

The CUX Inquiry Brief

❖ The Transition from Trainer to Performance Consultant: Avoiding the Order-Taker Trap

Learning and development professionals know that courseware, even well-designed courseware, is not always the right solution to a performance issue. But any time a learning organization expands its scope, or decides to make that necessary transition to being a strategic partner to the business, it runs the risk of becoming simply an order-taker, responding to the courseware requests of business leaders. After all, these people supported the new learning organization because it promised to help them solve those performance issues, didn't they?

To prevent this, the new learning organization has to move beyond training, and look at each performance issue to determine what the proper mix of interventions might be. This requires changing the mindset from instructional designer to performance consultant, a transition that may require a significant change in staffing or additional training for learning professionals. It also requires an educational effort to engage business leaders in new ways.

Corporate universities are aware of the importance of performance consulting. When asked how important adding a performance consulting function was to their organizations, 32 percent of respondents to the CUX Sixth Annual Benchmarking Report said it was of high importance, with an equal number putting it in the medium importance category.

Performance consultants need a different skill set than do learning designers. Again, the "Sixth Annual" sheds some light. Performance consultants were expected to have performance improvement knowledge (83 percent), and skills in coaching and counseling (78 percent), adult learning (77 percent), and innovativeness and creativity (73 percent). For e-learning design specialists, for example, only four competencies were required by more than half of the respondents: knowledge of technology (91 percent), adult learning (79 percent), innovativeness & creativity (73 percent) and project management (70 percent).

Performance Consulting	
High importance	32%
Medium importance	32%
Low importance	24%
No importance	11%
Don't know	1%

Source: CUX Sixth Annual Benchmarking Study

Findings: Business leaders have to understand that learning is not the only way to improve performance, and learning organizations trying to become strategic partners have to develop the expertise to go beyond designing courses to address performance issues in the most appropriate manner.

❖ Should the Company Sponsor MBA Participants?

The MBA is often considered a prerequisite for leadership at the top levels of a company, although fewer than 40 percent of CEOs actually have the degree. Probably more important than its status-symbol value, however, are the important lessons in finance, marketing, governance, international business and management that are learned during the experience. Add to that the feeling of many high-potential employees that the opportunity to earn an MBA is a real indicator of a company's faith in them, and you have a powerful argument for providing support beyond

that offered through a standard tuition-reimbursement program.

There are some important considerations and caveats to consider when offering this opportunity to employees. The primary issue is one of career development. The MBA should only be offered as part of a personal development/career management plan that is based on performance, identification of potential, and management recommendations. There should be no guarantees, but it should be clear that the effort will be rewarded and that the individual has an important role in the company's future. In fact, many executive MBA (EMBA) programs only accept students that have company support and a clear statement from the supporting company of the individual's development objectives. Other issues that have to be considered include the financial investment (as much as \$40,000 a year), the need to mentor participants who might be tempted by offers received as a result of their interactions with fellow students, and time and timing considerations.

Findings: Not all learning can be on-the-job, and high-potential employees who are expected to develop into the company's leaders can benefit from a well-structured external program. The company should decide whether an individual's development needs will be met through a residential MBA, an on-line program, an EMBA, or one of the short-term intensive executive development programs run by most of the highly-ranked business schools, and give both financial support and the time to get the most out of the experience.

❖ A CUX Member Benefit

Every week, CUX analysts answer inquiries – quick turn-around questions posed by members. These may be to jumpstart someone's thinking on an issue, provide a benchmark on a critical topic, or provide resources to inform a presentation. The CUX Inquiry Brief shares the questions (without mentioning who asked) and the answers, and offers commentary and analysis on the subjects raised. Each bi-weekly Brief features two or three issues that we think will be of interest to the CUX member community. The CUX Inquiry Brief will arrive in your e-mail as an HTML message with a PDF document attached to make it easy to save and read off-line. If your company is a CUX member and you want to learn more about any of the issues raised, or wish to place an inquiry, send an e-mail to research@corpu.com or call 212-213-2828.

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