current job positions and to get an overall higher performance, but also because trainings are themselves a way to communicate such objectives, as mentioned in the report "How Engaged Employees Drive Business Results", Harvard Business Review (see Picture 3). In this way, institutions should favor those trainings directly connected to its main activities, and enable clear transference of objectives to the staff.

Figura 3

Cómo se incorporan y comunican los objetivos corporativos

¿En qué medida los empleados comprometidos con la organización impacta en la satisfacción del cliente?



Case Study

This short case study introduced by Tim Weyland in "10 Principles for Building an Effective Human Capital Plan" seeks to depict the way in which trainings may lead to achieve successful results. This case is about one of TriNet's customers, an American human resources consulting firm. The customer had Project Managers that were not as effective as the company wanted when it came to team management. For this reason, TriNet worked together with them in order to develop their leadership skills through online training. These trainings contributed effectively to improve the managers' skills to manage

their working teams. As a result, they improved their customer service. To conclude, leaders became more productive and, consequently, their employees also became more productive. This was translated into an improvement in sales.

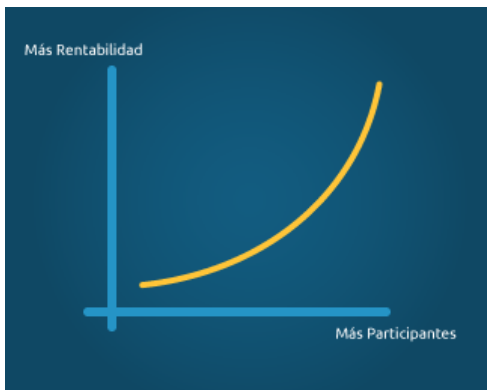
Once more, this case shows how everything is connected: there is a clear relation between the employee's attitude and commitment to the company and the company's performance. I will depict this connection by integrating the model "employee-customer profit chain", currently used by TriNet, and the model "service-profit chain" from the Harvard Business Review "How engaged employees drive business results".



3. What are the determinants of the success of training?

There are different training **paradigms** or **approaches**. So, the success of training depends on the approach adopted by a company, as stated by Laroche and Haccoun (2000). These approaches are:

3.1 Administrative Approach



In this case, success relies on the training **productivity** and the reduced efficiency costs. Therefore, the more participants there are in a group, the more cost-effective training will be. Generally, training is carried out in accordance with a certain request or obligation. For this reason, in this case, a "diagnosis of training needs" is not carried out. In order to assess the success of

training in this case, the volume of activity, i.e. the number of people that were trained during a certain year, and the percentage of the wage bill allocated to the training, etc., should be observed. Training contents are not taken into account in these cases.

3.2 Popular Approach

The satisfaction of those requesting the training and their impression on a good trainer are used to measure the success of training. Therefore, in this case, customers' perceptions (in this case, employees) are one of the most important criteria.

For this reason, the key concept is the fact that customer's demand must be met because customers have prior expectations. In this sense, it is considered that if employees are asked when they are offered training, they will be more satisfied and motivated to participate.

In these cases, companies primarily focus on the expectations rather than on the analysis of demand, thus adopting a "marketing" approach towards the "product sale". For that purpose, a kind of attractive catalog is generally developed.



Assessment in this case relies on two elements: employees' satisfaction (which will be assessed through a form) and attendance rate. For example, a problem will be proved if some employees enrolled in the training eventually do not attend.

3.3 "Competence" Approach

This approach is meant to make people learn, acquire competences and improve their level of qualification. Therefore, the difference between the necessary competence and the real competence in a certain job position leads a company to offer training. For this purpose, it is necessary to examine the competences that are necessary in each job position, and to offer training if any difference is found. In this case we deeply analyze the need for training, which will be developed only if it is considered as a solution to this situation. To this purpose, we may use a competence profile as a basis, in order to define the competence level that we want.



Finally, the purpose of assessment is not only the employees' satisfaction but also their acquisition of competences and knowledge that lead them to say they feel more capable of accomplishing a certain task.

