

Never mind the quality, feel the depth

The sins of Procurement in maximising an investment in learning for performance

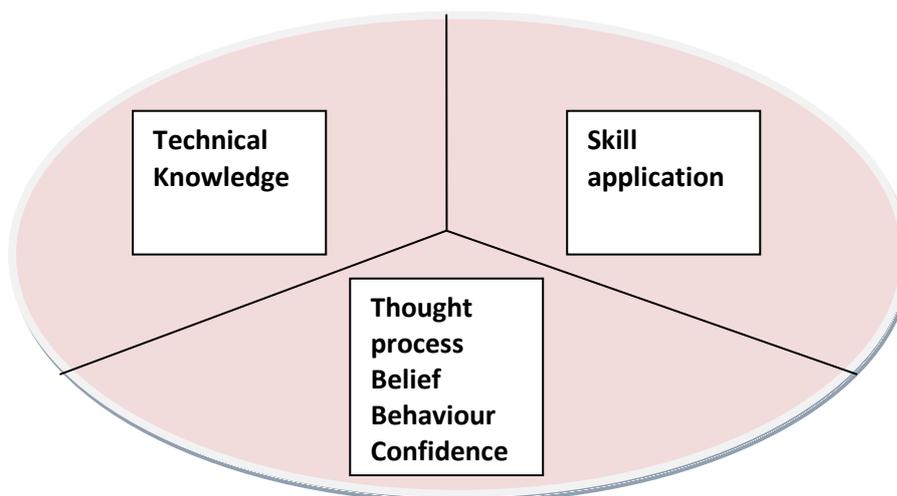
It is tempting to pronounce that organisations should consider seriously refraining from letting procurement anywhere near the purchasing of learning services or any service where the intent is to impact upon output performance. Buying training is not the same as buying articles, items, or input cost dependent services. The practice of procurement applying cost only decisions has had a profoundly negative effect on the potential impact of training – quality matters and quality analysts, designers, deliverers and leaders of training where their performance can act as a gearing mechanism to the impact of learning on performance are not necessarily a cost decision.

Indeed, some tendering processes are so complex for the provision of a simple resource that the time involved within the process will voluntarily exclude the people and organisations who may have the most significant potential to maximise the impact of the investment.

The internal time spent on meetings and reviewing complex tender documentation also drives up the cost of the initiative – potentially beyond any superficial price savings and may also delay to realisation of benefits on performance.

The practice also undermines the value of quality internal resource and the value and potential contribution of learning to performance. Accepting that as much as 80% of performance is driven by product, environment, management, marketing; the application and confidence that results from focused learning that can make the difference.

Components of Learning Journey Content





Learning Strategy and Solutions

So why do we find ourselves with this dilemma?

There is a need to ensure consistency and governance in the buying of services and it seems appropriate that the 'third party' involvement of a specialist procurement team could offer some value.

The perception of training, its defensive tick box utilisation and 'let's get it over with' response has grown from a lack of organisational performance and business acumen within Training & Development (T&D) functions. Where they purely respond to solutioneering from HR or business management then there is little added value being contributed and 'standard' off the shelf packages are being delivered to provide minimum standards and to 'comply'... In these circumstances then it is fair that the assumption that anyone can present (telling being training!) is applied and a cost based approach is valid. Thus, a very simple process would reduce the costs of procurement and the solutions would be available quickly. Suppliers would have minimum time to invest in the process and more would be attracted. In this instance suppliers are also restricted – their better resources won't work at the reduced rates unless convenient geographically & if the night before a better offer of work comes along then the cheap rate will be forsaken to work for the organisation that demonstrates some belief in the potential contribution – leaving the supplier hawking around for a last minute, unlikely to be qualified, replacement whose potential impact on performance change is minimal. Still, the training will have been delivered at a low cost so the box can be ticked.

