

## 2007: The Year of the Mission-Critical Workforce

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We all have read the statistics: By 2010, more than half of all workers in the United States will be older than 40. The decade ahead will see vast numbers of people retiring or at least leaving their full-time careers. What's more, this "brain drain" is leading to a talent shortage in a few mission-critical workforces, those that most affect an organization's bottom line.

Two research studies conducted in 2006 highlight the importance of concentrating learning and development resources on mission-critical workforces. The first research study, conducted jointly by the Economist Intelligence Unit and Development Dimensions International, is titled "The CEO's Role in Talent Management: How Top Executives From 10 Countries are Nurturing Leaders of Tomorrow." This study interviewed 20 CEOs from multinational companies that generate at least \$1 billion in annual revenue.

It revealed a startlingly fact: Seven of the 20 CEOs interviewed said they spend between 30 percent and 50 percent of their working time each month identifying, developing and retaining key talent.

The second study, conducted jointly by Babson Executive Education and Accenture Learning, "Focused Learning For Mission-Critical Jobs," found taking an undifferentiated mass curriculum approach to workforce enablement was on the decline. Instead the most successful organizations — those identified by *BusinessWeek* as high-performing organizations over the past three years — focus their learning investments on a select number of mission-critical jobs.

There are several factors driving this focused approach to talent development. CLOs are becoming more strategic in their management of the learning investment. This is being driven by the increased usage of strategic advisory boards composed of senior executives who now have a voice in how to align learning to solve business needs.

What does this razor-sharp focus on mission-critical workforces mean for the learning and development department in 2007? There are three areas for CLOs to consider:

First, based on your organization's business goals, can you readily identify your top three mission-critical workforces? Next, can you answer the following questions about them?

- Average age and tenure with the organization.
- Level of computer literacy.

- Percentage of learning and development spending.
- Key knowledge, skills and competencies needed for success in next two to three years.
- Potential partners who can assist in developing customized executive education offerings for mission-critical workforces.

Second, as the target audience of the learning department narrows to the mission-critical worker, the palette of learning services might broaden to include a host of new ones such as role-based wikis, podcasts and vodcasts, as well as customized certificates developed in partnership with accredited universities. In addition, there is an opportunity to build each mission-critical workforce into a self-contained community with its own portal, job aids, performance simulations, coaches and events.

Third, when a learning department takes on an enterprise focus, it naturally tends to measure myriad learning inputs such as the number of classroom days of training received, the number of online courses taken and the cost per hour of learning delivered. But the real opportunity is to focus metrics on hard improvements in the performance of a specific job family. For example, some of the metrics that increasingly will matter to senior executives include:

- Increase in time to competency.
- Decrease in call-center traffic.
- Increase in overall productivity.
- Increase in safety measures associated with performance on the job.
- Increase in level of engagement.

As we enter 2007, let's focus our investments on specific workforces rather than simply taking an enterprise mass-market view of our mission.

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