3.4 "Field" Approach



From this point of view, acquiring competences would not be enough to render training effective. For that purpose, participants must be able to apply what they have learned in the training to their working situation, i.e. they must "transfer" the competences they have learned (Haccoun & Saks, 1998, en Laroche & Haccoun, 2000).

Therefore, management of this transference, which in this case constitutes the main purpose of the assessment, is now a priority. Not only must teaching criteria be taken into account, but also the operational objectives, always considering those factors that may

allow or avoid the transference, which implies an action plan that is bigger than mere training.

3.5 "Company's project" Approach

Apart from the transference of competences into the field, according to this approach, the success criterion is to determine to what extent training contributes to the company's projects; i.e. the training impact and return on investment play a key role. Then, we may ask ourselves about the contributions of such training to the economic activities of a company, about its impact on the business activities. In these cases, training is a means to "sell" the business project to the employees, so that they adhere to this project. Assessment will then rely on the observation of the staff's changes and attitudes during the training. Such changes will be projected towards the framework of the organizational project.



It is important to know that these approaches are not mutually exclusive, and none of them is better than the other. Everything depends on each particular situation and each organization.

So, we know what the training success may depend on according to the approach adopted by a company. But in fact, do companies and employees really care about staff training? We will see below which are the most mentioned hindrances.


4. Which are the main hindrances to training?

There are many reasons for which a company or an employee decide not to offer or take part in training programs.

Valentine and Darkenwald (1990, in Carré, 2001) mention several factors. The main factors include lack of time, cost, unsuitability of the proposed trainings, and the fact that the training is not considered a priority. According to Guyot et al. (2005), an international survey carried out by IALS reflects the main reasons for which a person decides not to take part in trainings, which are also lack of time, having too much work, courses timetables, training costs, among others (see table 1 below).

Table 1

		Formaciones con fines profesionales	Otras Formaciones
Razones que explican la no-participación			
Gestión del tiempo	Falta de tiempo	38,8%	52,6%
	Mucho trabajo	16,3%	14,2%
	Ocupaciones familiares	15,4%	14,9%
Naturaleza de la oferta de programas de formación	Cursos no ofrecidos	7,1%	3,6%
	Costos de la formación	25,9%	19,3%
	Horarios de los cursos	9%	7,2%
	Idioma del curso	0,9%	0,4%
Situación Personal	Falta de apoyo del empleador	7,6%	0,4%
	Cuestiones de salud	2,6%	4%
	Falta de calificación	1,3%	0,3%
Otros		9,2%	5,5%



Besides, I had the possibility to carry out a statistical study in a telecommunications company in Belgium, in which the time factor was continuously pointed out: 51% of the people that had not taken part in any training program throughout a year stated that lack of time was the main reason. Here are some examples:

«Estamos siempre tan ocupados que cuando una formación se lleva a cabo, nunca se realiza en un buen momento y eso es una lástima. Por eso no pido capacitación, ya que no sé en qué lugar ponerlas en mi agenda (...) estamos tan ocupados que no tenemos tiempo de ver cuáles son las formaciones que se ofrecen»

« Soy el manager de una cuenta y por lo tanto no quiero perder mi tiempo en capacitaciones ya que durante ese momento no hago negocios, no vendo... »

To conclude, probably on both sides, the company's and the employee's, training is not offered or received because it is considered, in most cases, a "waste of time" and something expensive. However, as we have seen before, training is undoubtedly an investment, not only for the company but also for the individual. So, this way of thinking should be changed. Just like a parent that wishes his son accomplished high quality studies and wants to invest in his education, an employer should have the same feelings towards his employees. Although, in many cases, employees have already been academically trained, this training is rather general. Taking into account that every company is unique, business trainings close the gap between learning and the real situations of each institution, thus becoming an enormous competitive advantage. Through business trainings, a company may achieve a better adaptation to and a better contextualization of specific situations.

