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BRIEFING PAPER

Survey of Corporate Training Strategies

We are not slowing down a force that inevitably will destroy all the wilderness there is. We are generating another force, never to be wholly spent, that renewed generation after generation will be always effective in preserving wilderness. We are not fighting progress. We are making it. We are working for a wilderness forever.

HOWARD ZAHNISER, 1961

Author of the Wilderness Act

Survey of Corporate Training Strategies

by Anne M. McCaw

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Introduction

Training – including classroom instruction, e-learning, mentoring, and coaching – is universally viewed as a core activity at corporations (large and small), an activity essential to improving job performance, retaining talented staff, developing new business leaders, and building a collaborative ethic. The key association of training professionals – The American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) – publishes an annual State of the Industry report that compiles statistics on workforce training in America. A number of statistics demonstrate the deep commitment that corporations and other institutions like the World Bank have made to training:

- In 2007, organizations spent more than \$139 billion on training for employees.
- Organizations on average spend a little more than two percent of payroll on training.
- The average amount spent directly on learning programs per employee was approximately \$1,100 in 2007. Those companies that have been recognized by ASTD for best practices in training spend \$1,600 per employee.
- Most training dollars go toward in-house programs (62.2 percent). Outsourcing to consultants comprises 25 percent of training costs.
- On average, employees spent 40 hours a year on training and learning activities.

The following is a brief survey of training models and strategies used by companies of all shapes and sizes, with a focus on programs that have received recognition and acclaim from the corporate training community. These include:

- Corporate universities;
- Learning communities, also known as communities of practice;
- Virtual collaborative learning and gaming (the next step in online learning beyond self-paced courses);
- Leadership development strategies; and,
- Consultant models, with a focus on the unique training provided by the Disney Institute.

These corporate programs offer a number of lessons relevant to creating a comprehensive program for recruiting, supporting, and retaining leaders in the nonprofit sector. A summary of these best practices is provided in the concluding section.

It is important to note that there's been a major shift in thinking about corporate training in the last decade, as evidenced by the range of strategies described in this paper. Instead of conceptualizing training as a service provided as needed to keep employees up to speed, many companies attempt to create environments that encourage **continuous learning** over the course of careers.

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Corporate Universities

Corporate universities are centralized, in-house education programs. Course curriculum is a blend of classroom training and online learning that covers technical subjects that employees need to stay current, as well as “soft skills” training in management, communications, and leadership. Some course material is created by the corporation itself tailored to build capacity, such as compliance with new regulations or orienting employees to a new product. Other classes come from “out-of-the-box” training modules. By providing a “one-stop shop” for all training needs, corporations hope to standardize training for employees spread across many locations.

Corporate universities vary greatly in size and scope (keeping in mind that most corporations spend two percent of their payroll on training). The most successful and visible corporate universities have the following in common:

- **a dedicated, high-level executive to develop and run the program, along with a team focused exclusively on developing course material and maintaining the quality of trainers;**
- **an educational mission that ties directly to the corporate vision;**
- **input from managers across the organization on course content;**
- **a mix of customized course content for specific skills and tasks, complemented by standardized training in management, communications, conflict resolution, sexual harassment policies, etc.;**
- **an internal marketing strategy to alert employees and managers to the existence and benefits of the university; and,**
- **partnerships with academic universities to develop training curricula and train trainers.**

The following are a few examples of highly lauded corporate universities. Both Jet Blue University and Satyam Computer Services have received awards for their programs. Please note that described in this section are the range of training services provided within these universities. At other companies (as described later in this paper), these same services and products are considered separate, stand-alone initiatives. For example, Jet Blue University and BB&T University incorporate their companies’ leadership development activities. Other corporations, like General Electric, have established stand-alone leadership programs.

Jet Blue University

Jet Blue Airways devotes a larger percentage of revenue than most corporations toward training – three percent of its annual profits or roughly about \$30 million a year. The centerpiece of its comprehensive training program is Jet Blue University, which is run by a faculty of 200 at five training locations, three where most “crewmembers” go for their training. Flight crews are trained in the largest training facility in Orlando. The Orlando facility (which cost \$120 million) houses a range of flight simulators, classrooms, briefing rooms, offices, an indoor training pool, and an auditorium. Operations and technical crews are trained in Queens, New York. Reservations and customer service representatives train in Salt Lake City. It is unusual for an airline to centralize all training programs, but the model has proven successful for Jet Blue.

