

# point of view

## Team-Based Learning

As businesses strive to shake off the shockwaves of the Great Recession, forward-thinking leaders turn their focus to matters of strategy, quality, and competitive advantage.

### Highlights

- Embed problem-solving and learning into everyday routines and the organizational culture to embrace challenges and support team and enterprise growth and objectives without adding costs.
- Identify and measure learning and development as core individual responsibilities to build employee skill, knowledge, and trust.
- Apply an efficient, cost-effective learning approach used by leading teaching hospitals as a critical learning tool.

### Learning and development strategy at a crossroads

High performance, driven by top talent, will distinguish the players that will dominate in tomorrow's market. With a dramatically different kind of labor pool and a talent shortage on their doorsteps, organizations will need to identify thoughtful, creative ways to train and retain talent to fuel long-term success. The best answers will not be found in the training room—they rarely are—but instead by engaging teams of employees in ways that may be new to the business world, but are nonetheless proven, trusted, and budget-savvy.

# Getting 100 percent out of 70 percent

**More than three-quarters (77 percent) of senior executives responding to a PwC survey reported reductions in skill development programs, and almost half (48 percent) experienced at least moderate reductions. This includes 29 percent reporting a moderate decrease, 5 percent cutting back severely, and 14 percent cancelling or delaying all nonessential programs.<sup>1</sup>**

Team-Based Learning (TBL) is emerging as a key opportunity at a pivotal time, enabling businesses to bring workers together, extend employee skills, and build and groom leadership without adding layers of clunky bureaucracy or entailing crippling costs. As businesses seek to protect the bottom line while retaining key talent, TBL is a way to manage through the downturn and also maintain a focus on planning, growth, and future needs. By embracing a learning-at-work model, an organization can improve performance through development and operate more cost effectively while enabling a more efficient, rewarding, and sustainable culture—one that is relevant to a new generation of workers just when they will be needed most.

Note that 70 percent of learning occurs in the course of day-to-day work, with the balance achieved through informal learning and coaching (20 percent) and formal instruction (10 percent). TBL provides an elegant vehicle through which organizations can vigorously leverage that 70 percent window, building performance and business and keeping costs at bay.

As recessionary times continue to drain resources and present new challenges, thoughts may not turn immediately or obviously to issues such as employee development and talent shortages. But smart observers know they should be contemplating these issues to drive organizational leadership, talent retention, brand, and enterprise sustainability.

## **Don't let development strategy languish amid cost concerns**

Although training and development budgets can often be vulnerable to budget cuts aimed at shoring up the bottom line, the long-term cost can be considerable. Businesses should not take for granted the value of masterful employee education and cultivation. In fact, a dearth of career development opportunities trumped compensation as a key contributor to pivotal talent losses, according to another recent PwC survey.<sup>2</sup>

Short-sighted decision making may be particularly precarious at this time. Thanks in large part to today's economic turmoil, employee and corporate loyalty, already in decline, now look to be on the fast track to near extinction. And, despite current fiscal concerns, long-term forecasts indicate a looming and serious global talent shortage. At the same time, employers will find that tomorrow's employees will think and work differently from the long-predominant baby boom generation.<sup>3</sup>

These trends point to an emerging demand for far-sighted approaches that will enable organizations to manage the workforce and the balance sheet with equal dexterity and efficiency. One solution that is gaining notice among forward thinkers emanates from what may at first glance appear to be an unlikely source: teaching hospitals, which traditionally rely on TBL to build knowledge and teams on a day-to-day basis as an integrated part of the routine—even when life itself can be at stake.

TBL can be an empowering tool for building staff knowledge, confidence, and mutual support—along with competitive advantage and organizational durability. Although a growing number of companies recognize the wisdom of encouraging staff to own their professional development, budgetary concerns amid the financial downturn have many businesses relying foremost on scaling back learning programs and delivery methods, rather than assessing new approaches that may be just as cost-savvy and potentially more effective.

We see growing recognition that if TBL can work for the medical profession—where the schedules are grueling, quality care is a must, and differences in experience levels can be significant—then businesses can benefit, too. Might your organization be ready to fill this prescription for tomorrow's training and budgetary needs?

<sup>1</sup> PricewaterhouseCoopers' Manufacturing Barometer, August 2009, <http://barometersurveys.com/store/docs/Manufacturing%20Barometer%20Special%20Issue%20Talent%20Management.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> PricewaterhouseCoopers, *Managing Tomorrow's People, Millennials at work—perspectives from a new generation*, <http://www.pwc.com/gx/en/managing-tomorrows-people/future-of-work/millennials-survey.jhtml>

<sup>3</sup> PwC Saratoga 2009/2010 *US Human Capital Effectiveness Report*.

