

How to keep HR programmes on the corporate agenda during cutbacks

By Jenni Murphy-Scanlon

A real fear for HR and Learning and Development managers in the current economic climate, is the axing of current and planned initiatives.

Even though business managers are advised that cutting back on people initiatives now will harm the company's recovery when the economy improves, HR programmes can be easy targets when the financial belt is tightened. Here are eight critical activities to maximise your team's chances of keeping key programmes on the corporate agenda:

1. Develop relationships with key decision-makers

Spend time with the key decision-makers in your organisation. Find out about their business concerns and their personal motivators. Be supportive and become a trusted confidant.

2. Understand organisational priorities.

It's critical to know the priorities of decision-makers in the organisation and that may not be identical to those in the business plan. Use the relationships you develop to understand key managers' objectives and concerns.

3. Adapt your programmes to help achieve priorities

HR interventions usually have a variety of benefits and can be adapted for a range of

needs. Get creative and target your programme to the priorities of key decision-makers.

4. Speak management language

Ensure that when you talk about HR interventions you use the same language managers' use when they talk about the business. Understand the external environment your company operates in. Make a friend on the finance team (the more influential the better) and ask them to explain how company finances work.

5. Make it measurable

When finances are tight, HR, like everyone else, must be able to show that the benefits of programmes outweigh the costs, and that return on investment is justifiable. Link to organisational strategy and operating environment. Ask a friendly accountant in your company to help you prepare the financial information so it will stand up to scrutiny.

Make sure you understand it - and don't forget to measure the results!

6. Keep up to date with industry and competitor HR initiatives

Despite a gloomy economic picture, most organisations can't

afford to fall behind the rest of their industry on people practices. If necessary, bring in an external expert to update business managers on industry HR trends.

7. Be flexible about implementation. It's better to conduct a pilot of your programme in one division or region of your organisation than not get started at all. If you can get agreement to partial implementation then the results may sell full implementation for you.

8. Don't assume managers aren't supportive

Sometimes HR professionals can feel obliged to justify programmes when it is unnecessary. Managers may be aware of the benefits and don't require elaborate business cases to maintain or implement a programme. Check out managers' thinking before you spend time you might not need to.

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