The mission of Jet Blue University – which is “to deliver the tools necessary for success” – follows directly from the mission of Jet Blue Airways: “bringing humanity back to air travel.” A founding principle of the Jet Blue Airways is an emphasis on recruiting talented, engaged employees and empowering them to provide the best customer service as possible. Courses at Jet Blue University instill the five core values of the corporation: safety, caring, integrity, fun, and passion.

Coursework covers everything from basic orientation in customer service and the Jet Blue reservation system to pilot training, security procedures, and FAA requirements. All faculty must complete 75 hours of training in

adult learning strategy offered at New York University.

Leadership development courses are a major focus at the university, when it became clear in 2002 that the rapid growth of the corporation was creating a “leadership gap.” Top executives identified five leadership objectives that distinguish Jet Blue managers:

- Inspire Greatness in Others
- Communicate With Your Team
- Do the Right Thing
- Encourage Initiative and Innovation
- Treat Your People Right

They then tasked Jet Blue University staff with developing a program to provide managers with the tools to accomplish these objectives. The result from in-depth research and development is the Principle of Leadership learning series, a customized leadership development program comprised of a three-day foundation course and a follow-up course that focuses on specific skills. Top executives, including the CEO, teach courses along with other trainers. Participants also take the Myers Briggs assessment and a 360-degree feedback assessment. Afterward, they receive one-on-one coaching and are given help in developing a personalized action plan for leadership development. Jet Blue University also offers a series of follow-up lectures to encourage continuous leadership development.

One of the key online innovations at Jet Blue University is an experimental, highly interactive online learning platform that is meant to create a learning community off campus. The test group for the program is the training team itself. Built by Awareness, Inc., the platform allows trainers to blog, post photographs, and create wikis. The goal is to foster collaboration at different training sites by providing a range of tools for sharing best practices and evolving training materials. The ultimate hope is to expand the system to other units at Jet Blue Airways. Jet Blue is following the example set by IBM, which has developed a robust social learning infrastructure online, described later in this paper.

Finally, Jet Blue Airways recently partnered with Aviation University Gateway to create a rigorous and comprehensive training program for aspiring pilots. Additional partners for this program are Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University and University of North Dakota, the faculty of which will assist Jet Blue in identifying promising candidates for training. Cape Air will help provide these pilots with flying experience.

Satyam Computer Services

Satyam Computer Services is one of the largest information technology companies in the world, with 30,000 employees working on six continents. They provide a range of “virtual business services” in many different business sectors, including automotive, banking, healthcare, manufacturing, media, and telecommunications.

Learning is considered a central principle of success at Satyam, and there are a variety of different learning initiatives offered. The Satyam Learning Center provides a range of basic training, including classroom and e-learning. All employees graduate from the Entry Level Training Program, 15 weeks at the Satyam training facility. They learn the basics of software engineering, as well as the fundamentals of customer service and project management. During the last three weeks of the program, participants break up into teams and focus on specific projects.

In addition, Satyam invested more than \$8 million in an online learning platform, partnering with The Fuqua School of Business at Duke University, Harvard Business School Publishing, U21Global, Liqwid Krystal, SumTotal Systems, and Thomson NETg. Still evolving, the platform includes a range of online tools, including virtual class-

rooms, blogs, performance evaluation and management assessments, web radio, and mobile learning units.

Satyam invests in its future leaders through the Satyam School of Leadership. The school offers a year-long program in four stages. Each participant is paired with a learning consultant who guides them through the program. Participants also receive learning guides, coaches, and mentors throughout the program.

BB&T Corporate University

All employees of the BB&T banking business complete at least 40 hours of training through BB&T University. Course curriculum is customized, for each employee is required to develop a learning plan that describes annual objectives for growth, as well as an assessment of strengths and weaknesses. The learning approach of the university is encapsulated in the phrase, "Teach, preach, and reach," implemented as follows (as described in a profile in Workforce Week (<http://www.workforce.com/archive/feature/26/05/29/index.php>):

- Teach (training): BB&T University provides foundational and specific skills through courses, seminars, e-learning, and support materials.
- Preach (habituation): Local managers must be actively involved in their employees' learning by reinforcing what is taught in class.
- Reach (excellence): Through this combination of efforts, employees can reach their full potential.

Training regimen combine classroom instruction, e-learning, and on-the-job training. For example, tellers must complete a two-week program that starts with a series of online tutorials and exercises at their workstations, overseen by a BB&T instructor. In addition, managers are trained to help employees complete their learning plans. Managers help employees identify courses (both classroom and online) and provide coaching as needed. In addition, BB&T executives are actively engaged at the university, both as students and teachers. All members of the senior leadership team complete an intensive, six-month course focusing on banking, corporate culture, leadership, and lending.