So, "**time**" and "**cost**" factors seem to be the great hindrances to the development of training programs. So, what could be done? In a world in which technology is the core of any activity, as it helps to reduce time and distance, it is undeniable that e-learning, and even better Live Learning, are simple solutions to this problem. We are going to analyze how this is possible.





5. E-learning vs. Live Learning

E-learning is a learning process through which people acquire new competences or knowledge, thanks to ICTs, information and communication technologies (C. Baujard, 2006). This process may have different aims, namely, acquisition or updating of knowledge, development of certain know-how, development of competences related to problem resolution and management of such development process within an organization (N. Lauzon, 2003). These technologies allow employees to have access, from different places, to updated information targeted to a specific objective. In general, Internet, intranet, CD-ROMs (now rendered obsolete) and software developed inside or outside the institution by experts are used.

A most updated notion is **Live Learning**, which allows the possibility of gathering the particular advantages of both distance education (such as flexibility) and traditional education together, which grants the possibility of establishing a good interaction of each participant with his instructor and partners. So, this notion which is highlighted in this book, tries to improve traditional learning through ICTs, by combining online courses with other tools that are specific of e-learning. Therefore, Live Learning is a possibility to copy the model of traditional learning, in which people interact with each other and with their instructor, wherever they are through any electronic mobile device. In this way, each organization may create and manage distance courses, including multiple activities such as sharing videos and audios, showing documents or presentations, holding a discussion, among others; and, at the same time, it allows to record the whole course.



6. What are online trainings useful for?

Some Live Learning applications are, for example, aimed at acquiring or updating knowledge related to the structure or functioning of a team, the characteristics of the production process, the risks associated to hazardous materials, operational safety, certain standards, such as ISO, or the same working procedures (Lauzon, 2003). Some simulation methods could be used, which allow participants to get used to the team or develop competences related to problem resolution. In this last case, a simulation of a problematic situation could be carried out, allowing the employee to develop the competences that are necessary to identify the causes of a problem, as well as to choose the most suitable solution.

To conclude, any kind of training may be carried out by means of Live Learning. But this is not the only benefit of Live Learning. Let's see further advantages.

7. Why should we prefer Live Learning?

The reasons given by companies that opt for Live Learning are not different from the potential offered by the ICTs. This learning methodology has a lot of advantages:

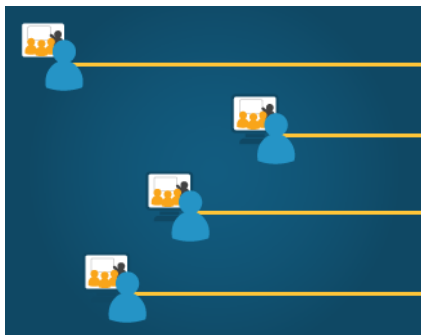
Releasing the participants from the limitations of time and space

Traveling to a physical location in order to participate in training programs takes time. Even more in big cities. Do not even mention cities like Buenos Aires, where public demonstrations turn a 1-hour trip into a 2 or 3-hour trip. Undoubtedly, those are the moments when you think you are wasting your time. Not only does the employee think that, but also the company, as it thinks that when an employee is not working, he is not producing, therefore money is being wasted. One of the advantages of Live Learning relies on the fact that moving from one place to another is not necessary for training. Anybody may have access through any digital device wherever they are. Therefore, a lot of time is saved.



Learning at different paces

Each person is unique and has its own pace of learning. In many occasions, pressure exerted by those who want us to follow their pace is prejudicial to one's learning. In some cases, some participants learn faster than you, which may be frustrating as this pace is difficult to follow. In others, people learn slower than you, which may result in a delay in



learning. When I was in college, I remember that although in some occasions I decided to study with my classmates to exchange knowledge, in many other occasions I preferred studying alone because I had my own pace. So, the advantage of Live Learning is that, although it is possible to exchange with other participants in an online course and with the instructor, it is also possible to train at your own pace, having access to information when you consider it necessary.

