



Stamp of approval

Chances are there are qualifications available that could be aligned to the training being carried out in your workplace. Helen McPhun explores the pros and cons of linking workplace training to a nationally recognised qualification.

On any given day there are numerous training courses being conducted in New Zealand workplaces. Managers, team leaders or staff members—regardless of role or responsibility, at some point there will be training provided.

Organisations invest in training in the hope that employees will pick up useful knowledge and skills they can transfer to their work. Some organisations do an excellent job of building transferability into their training to ensure what is taught results in improved performance. Other organisations put on great training and no one really checks to see that it has made any difference at all. But the opportunity is there for all organisations to make their training more valuable and to greatly increase their return on the training they provide.

It is proven that employees who are able to access and achieve a reputable qualification on the job tend to stay longer with their employer and view the employer in a more favourable light. The

evidence of this is seen in increased staff engagement scores and reduced staff churn.

Chances are there are qualifications available that could be aligned with the training being done in your workplace. And there will be training providers or industry training organisations happy to assist you implement appropriate qualifications.

Two successful examples

A major New Zealand insurance company decided to redesign its traditional induction programme for its call centre staff to include components of the NZQA Financial Advisers (Level 4) qualification. As part of the induction programme, new employees had to complete targeted sets of tasks. These tasks were then assessed by an employee who was trained to assess and the employees each achieved unit standards towards their qualification by simply completing the

Weighing the pros and cons

The pros

For employees:

- Feel more valued;
- Are more committed to the organisation and less likely to leave;
- May want to continue on a pathway of advanced learning in the organisation;
- Have to demonstrate the valuable knowledge and skills they are taught;
- Are held accountable for transferring learning to their roles (not just showing up at training);
- Ask fewer questions;
- Build confidence and self esteem because of their increased credentials.

For the organisation:

- Grows a learning culture that is respected by management and staff;
- Has measurable results from learning;
- Is recognised as forward thinking;
- Saves money in the long run.

The cons

- Time must be allocated for staff to complete the tasks;
- Fees need to be paid to the training provider to put the programme in place and assess the work—or a fee is paid to the ITO for the same process and a financial incentive may be provided to the company by the ITO;
- Some training resources provided by some ITOs and training providers are cumbersome and inefficient—smart tools need to be developed to meet your organisation's needs;
- If working with an ITO, some staff members will have to use their time to assess others.

Authenticity and e-learning

After attending the American Society of Training and Development conference in Dallas along with 9000 others recently, I realised that learning and development issues and trends in New Zealand are no different than those in the rest of the world.

Online learning is used in many countries and everyone agrees it saves training dollars from having to pull people into training courses. However, authenticity issues run rabid in the e-learning process. Who is it that is really completing the module online?

A major overseas rail company told how it traditionally had all contractors who entered a rail yard attend a mandatory safety workshop. In a two-hour session, an instructor checked each contractor could read and understand English signage and instructions and ensured each person knew the safety rules for working in a rail yard. This safety session was moved to an online platform which saved the company millions. Contractors had to complete a comprehensive online module prior to working in the rail yard.

Before too long there was a marked increase in yard accidents and site foremen noticed an overwhelming number of contractors could not converse in English or understand the safety signage. How had these people passed the online safety course? How had they each passed the online literacy tests?

Not being able to determine who has been sitting at the computer completing the online modules has prompted some companies to use a camera to record the learner completing the module; an expensive option but worth it in some cases.

induction programme. Rather than the company delivering induction and setting the newly trained staff free to start their roles, the staff were able to start their roles with a number of assessed tasks under their belts.

During subsequent months, post induction, the same employees worked on other topics and assessment tasks and were able to complete their national qualification. The programme was run through an industry training organisation which reported the credits to NZQA and who also provided the organisation with a small government-funded financial incentive for successful completions.

The benefits to the company were enormous! Not only did newly inducted staff ask fewer questions, spend less time getting information, and appear more engaged in work, but their speed to competence compared to a control group was increased by an average of 160 percent (3 weeks).

A thorough analysis was done to determine intangible benefits of the revised programme, showing there was a marked improvement in employee engagement and a stronger commitment to staying with the company. Participants overwhelmingly agreed that the ability to work towards and achieve a national qualification while doing their regular work and traditional training was an enormous benefit to them individually.

A full return on investment (ROI) study was conducted on this project and the result was that a 69 percent return on investment was realised in the first year of the new induction programme and in the second year it was estimated that the ROI would be 141 percent.

In a second programme, another company was concerned that they delivered so much staff training each year but, at the end of it all, their employees had nothing to show for it in terms of transferable reputable credentials. Sure they had their attendance at the team building workshops, the time management session, the negotiating-with-difficult-clients course and the writing-effective-reports workshop, but none of the certificates or results provided tangible recognition of advanced knowledge and skill. Nor did they provide a credential that was transferable to another company or industry.

Faced with this dilemma, along with a fresh perspective and a desire to provide employees with something they would see as valuable, the company decided to see what national qualification would best line up with the training they currently did for their staff.

It was determined that staff completed about 60 percent of the training towards a national certificate in first line management. They just needed to provide workplace evidence to show they applied what they had been taught. The other 40 percent of the qualification was made up of topics the company saw as having value for their staff members, including: managing change, report writing, dealing with conflict and communicating in a team. These topics, additional to the usual in-house training, were easily able to be learned through self-directed learning.

The company worked with LearnPlus who developed assess-

ment resources for the topics the company already taught, and designed self-directed modules and assessments for other relevant and related topics.

To ensure staff members kept up to date with the modules and did not put things in the 'one day' basket, the staff members had set deadlines on which they had to submit each document. There was one central person to submit documents to and any excuses had to be made to that person! Once all of the assessment documents were received, they were sent to the training provider to be assessed and reported to NZQA.

The calibre of the work received was of an extremely high standard. It was clear the manager had promoted a learning culture that encouraged staff to apply what they had learned and to take pride in what they were doing.

The net result was that within one year—by delivering the training the company traditionally delivered, and by aligning with a training provider to do assessing and some self-directed modules—the employees each earned their National Qualification in First Line

Management. The provider charged a nominal fee to provide the self-directed training, assessments and qualification programme.

The benefits to the company included having tangible evidence of learning, showing increased engagement scores from staff, having staff who wanted to pursue the next level of qualification, and most importantly, becoming known as an employer of choice.

If you weigh up the pros and cons of linking a recognised qualification to your existing or future workplace training, there are a number of things to consider (see box).

And remember, while we all know that employers are very selective about who they hire, employees are becoming equally as selective. Smart organisations offer their staff a job *plus* a qualification as a pathway to future success. **et**

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