BB&T is designing an executive development program for middle and senior managers. The program will be two years in length with quarterly learning events that bring in experts from across the country.

Learning Communities

Informal, continuous learning cannot be accomplished by taking class after class after class, for a number of reasons. For one, a classroom is not a real work environment, and 80 percent of learning happens on the job, according to training experts. Second, it is difficult for course curriculum to keep up with an ever-changing work environment. Often peers are the best resource for continuing learning, especially when products, services, processes, and regulations frequently change. Thus, many corporations and other institutions have established learning communities, also known as communities of practice. These communities are comprised of employees and managers, often with different kinds of expertise and varying levels of experience, that come together on a routine basis to discuss lessons learned, reflect on individual learning goals, share information on emerging trends, and work collaboratively on projects with the dual purpose of improving business practices and promoting learning.

There is no one working model for learning communities. Most meet face-to-face in some form periodically, but technology has allowed learning communities to communicate in a variety of ways, including through blogs, social networking, list serves, and wikis. According to Etienne Wenger, the person who developed the concept and coined the term "communities of practice" in 1988, the most important characteristic of successful learning communities is a clear, shared mission and a group of people committed to that mission.

The World Bank, IBM, and Xerox are among the institutions that have established learning communities. The World Bank has organized more than 90 communities around different expertise within the bank, including early childhood education and sustainable development. Each of these communities functions independently, meeting regularly in person and staying in touch via email. Learning specialists at the World Bank are attempting to develop standards and tools to assist communities, as well as to measure progress in learning.

IBM started experimenting with learning communities in 1995. By 2000, IBM Global Services sponsored at least 60 different learning communities – which they call “knowledge networks” – across the world, with more than 76,000 employees participating. Most of these knowledge networks are established by a sponsor who receives assistance from a knowledge management professional within the company. “Knowledge management,” or the processes and practices for distributing insights and experiences as part of learning, is a core service at IBM, and they brought on dedicated knowledge management specialists starting in 1994. With new online platforms, employees have created 1,800 communities with more than 80 percent of all employees participating. A more in-depth description of the online component of IBM’s learning programs is provided below.

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At Xerox, there are 15 different learning communities with more than 1,000 employees participating. One of these learning communities is made up of 125 managers involved in sales support. They have broad knowledge of product and services and various customers. They meet regularly and also have built a wiki of online resources. This learning community allows managers to step outside of their particular group of experts and work collaboratively across the company to disseminate information. Xerox is quite deliberate in how it launches learning communities. Learning experts work with executives to structure communities to support different functions within the company and to develop ways to measure learning progress within these functions. They develop a list of core competencies that learning communities members are expected to master, and each participant is measured on their proficiency as they participate in learning community activities. Participants are also offered other learning resources, including online courses and classroom training.

Virtual Collaborative Learning and Gaming

The most innovative of corporations – not surprisingly, this includes those in the information technology sector – have been early adopters of an assortment of online learning tools. The most basic is the self-paced online course, where material is provided via an interactive, multimedia presentation (sometimes as simple as a PowerPoint presentation). Online training modules can be especially helpful in assisting employees to learn new software or technologies, since they can interact with a software or hardware simulation as part of the course. Many courses include a testing system to ensure that participants absorb material. There are also performance management systems that tie an employee’s annual learning goals and overall job performance to online course material. According to the American Society for Training and Development, self-paced courses comprised 90 percent of all online learning programs sponsored the companies that they survey. Most companies have also created webinars, video conference training, and online databases of educational material available on intranet systems.

A major trend in the online learning world is the move toward creating shared learning experiences with a range of goals, including the creation of learning communities, mentoring and career advancement, and fostering col-

laborations between project teams. IBM is considered the pioneer. They were one of the first companies to embrace blogging and have created their own social networking tools designed specifically for workplace collaboration and learning. Among IBM's tools are:

- **Blog Central**, with 16,000 different blogs and 67,000 users;
- **Beehive**, the social networking tool, with 53,000 members;
- **Wikicentral**, with 150,000 users; and
- **Jams**, online conferences that link employees across the world with top executives to brainstorm on key topics; the last innovation Jam attracted more than 500,000 participants, including clients and vendors.

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Having tested many learning tools internally, IBM is now developing learning and collaboration products, such as Lotus Connections and its Jam Consulting Services.

