
Preparing employee learning and development plans

Overview

A learning organisation is one which is able to quickly adapt to changes in its business environment by being skilled at creating, acquiring and transferring knowledge at many levels.

Updating the skills and knowledge of employees is essential in keeping up with cycles of change and innovation in this kind of organisation.

In this section you will explore the concept of the learning organisation; a concept that underpins the learning and development of individuals and teams for improvement through performance management systems.

This learning resource will examine a range of broad options available for staff learning and development and will explore types of training, the reasons for training and why training sometimes fails. It will look at how the "learning culture" of an organisation can affect its flexibility and will explore the dynamics of training and productivity.

You will learn why planning for individual and team learning needs to be undertaken in cooperation and consultation with team leaders, managers and training providers, and why you need to work together with team leaders to monitor and measure learning and development achievements.



Key terms

Benchmarking

The process of establishing points of reference or standards representing good practice for a particular process, product, service or industry.

Learning organisation

An organisation that displays the capacity to continually adapt to changes in its business environment.

Mentor

A person who is experienced in a particular role, and who acts as a role model for a trainee over a period of time.

Quality Assurance Standards

Pre-determined statements relating to specifications on how a product or service is presented to the user.

Plan for learning and development

Learning is a lifelong experiential process. Extended learning and development brings long-term results and rewards, such as:

- healthy lifestyle
- jobs
- careers
- material possessions
- travel
- spiritual insights
- intellectual pursuits
- artistic expressions
- sporting endeavours.

Each individual brings with them an array of different gifts, traits, beliefs, virtues and talents. Some of these attributes are specifically used for a particular job, as determined by the job description. Others are additional benefits, which individuals naturally bring with them.

One individual may have a gritty determination to see a job completed against all odds, while another seeks alternatives that offer an easier way. An opportunist may seize the moment and jump straight into a project, while a dreamer contemplates and visualises the pitfalls or benefits ahead. An analytical thinker may devise a logical way to proceed.

The learning organisation

The value of individual and team learning and development is priceless to the productive and sustainable capability of an organisation. This is the human capital component of the learning organisation. For this reason, performance management systems embody learning and development as a continuous cooperative undertaking by all stakeholders in the organisation.

Themes for organisational learning

The main themes for organisational learning are:

- learning cultures are created and embraced by all stakeholders in the organisation
- visions are translated and broadcast to encourage the entire workforce to think strategically
- individuals and teams consider the strategic vision intrinsic to all their performance plans and activities
- communication channels remain open throughout the organisation for dialogue, cooperation and consultation between employers, learning facilitators and employees
- employees will be challenged to be enterprising, creative and innovative



Readings

Two recommended additional readings on lifelong learning and learning organisations are:

Human Resource Management by Dessler, pages 297–300.

Performance Management by Armstrong and Baron, pages 217–222.

Individual and team learning and development

As you plan for individual and team learning and development, keep in mind that adults learn in particular ways. They:

- want to be in control of their own learning

- want to decide on the direction their learning takes
- relate learning to their own interests and needs
- link their learning to significant personal rewards
- prefer to learn at their own pace, within their own determined timeframe

Your awareness and application of these basic adult learning principles will help your planning, implementation, monitoring and measuring of workplace learning and development.

Learning for adults needs to reflect real life experiences.

Your performance review and feedback process should have identified the current position of individuals and teams in their performance progress and achievement. Now proceed with planning for improved, advanced and exceptional performance, based on the information exchanged during that process.

Figure 16 is an extract from Figure 6, which illustrates your progress so far in developing a performance management system.