# Understanding the millennial mindset

A look at Generations X and Y, which are starting to unseat the baby boomers as the majority of the workforce<sup>4</sup>, clearly demonstrates the need for a fresh perspective. Where the baby boomer learning style has tended toward more formal training and behaviors, Generations X and Y show an increasing propensity toward hands-on, experiential learning paths.<sup>5</sup>

In particular, tomorrow's workforce will rely heavily on Generation Y, also known as the millennials. Born between 1980 and 2000, the group is well educated and deeply values career growth as part of an overall remuneration package—so much so that they favor career development opportunities over cash incentives, according to a recent PwC survey.<sup>6</sup> Gen Y will be a powerful demographic group at a time in which labor shortages will likely hit the global economy.

## Team-based problem-solving

Research supports the power of teams, which can cut staff turnover while enhancing production cycles, quality, individual performance, and attendance.<sup>7</sup> Many companies are starting to place greater employee development responsibility directly on the workforce, with leading businesses promoting shared responsibility between management and employees, and some beginning to recognize the potential of problem-solving through problem-based learning as a key learning and development tool. The result: increased employee satisfaction, decreased administrative heavy lifting for professional development, and a more robust talent pool.

## The learning-at-work fusion

TBL can create this kind of development culture, ingraining teaching and learning into the course of work, accelerating development to forge high-performing teams and deliver top-tier results, and shifting focus away from training program

cuts as a sole means of cost control. The goal for companies that seek to replicate such synergy: Accelerate individual and team development to achieve competitive advantage; encourage staff retention; and make smart choices on behalf of the organization's long-term goals. Though ambitious, the shift to a learning-at-work approach does not have to be difficult, based on what we have learned from the medical training precedent and our own implementation of TBL.

## Inside TBL

Based on the development rule that 70 percent of learning transpires in the course of day-to-day work, with 20 percent occurring through informal learning and coaching and 10 percent through formal instruction, the practice of embedding learning into daily routines can create strong competitive advantage.

By providing team members with an opportunity to learn and develop while addressing problems in real time in the context of day-to-day work, TBL can supplement and reinforce formal professional learning experiences. Because learning can be incorporated and integrated as an essential component of work within the parameters of routine team and organizational operations, additional cost is minimal. As team members participate in TBL, learning, teaching, and problem-solving become simultaneous, and skills development blends seamlessly with the achievement of project and client objectives.

TBL participants gain exposure to a wide array of business topics and relevant challenges, rather than focusing narrowly on assigned tasks absent a broad understanding of a project or industry. Therefore, team members, especially those who have less experience, can begin to see beyond their individual roles to understand a far more comprehensive sense of the work and its significance for the individual, the team, the client, other stakeholders, and the greater organization.

<sup>4</sup> PwC Saratoga 2009/2010 *US Human Capital Effectiveness Report*.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.greenesconsulting.com/KA/Core-themes-Generational-Differences.htm>

<sup>6</sup> *Managing tomorrow's people, Millennials at work—Perspectives from a new generation*, PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2008.

<sup>7</sup> PricewaterhouseCoopers' Global Best Practices.

# Critical success factors

## Q&A

**Q: What are the central components of the TBL approach?**

**A: The Point of the wedge:** Grant responsibility and lend team and experiential support to a less experienced participant to enable teaching, learning, and development.

**Teach, don't tell:** Use questions and guided inquiries to teach, instead of providing answers and resolutions.

**Problem-based learning:** Use challenges encountered in the course of work as learning and teaching opportunities.

**Own the client:** Build greater accountability and motivation among team members for providing clients and other stakeholders with high-quality results.

**Q: What distinguishes successful TBL programs?**

**A:** A broad-based understanding of TBL's underlying philosophies and principles among team members is a prerequisite for effective implementation. Each team member and the team as an entity must retain top-of-mind awareness of their roles in the learning matrix, on top of their functional responsibilities: More experienced team members must see themselves as learners, teachers, and developers; less experienced team members, too, must see themselves as learners and teachers, and view the learning environment not only as safe, but also as a place to stretch, deliver, and demonstrate high performance.

**Q: How can my organization bring TBL to life?**

**A:** TBL takes shape through these practices:

**Rounds:** An approach to team discussions about daily work and challenges that develops skills including problem-solving, preparation, presentation, inquiry, listening, knowledge sharing, and the creation and communication of a point of view

**Shadowing:** An established development activity through which less experienced team members (Point of the wedge) can observe the work and behaviors of more experienced personnel as they manage complex issues

**Lessons learned forum:** A channel through which teams and individuals can discuss and celebrate successes realized in surmounting difficult situations and building critical knowledge

**Observation and feedback:** An ongoing process through which a less experienced team member (Point of the Wedge) demonstrates a task or competency for and receives feedback from a mentor or observer

**Team workshops:** Opportunities, often led by the Point of the Wedge, for improving technical, client service, or professional development skills, with an emphasis on guided inquiry

## Contact information

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