There is still another level of online collaborative learning, where employees immerse themselves in a simulated, three-dimensional environment. Simulated disaster and combat scenarios have long been a staple of training for early responders and the military. In the corporate world, companies are creating virtual training worlds, where participants interact with each other in real time via their computers. One company producing these simulating learning environments is Qwaq. In a Qwaq training environment, participants create avatars that move in a virtual classroom. They can point at objects, as well as signal to or talk with other participants. Participants can even point out an object in the room for everyone to look at, study, and discuss. One key advantage to these virtual environments is that a trainer can observe "classroom" behavior during a distance-learning course and know who is engaged and who is not.

Organizations as diverse as the U.S. Army, Sun Microsystems, Cisco, Cold Stone Creamery, and Canon have incorporated computer games (known as "serious" games) into their training processes. The Army created an ever-expanding software simulation game known as **America's Army** that it uses for all sorts of orientation and training. Modules are created and modified at regular intervals. For Sun Microsystems, two orientation games teach new hires about Cisco's products, services, mission, and values, hopefully integrating them more quickly into company culture. In either **Dawn of the Shadow Specters** or **Rise of the Shadow Specters**, new hires become superheroes in a futuristic world working to prevent evil hackers from stopping a Sun Microsystems scientists from completing the company's most important project. Employees are given incentives for completing the games, such as a new iPod. The games foster competition and bonding among new hires.

Cisco recently released a comprehensive suite of Mind Share games geared toward preparing information technology professionals for certification, both inside and outside the company. Mind Share is comprised of more than 75 different games covering 15 different topics related to computer networking. The games are a component of the Cisco Learning Network, a online "social learning" platform with community discussions, blogs, and social networking tools. This is another example of a community of practice, this one created entirely online among information professionals working in a variety of settings, not just within Cisco.

Leadership Development

Led by General Electric (GE), corporations have created intensive leadership development programs to retain and grow the best and brightest employees. Lasting a year or more, these programs combine a range of strategies, including training, mentoring, and hands-on projects. Often, these leadership development strategies are incorporated into corporate university curriculum (as described above). Here are a few additional examples of stand-alone leadership programs.

At GE, candidates for its Leadership, Innovation, and Growth course must complete a comprehensive leadership analysis with a “specialized performance review.” Human Resources works closely with senior business leaders, who conduct the reviews. Senior vice presidents in Human Resources and Executive Development visit all 20 business units to conduct one-on-one interviews as part of the review. Candidates complete a series of trainings that last between two to three weeks, with topics changing from year to year, based on trends in the field and the needs of candidates. Speakers and trainers come from inside the company and from the top business schools. In addition, candidates take a team leadership course, at the end of which each team must present a report to the Senior Vice President of Human Resources on what they have learned and how they plan to apply what they have learned.

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Whirlpool runs a tiered leadership program for different segments of its workforce. Young people right out of graduate school (largely those who have just received their Masters in Business Administration) immerse themselves in training that lasts three to four years. They receive formal instruction, mentoring, and rotations through job assignments focused on core business activities – brand marketing, engineering, finance, global information systems, global supply chain, and human resources. Senior executives participate in the Leading the Whirlpool Enterprise initiative comprised of two one-week training courses. As part of the first course, executives undergo a 360-degree assessment. As part of the second course, executives are asked to develop a 100-day plan that addresses a pressing business issue or challenge. The top-tier program, Leaders Developing Leaders, is designed by the executive committee for the top 20 to 25 executives at Whirlpool, selected from business units across the world. The executive committee teaches at the training while assisting participants to develop a one-year leadership development plan. Trainees also receive support from a coach within the organization and an outside expert.

Hindustan Unilever – an India-based unit of the global corporate giant Unilever – has created a unique accelerated leadership program designed to bring young, bright, and ambitious employees through the ranks at a faster pace than most other global corporations. To this end, executives select 50-55 MBA graduates each year for a 15-month leadership training program, which entails intensive mentoring and rotation through all parts of Unilever, including in rural areas of India. In addition, Human Resources actively manages recruitment for the 50 “hot jobs” within the business unit, looking for 50 people with the greatest potential for growth. Human Resources staff collaborate with the management committee to fill these top-50 positions, groom people for those positions, or support those executives in those positions.

The Infosys Leadership Institute in Mysore, India – a recruiting ground for the international technology firm Infosys Technologies – focuses on building tiers of mentorship relationships. The top 50 people in the company – heads of business units with an average of 20 years experience – are mentored by board members. These top 50 executives then mentor the second tier of managers of 180 people, who average 15 years experience. Finally, these 180 managers mentor the third tier of about 550 people with an average of 10 years work experience. All receive additional leadership training and devise personal development plans. Human Resources reports back to the board each quarter on progress made mentors and mentees, ultimately rating them on a leadership index scale based on nine leadership characteristics.

