

How to maximise training budgets

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During recessions it can be tempting to treat training as a dispensable expenditure. In fact, a recent CIPD survey found that the average annual spend per employee on training has already dropped from £300 to £220. But simply cutting training budgets can be dangerous, instead take the opportunity to work smarter.

To help ensure you survive the economic turmoil, don't cut budgets indiscriminately. You need to be well equipped for growth when you come out the other side, while supporting and improving performance today. Be smart with available funds to support and retain key talent. After all, keeping your talent motivated and engaged is essential to your organisation's long-term growth and success.

1. Prioritise mission-critical training needs

First, identify and focus on the mission-critical training requirements within your organisation. These may include business-generating training on new products and sales skills. Legal and regulatory compliance will also have to be addressed, recession or not. Your organisation will be focused on business-critical issues more than ever, as must your training.

2. Don't sheep dip - assess to train

Stop and think about the real skill gaps. What do people really need to do their jobs? Use online assessments to see if training is necessary. Then tailor your training programme to support real performance needs. If you don't, you risk throwing your training budget away unnecessarily.

3. Expedient outsourcing

So you're using more e-learning to reduce costs. Yes, it certainly makes sense to outsource the design and development in terms of efficiency. But don't ignore the skills of your in-house learning and development team. With the right coaching and right tools, they can play a valuable part in coordinating external suppliers with internal business sponsors. They can bring their knowledge of training and your people to bear during e-learning design. They can also update the content and respond to changes as required, to keep costs down. In-house resource can also maintain other training channels, such as classroom-based courses.

4. Encourage informal knowledge sharing

In the current age of social networking and connectivity, make use of social media to encourage employees to share knowledge informally. This may be facilitated via a secure network within an intranet, or a group set up within one of the more popular social networks such as Facebook or LinkedIn. You might find that staff will be happy to access such informal learning at a time when they know they have to keep up in terms of knowledge and skills.

5. Consider pre-induction training

Get people learning online about your organisation and processes before they actually start, when they'll be highly engaged and keen to make an impression. Pre-induction, or on-boarding, reduces the training burden once new staff have joined, meaning they can realistically 'hit the ground running'. This resource can then be focused on the business and job role directly as soon as they start in the job.

6. Maximise different training channels

Do look at using existing training resources which can be delivered using different channels. For example, create e-learning to reach large numbers of staff. But then use the same materials - design images, stories and questions - to produce posters, brochures or PowerPoint slides. You don't need to write and design a new course or campaign from scratch!

7. E-learning and classroom training - horses for courses

It can be tempting, but scrapping all classroom training when training budgets are cut may be a mistake. Instead, think horses for courses - transfer costly classroom based training into a blended learning programme. For example, select the key interactive/role play/discussion points from a three-day classroom course to create a one-day course. The key knowledge learning and testing elements can then be transferred online to ensure no learning is lost, whilst maximising time in the classroom.

8. Get employees learning at home

Offer incentives, such as paying the home broadband bill for the training period, in return for time invested in training at home. This minimises disruption during the working day and enables training to be tracked and assessed centrally to monitor its effectiveness.

Key points:

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- Maximise different training channels
- E-learning and classroom - horses for courses
- Get employees learning at home

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