Flexibility

This aspect is connected to the aspect mentioned above. Trainings are always available and participants may have access to them the moment they need, wherever they are. For this reason, they can study at their own pace, go fast through a module that is easy or go over a more difficult one. Besides, these contents may be reinforced during the virtual class.



Trainings are divided in modules, which simplifies understanding

Generally, the contents of a certain training are divided in modules. Whereas a traditional training takes, in general, half of a working day, these modules take from 20 or 30 minutes up to 1 hour or 1.30 at most (D'Halluin et al., 2003). Taking into account that a person cannot pay attention and be concentrated on something for a long time, this division into different modules allows training to be better adapted and directed to the public. In this way, understanding of information and learning become easier, as attention can be expanded through time.



Possibility to convey a single message

Live Learning makes possible for an organization to offer the same training to employees of different regional or international branches so as to promote the same values and competences throughout the organization. In turn, transmitting the vision and mission of the company becomes easier, thus favoring the standardization and coherence of the company's culture. By transmitting a unique and coherent message through the unification of content, an improved vertical alignment is achieved, i.e. an improved alignment with the general strategy of the company. Therefore, all that is translated into an increase in sales.



Saving costs is easier

This is possible because there are no expenses connected with paper materials, investment in infrastructure is not necessary and materials can be reused; besides, training could be thought as a form of centralization, which allows costs to be reduced by an economy of scale.



It helps to improve the company's image



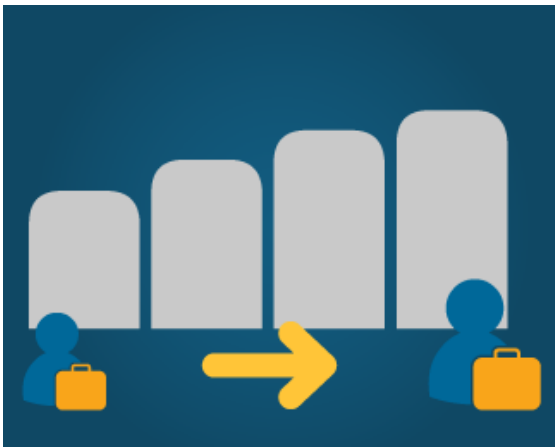
Taking into account the employees' needs and thinking in their development and evolution demonstrate that the company is really concerned about increasing opportunities for its workforce, therefore the internal image of the company improves. It should not be forgotten that the employees are the visible face of the organization. If they have a good concept of the institution where they work, they

will probably help to improve the institution's external image. A lot of companies are afraid of losing their employees, because when they are more trained and have improved curriculums, they have greater possibilities of leaving the company. However, as stated by Judith Leary-Joyce in "Keeping your talent on top form", that should not constitute a hindrance to train their employees. If they decide to leave the company, it does not matter. If you were the one who kept him "employable", allowing him to improve his CV and professional opportunities, your employee would probably have a great image of you,

therefore he would speak of what a great employer you were. This may lead other productive people to knock on your door.

Internal rotation becomes easier

On many occasions, an organization resorts to internal recruitment. In some occasions, employees want to evolve and be promoted and change their job position... Thanks to



trainings, the person has greater possibilities of rotating internally. The fact that Live Learning has other advantages, such as saving time and costs, contributes to greater participation of employees in programs, therefore achieving a greater training. Besides, the company has a comprehensive knowledge of its employees and their skills, and in many occasions it favors their applications instead of the application of

someone from the market.

You can access easily

In general, you only need to click on a link to have access to this kind of training. They are available all the time, at any place and for every team member. So, according to Chantal D'Halluin (2003), a company observed a participation rate higher than 100%: team members that were not part of the group to which training was directed at first had spontaneously followed the training modules.



Improves the transference potential

As training is directly related to the company's activities and combines different learning methods, such as simulating special situations, if the opportunity arises, the person may apply, after the practice, what he has learned at the training.

Improves the reactivity

Contents can be updated instantly and we find the same version at any place and any time, regardless of the technological support being used (intranet, Internet or platforms).