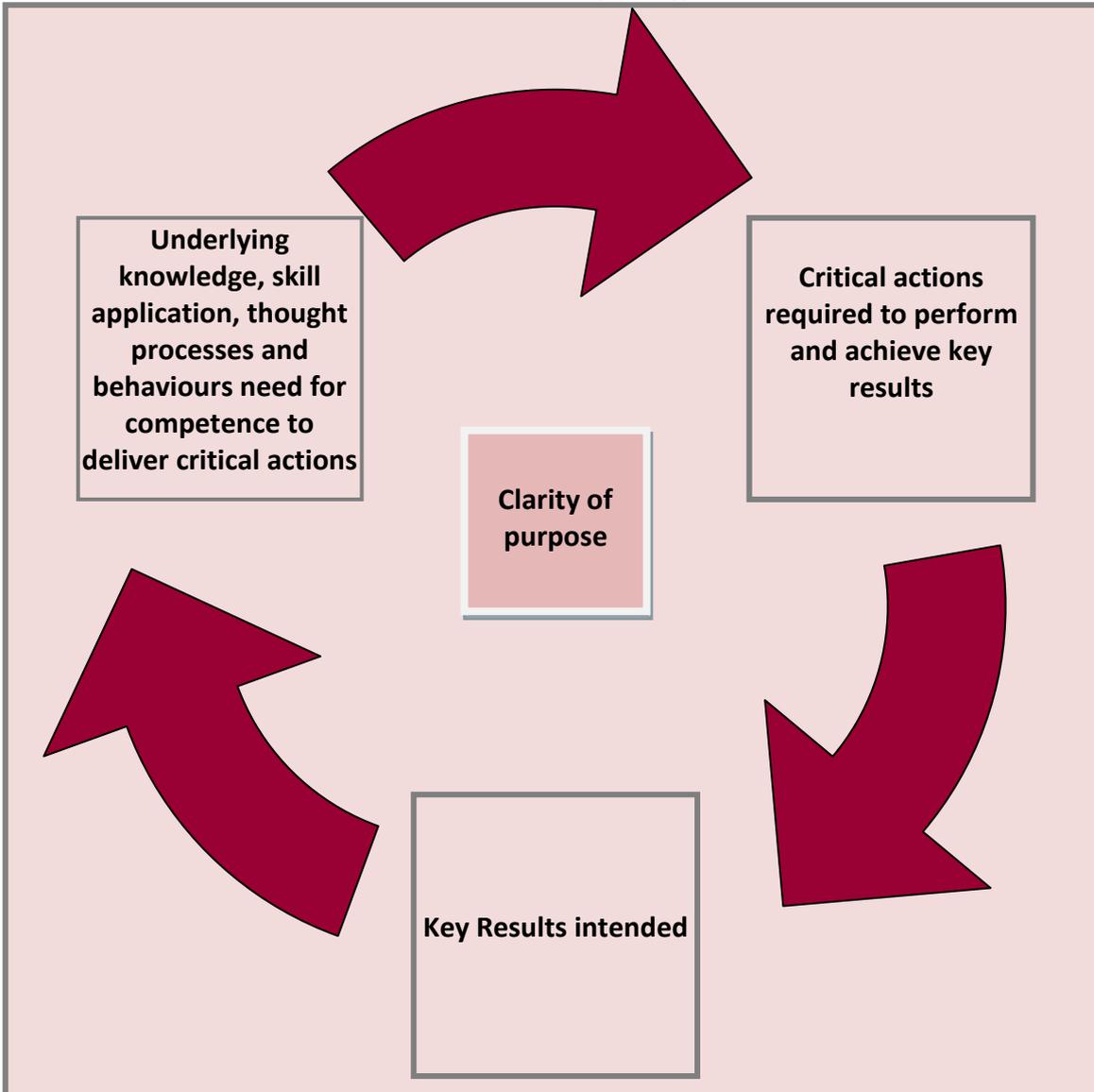
However, what of impact, performance change, benefit realisation? It is the underlying perception of what T&D is, what its potential contribution to performance could be and how we link learning and performance with enhanced impact from the use of specialists that needs to be addressed. In the often too common example we have just considered rather than saving money they are, in fact, wasting it – the pure chalk and talk, read from the notes approach has almost no value and if delivered poorly then certainly will not. Equally, if the solution itself has been poorly identified as a lever for performance improvement then it wouldn't matter who delivered it – it wasn't needed!

What can be done?

A strong impact measurement framework which reflects the performance results achieved from both efficient and effective learning and development activity which is appropriately reported could help to shift perception. It should also ease the consideration and decision making involved in the procurement of L&D services to focus on the potential impact of specialist support and the investment to be utilised on those services which will actually impact upon performance.

The building of Learning and performance journeys together with organisation management and associated functions will also help to ensure a balance of opportunity appropriate the extent of performance change intended. The specialist L&D personnel can then ensure the right media mix - face to face training, synchronous learning, coaching, e-learning, knowledge management, blended learning, performance support mechanisms, personalised learning, communication, ??

A thorough Performance and Learning needs analysis conducted by specialists with organisational management and staff will help to identify the causal issues and gaps that co-ordinated L&D should aim to support closing and developing intended performance shifts. It would include the need to define:



Without this clarity there are inherent dangers associated with 'solutioneering' – where a snap judgement is made as to the needs of all members of a group simply by a title e.g. sales training rather than understanding which causal elements with the full sales process – from generating leads, to closing to servicing, to components of relationship management and consequential subjects such as market and customer understanding - may require further learning in order to most effectively impact performance.

Clarity in and the taking of development responsibility by individuals, line managers and peers should be agreed and measured in order that the benefits of specialist support may be focused on providing opportunities to leverage learning to drive performance.



Learning Strategy and Solutions

Ensure that the procurement of L&D is not simply measured in terms of superficial cost savings. Introduce a measurement framework that includes the cost of the process, the cost of management and the output impact and return against intent. Build procurement decisions into the financial risks to ensure true cost and return are managed and not just budgets and headline costs.

From these considerations we can see ways in which high quality and flexible procurement processes focused on generating value in the support of achieving performance impact through L&D and which ensure that L&D expertise together with aligned organisation management is responsible for the ultimate decisions for supply and implementation co-ordination can help to ensure any investment in L&D will be maximised.

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