From Training Departments to a Company Academy Part 2

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We are happy to share the second part in our two-part series about Company Academies. In Part 1, we discussed how Company Academies have evolved and their stages of development. In this post, we'll discuss trends and new developments in Company Academies, and the roles the various stakeholders should play.

Trends and Developments
Like any organization, Academies are subject to changes and adaptation to the daily reality. We've compiled some interesting trends and developments applicable to Company Academies below:

- Company Academies must prove their added-value to the company.
- Academies must be completely self-supporting by the use of clear KPI's (Key Performance Indicators). Showing clear and indisputable return on training investments remains an important question.
- The budget of the most of the Company Academies comes, for the majority, from Head Office. There is, however, a tendency to 'invoice' the various operating companies for usage of the Academy resources.
- The investments for training of individual employees continue to grow. Especially in this period of economic challenges, it seems that Company Academies are an excellent instrument to energize and strengthen organizations to face the challenges.
- Company Academies continue to concentrate on learning solutions which give an answer to the highest priority issues, e.g., increasing the productivity of the employee and reducing the high costs of "class-room-based-learning".
- Many Company Academies now provide training to customers and distributors.
- Evaluation of the learning impact is most often accomplished (40%) by means of company simulations and role plays.
- A third of all Company Academies use the "balanced scorecard" method to evaluate the strategy. New evaluation methods are developed to increase the efficiency of the Academies.
- Company Academies are increasingly using traditional marketing methods to stir the interest potential participants for programs.

- The Company Academies are using "blended learning" approaches more frequently.
- E-learning programs (*a method which uses a computer network for distribution, two-way communication and facilitation*) in combination with classroom sessions ('C- learning') are offered.
- E-learning actually has developed itself parallel to the changing concepts of learning and training in organizations (see our article on E-learning here. The internet makes distribution of modules possible. E-learning 2.0 now puts the learner more in a central role.

New Developments

A recent development in e-learning is the Responsive Open Learning Environments' (ROLE). This development is supported by the European Union as an important learning project for organizations.

Personalized, intelligent training environments are developed in ROLE by the learners themselves. This enables the learners to practically create their own learning environment in order to optimize the experience. Learning services, content and functions which fit best are assigned to them. These services can be incorporated in a LMS (Learning Management System) as well as social networks such as LinkedIn, Twitter and YouTube, etc. Like students in universities and colleges, employees will even be able to create their own learning environment at home! Integrating learning with other components of the employee's life results in an actively involved and motivated learner.

To offer the correct tools at the right moment for the learners, ROLE asks for an individual user profile. Based on these assessments, ROLE offers new learning tools and appropriate learning activities. Learners themselves grant access to these data to HRD or their manager. This means HRD managers have access for the first time to the hidden competencies of their employees in a structured manner. HRD managers can gain an advantage by using these hidden competencies for future challenges within the organization.

Roles of the HRD Function and Top Management

Organizations realize more and more that a simple training program is no longer the best solution, because the organization has to adapt itself continuously to changing business conditions. Constantly adapting means ongoing learning is required. Here lies the momentum for existing Company Academies as well as an important momentum for HRD.

Management at the strategic level may be interested, but maybe not yet involved and committed. HRD should work to change that latent involvement into effective involvement. Right now, HRD must grab its role as strategic supporter or even as strategic innovator to show their value.

Is it possible to persuade top management of the contribution which can be provided by HRD? It is not only possible, it's simply an absolute requirement to engage management in the evolution of the Company Academy. If you miss this opportunity, HRD will not develop, nor will the Company Academy.

Conclusion
Innovative answers must be given on strategic questions. It is therefore vital that HRD have insight into business questions and know how to translate these into learning solutions which produce results for the organization. The concept of a Company Academy shows how HRD can position itself as strategic supporter or as strategic innovator. With clear objectives centered on the support and influence of the organizations strategy, Company Academies demonstrate the true strategic potential of the HRD role.

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