

Employee Training: DEVELOPING SOFT SKILLS



UNDERSTAND SOFT SKILLS

Soft skills are personal attributes that allow individuals to interact effectively with one another. Competencies (the effective application of soft skills) are typically divided into two categories; core and job specific.

Identifying and developing employees' soft skills can help to:

- Develop a model for high-performing teams
- Expand hiring and succession pool
- Retain key employees
- Redesign jobs
- Certify competency levels
- Design feedback and other developmental tools
- Assess training needs

EXAMINE HOW SOFT SKILLS IMPROVE ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

A collaborative organizational culture has been found to promote innovation and productivity. High-level soft skills such as communication, problem solving and conflict resolution lead to a more conducive environment that helps retain employees. Success often depends on employees' ability to work together to achieve a common objective.

IDENTIFY THE SKILLS GAP

When hiring a new employee or working with an existing employee it is important to understand the need for a balance between hard and soft skills.

For Potential New Hires:

Decide which soft skills are mandatory and which ones can be developed through on-the-job training. Use interview questions and give scenarios which will determine if potential new hires have the mandatory skills needed for the position and the trainability for those which can be learned on-the-job.

For Current Employees:

When all of the required competencies have been identified, surveying employees on their perceived and desired competency levels in each area will be important to conduct a skill gap analysis and establish a benchmark for training.

IDENTIFY SOFT SKILL REQUIREMENTS

Before identifying soft skills gaps it is important that employers consider which soft skill competencies will lead to organizational success. Ask questions such as:

- What are the ongoing and anticipated changes?
- What are the key job responsibilities?
- What skills/knowledge do you see an employee using?
- How have recent conflicts been successfully resolved?
- What behaviours distinguish an unsuccessful employee from a successful one? What is the primary problem that the position faces?

CONSIDER TRAINING METHODS (OR COMBINATIONS)

"The key to offering soft skill training is to increase awareness among employees regarding the importance of soft skills to organizational effectiveness"

Informal Soft Skill Training:

- Job Shadowing
- Networking
- Informal Mentorship
- Proximity to Employees with Superior Skills
- Company Events
- Online Company Chat Rooms

Formal Soft Skill Training:

- Soft Skill/Personal Effectiveness Training/Workshops
- Online Learning Programs
- Mentorship Programs
- Conferences
- Performance Management and Talent Development
- Leadership Development (Train managers to be soft skills trainers)

IMPLEMENT A SOFT SKILLS DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Develop a clear soft skill development strategy which addresses both the hiring of new employees who possess the required soft skills and a plan for the continuous training of employees.

This plan may include (but is not limited to):

- Interview Strategy/Questions
- Performance Review Strategies
- Employee Envelopment Plans
- Soft Skills Training Programs
- Training Evaluation Strategies

TRACKING PROGRESS

Using the benchmark developed through Employee Soft Skill Surveys is important for tracking evaluating the progress of employee training.

Employee Development Plans (EDP) which include performance and learning goals, skill gaps, plans for bridging these gaps and follow-up surveys/interviews that are included in the performance review process is an effective way to ensure employees are on track with soft skill development.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Hatala, J.P. (2015). Soft Skills Development: Improving Organizational Effectiveness. Workforce Planning Hamilton, November 26, 2015.

<http://workforceplanninghamilton.ca/publications/341>