Nancy Lauzon (2003) points out the following advantages for manufacturing companies:

Employees can simulate situations

There are cases in which the risks arising out of mistakes could be hazardous or expensive. By means of Live Learning employees can simulate those situations and learn how to react, solve certain problems and anticipate certain situations, among others. In this way, risks of error could be reduced.



Employees can visualize better



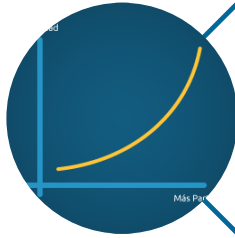
Live Learning allows an individual, through simulated situations, to visualize those things that would not be possible to visualize in a real context because performance of a certain operation is fast or because of the physical structure of the equipment. At his own pace, the participant may visualize the situations as many times as he deems necessary. For example, a company from the bio-food industry used these trainings to show its employees the production stages in slow motion, which, in real life, develop so quickly that the human eye cannot perceive it.

Sounds can be reproduced

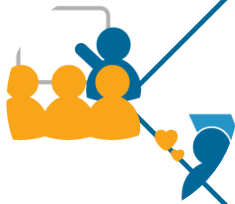
We are talking about sounds that are part of the working environment, such as different alarms, noises made by certain equipment, among others; these sounds should be recognized quickly so that employees can react properly.



Referring back to training paradigms, with Live Learning the company has more chances to achieve success, whatever approach it adopts. Let's analyze this on a case by case basis:



Administrative approach: Live Learning facilitates accessibility at a lower cost and thus allows to increase the amount of participants.



Popular approach: apart from increasing the amount of participants, the fact that each of them can follow their own path, go over the material and exchange opinions with their peers increases their satisfaction. Besides, this means that the employee may be willing to participate. As a result, these trainings are generally interesting for the individual.



Competence approach: since the individual has more access and more opportunities to follow the great amount of training programs, he may acquire more competences and thus enhance his skills and knowledge.



Field approach: live-learning are programs specially chosen by companies for certain situations. They are specifically applied to each organization's real situations. Since they are managed with coherence and standardization, they allow a better transference to the working environment.



Company's project approach: as mentioned above, this kind of training gives the possibility of conveying a unique and coherent message and an improved strategic alignment. In this way, they facilitate the contribution to the business project. Apart from that, they are a means to reach the business objectives and to concentrate all efforts pursuant to its scope.



To conclude, ICTs increase training accessibility. Therefore, a "learning culture" should be developed, so that employees become willing to train, and training becomes an integral part of the working process. Undoubtedly, one of the challenges of Live Learning is to face competition, laying emphasis on the company's human capital management, thus generating a competitive advantage thanks to the development of inimitable resources.



Conclusion

Training employees implies a win-win logic because, on the one hand, employees can increase their "employability" and improve their skills; and on the other hand, the company can improve its performance. For this reason, employees should not only receive training related to their current job, but also acquire more general competences to become versatile in the field, being capable of understanding and treating customers' demands. Business training aims at generating human capital, which has strategic value as it will help the organization to improve its efficacy and efficiency and will contribute to the competitive advantage.

For the above mentioned reasons, I highlight again the importance of seeing training programs as an investment, not only for the company but also for the participant himself. You must be aware that, as Tim Weyland states, it is much more difficult copying the workforce abilities than copying a marketing program or a product. Besides, the truth is that an organization should not be interested in copying the human capital of another organization, but it must look for a unique plan suitable for the organization's specific situation, for its own business model and its specific objectives. So, if you create your own human capital and the employees' abilities, you will obtain a powerful competitive advantage as a result which will not be easily copied in the market.

Although I am conscious of the main hindrances when it comes to implementing training programs (time and cost) I consider that Live Learning has many undeniable advantages and, for this reason, you must use them, always bearing in mind that the progress of an employee also implies progress for your company.




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"Train people well enough so they can leave, treat them well enough so they don't want to"

- Richard Branson -

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