

**LEARNING
EXECUTIVE
THINK TANK**

LEARNING EXECUTIVE THINK TANK INSIGHTS

**5 Ways to Help Your Training
Organization Survive and
Thrive in a Troubled Economy**



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INTRODUCTION

“The emergent winners in these recessionary times will innovate and widen the gap between themselves and their competition.”

In an economic downturn, you may think that top learning executives map strategies for survival. However, many view an economic crisis as an opportunity to help their company expand market share, secure customer loyalty, and prepare the most talented members of their workforce for current and future success.

The emergent winners use recessionary times to innovate and widen the gap between themselves and their competition. While many companies slash payrolls, place product development on hold, and take a wait-and-see position in their markets, the true “winners” strategically increase productivity and prepare to come out ahead when the good times return. True—economic hardships make everyone become more focused on “need”—and this is a particularly compelling challenge for the training industry.

In a second virtual roundtable discussion, a handful of top corporate learning executives sat down to compare insights on key issues facing the industry, and share ideas about how to “survive” in a tough economy.

The roundtable group included learning leaders from a broad spectrum of businesses, including global business consulting, IT services, retail, construction management, human resources and knowledge services.

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The main question participants were asked to address:

What are you doing in your training organization to navigate the uncertainty and survive the impact of the stressful economic environment?

Despite the diversity of industries in which they serve, all of the participants had similar conclusions. At the top of the list: *learning organizations are being asked to do more with less money—making it necessary to be innovative at cutting costs AND improve the quality of their training programs.*

Classroom training has taken a rather large hit, in particular, due to reduced travel budgets and a smaller workforce that cannot be away from the office for long periods of time.

The interesting dichotomy of the current business climate is that it's creating an increased demand for training. Organizations are making hard decisions about what stays and what goes. They are making sure that at the end of this recession, their learning organization and the company is stronger and better than it was before.

KEY FINDINGS

“An effective teaching culture requires that you identify the individuals within your organization that will be helpful in the training initiative.”

The increased need for training in a streamlined organization presents some interesting challenges. These learning leaders shared the ways in which they are successfully meeting these demands and equipping their organizations for current and future success.

#1. Create a Teaching Culture

Internal experts know your organization’s challenges and mission better than any hired expert...and have the skills and knowledge that exist nowhere else.

An effective teaching culture requires that you identify the individuals within your organization that will be most helpful in your training initiatives. These experts in sales, engineering, product installation and support are trained and then given the tools they need to deploy their knowledge and skills to the rest of the organization.

One participant from the knowledge service industry noted that this is an extremely effective and economical method for training the workforce. Using internal experts has helped them create a collaborative, peer-to-peer learning culture, and also limits the loss of productivity during training. He noted that a teaching culture has allowed him to prepare his organization for current problems, and future success. When the economy rebounds, his workforce will be better positioned with a well-trained workforce with deeper and broader skills and knowledge. They’ll also be prepared to grab opportunities and meet the demands of the new marketplace.

“Having a good understanding of your company’s objectives, human capital, and overall mission is critical to the survival of the training department.”

#2. A Shift to Virtual and e-Learning

Create training programs that ensure excellence without a loss of productivity.

Roundtable participants earmarked e-learning as a critical training tool in a cost-conscious business climate. A smaller workforce means that productivity has to be maintained by limiting the time that employees are away from their jobs. This makes e-learning a more efficient method of training.

One participant commented that e-learning has allowed for much quicker deployment and can be developed and implemented effectively and efficiently by a “leaner and meaner” training team.

#3. Encourage and Integrate Informal and Collaborative Learning

Ensure continued skill development and workforce proficiency.

Increasing demands on a smaller workforce makes skills development a critical factor to the success of the entire organization. Borrowing from successful social media technology, the use of blogs, webinars, wikis, white papers, and peer-to-peer training helps to ensure that organizations have access to the training they need at any given moment, to operate efficiently and effectively.

#4. Re-negotiate Contracts with Vendors

Keeping current partners is much easier and economical than finding new ones.

A more tactical way to trim expenses is re-negotiating contracts with vendors—however, many of our roundtable participants agreed that this should to be done with caution. In some instances, it may be appropriate to re-negotiate services;

however this might result in a reduction in quality. The key is doing it strategically and making sure the outcome is win-win.

It also helps to first compare your current vendor agreements with other providers to ensure that you are getting the best product, service, and price.

#5. Align, Prioritize, and Cut

Understand your objectives, align training for success, and reduce intelligently.

A. Training Programs

All of our roundtable participants agreed that having a good understanding of your company's objectives, human capital, and overall mission is critical to the survival of the training organization. One roundtable participant said, as expenditures are cut within the organization, it is vital that "good costs" are retained.

Training must also be measured and refined to meet company objectives. When training initiatives are clearly helping the company meet its business goals, the value of training goes way up. Measurement provides credibility—One learning leader added, "You must review every program and training mechanism within your organization and determine whether or not it is worthy of continued support. Do not assume the effectiveness of any program, even if it has been around for a long time."

B. Intelligently Reduce Headcount

In a troubled economy, the training staff is almost guaranteed to be reduced. A leaner workforce requires that your best talent be retained and sufficiently cross-trained for maximum effectiveness. Similarly, knowing the people who comprise the organization is equally important.

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Also, use the downturned economy as an opportunity to cultivate and cross-train your best talent to ensure that they don't leave the organization when the economy does improve.

CONCLUSION

Even in an economic downturn, the training environment has become one of innovation and creativity. Learning executives are being asked to create a higher sense of loyalty, confidence, and viability within their organizations, while continuing to trim expenses.

The dichotomy of “doing more with less” is a big challenge that is pushing learning executives to do things differently than what worked in the past. Today’s training organization needs to be more streamlined and focused. Learning executives need to adapt and administer programs that meet clients’ needs while continuing to reduce costs.

In the downturned economy, training continues to play a vital role in the efforts of organizations to emerge with a larger market share. The key to survival, however, will be to understand the organization and its members—devising programs that cultivate and grow corporate “superstars” and support business objectives.

During this time of budget cutbacks, reassess all of your training programs, tap internal resources by creating a “teaching” culture, and measure learning to ensure effectiveness.

This white paper is one of six roundtable discussions in 2009. To find the latest results from each roundtable discussion, visit <http://www.trainingefficiency.com/> .

This roundtable discussion was sponsored by Expertus www.expertus.com, a learning services firm with over 500 learning specialists who help companies like Cisco, ADP and Lockheed Martin optimize every aspect of their learning organizations.