Coca-Cola uses yet another technique to groom its future leaders – senior executives select high-potential employees for newly formed corporate task forces. These task forces – comprised of managers and executives from across the company – spend four to five months researching and discussing a list of challenges that the company faces. With coaching and support, the task forces come back with recommendations for addressing these issues.

Outsourcing/Training Consultants

An entire industry of “talent management” and training consultants has evolved as corporations look for cost-effective and innovative ways to keep their workforce sharp, motivated, and conversant in the latest business trends. Keeping in mind the goal of creating a culture of continuous learning, consultants provide a wide range of tools, support, and expertise to spur all different kinds of learning. Such services include the creation of online performance assessment tools and social networking platforms to training regimens for trainers. Academics are often brought in as consultants for all aspects of learning, including specialized curriculum and e-learning strategies.

The Disney Institute has developed a particularly unique consulting business based on the corporation’s approach to customer service, a model that has evolved over the history of the company, dating back to when Walt Disney bought dinner for his animators as they feverishly worked to complete Snow White. Today companies of all sorts – including hospitals, accounting firms, and the U.S. military – have come to the Disney Institute for training and strategic guidance.

A core service is a three-day course at Disney resorts where participants observe Disney’s customer service principles and strategies. Disney consultants also visit companies to develop customized training to share the Disney approach and adapt it to a business’s specific needs and goals. For example, a Disney consultant worked closely with leadership at the Women and Infants Hospital of Rhode Island to design a four-day training course to create a “culture of caring” among patients, clinicians, nurses, and administrators. The class includes classic training, but also break-out sessions where participants brainstorm new ideas for enhancing communication and patient care. With help from the Disney Institute, the hospital created a steering committee tasked with evaluating and implementing projects conceived of during trainings.

The Disney Institute has been in operation since 1986 and is one of the company’s most profitable units, especially in the midst of the recession. It is perceived to have a particularly successful approach that combines superior customer service and creativity, a way of thinking that helps businesses take a step back and look at all aspects of customer relations, from union relations to communicating complex concepts to clients.

Conclusion

While this paper describes a small sample of corporate training initiatives, these acclaimed, innovative programs provide nonprofit organizations with important lessons in conceptualizing and implementing a successful training program.

- **Blended learning – with some combination of classroom training, communities of practice, online learning initiatives, on-the-job training, and mentoring – is critical to creating a training program where knowledge “sticks.”** Communities of practice in particular are cost effective, meaningful mechanisms for learning and collaboration.
- **Companies create a “culture of learning” in a variety of ways, not just by inviting employees to participate in training.** First, they create an infrastructure for planning and evaluating training programs that includes top executives, training experts, and managers. Second, top executives set an example by actively participating in training efforts. Third, companies engage employees at all levels in creating the training curriculum.
- **Companies develop specific learning objectives for each component of a training program.** Sometimes these objectives are narrow to maximize limited resources; for example, a company may roll out an interactive computer game specific to orienting new hires. Broad learning goals tend to lead to diffuse and underutilized training programs.

- **Training goals should directly tie to the value, mission, and business objectives of the company.** Thus, training not only builds skills and improves performance, it also engages and empowers employees to collaborate to meet organizational goals.
- **Learning models should evolve over time, adapting to changes in the work environment and new technologies.** It is therefore critically important to create a sustained feedback loop between participants, training specialists, and leaders to evaluate what training strategies work and address the evolving needs of employees.
- **Experimentation with small teams is a great way to innovate.** Often the best guinea pigs are training team members, who are invested in devising innovative and efficient training strategies. Many of the companies cited here created pilot training programs geared toward their training staff to see how they work and determine the benefits. They then expand the training to other teams.
- **In order to ensure full participation and engagement, companies need to brand and sell their training programs, just as they would any other product.** An internal and external marketing strategy must be part of the planning process.
- **A successful training program is a product in of itself, and many companies either expand their learning programs to include clients or create products and services based on their own training model.**

Additional Resources

The author recommends two resources for additional information on corporate training programs. The American Society for Training and Development (www.astd.org) maintains an online library of papers and articles, many of which come from their quarterly publication, T&D. In addition, there is a trade publication called Workforce Management (www.workforce.com) that routinely presents research and case studies on new training concepts, strategies, and models.

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