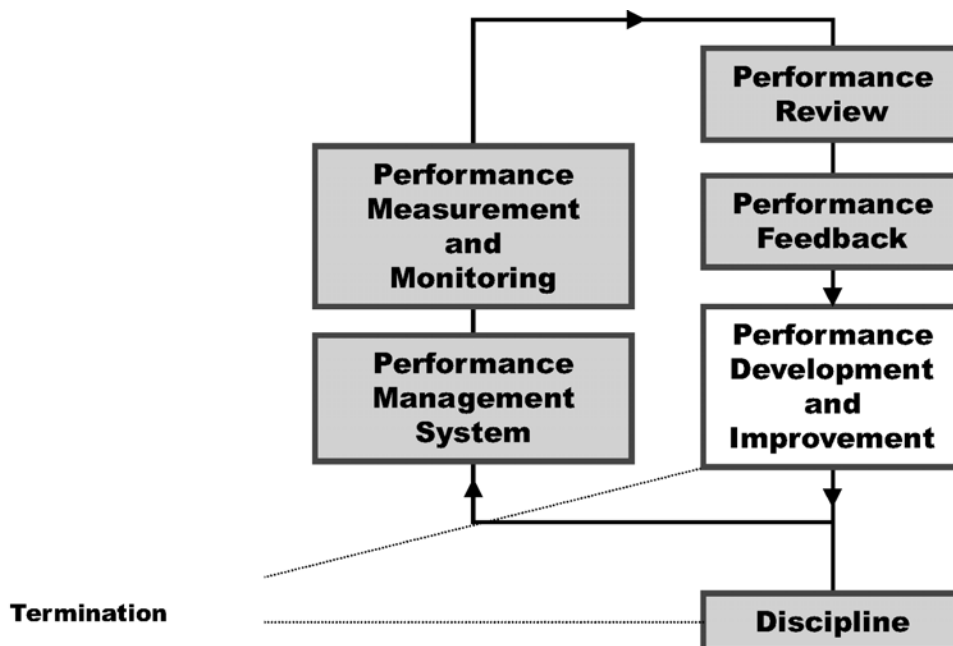


Figure 16 Extract of performance management

Remedial learning and development

Skill and behavioural problems may be remedied with formal training or re-training, coaching, mentoring and behaviour modification programs.

Prior to determining remedial learning and development activities, address the purpose of the activity by:

- explicitly stating the performance problem
- jointly analysing the cause of the problem
- collaborating on a suitable solution
- setting goals and objectives for undertaking the activity

This unit has emphasised that progress must be monitored towards achieving goals. This is vital.

Counselling is another activity that helps to remedy under-performance and sub-standard performance.

Counselling plans need to set out the performance counselling process, which generally includes three progressive stages of:

- working with the person to have them identify their own performance deficits
- having them put forward solutions for solving their problem
- assisting them in the setting of goals to rectify performance gaps and/or deficits

Similar processes can be used for remedial learning and development activities for teams. Facilitate the team to:

- identify their performance problem
- identify suitable activities for solving the problem
- set goals to rectify the problem through learning and development activities

Gaining exceptional achievements

Learning and development activities provide opportunities to reach beyond predetermined goal achievement. When contemplating strategies, open the door to the potential exceptional, unusual, uncharted, groundbreaking achievement.

Such performance achievement can be demonstrated in:

- new and improved work practices
- new products and services

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- improved productivity
 - scientific discovery and exploration
 - traditional breakthroughs
 - competitive advantages

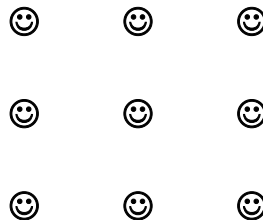
This is the point where you encourage teams and individuals to be enterprising and opportunistic in the way they plan beyond goal achievement. Encourage them to use creative thinking. Teams need to think “outside the square” and extend their thoughts, ideas and options beyond what appears to be possible.



Try it

Test your ability to think creatively.

Join all nine objects with four straight lines, without taking your pencil off the paper.



Were you able to think and move outside the square?

Team creativity

An organisational climate that encourages creativity will include:

- limited regulations, such as rules, policies and procedures
- self-directed teamwork
- open and unfettered channels of communication and diversity
- openness to experimentation, alternatives, opinions and ideas
- risk-taking as a developmental exercise

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- failures and mistakes as learning opportunities
 - tolerance and constructive use of conflict
 - a focus on the ends, rather than the means
 - responsiveness to change



Think

Consider your organisation – does it foster a climate that is conducive to individual and team creativity?

Some points to consider may include:

- is there a willingness to treat a mistake as a learning experience?
- is there a tolerant and constructive perspective to conflict?
- does your organisation encourage new ideas?
- does your organisation value employees' opinions?
- does your organisation encouraged experimentation?
- is there an acceptance of culturally diverse beliefs, values and opinions expressed among people in informal groups, teams, and between management and workers?
- is there open and unfettered channels of communication?
- are rules and regulations kept to a minimum?



Reading

Recommended additional reading on creativity can be found in **Management** by Stoner, Yetton, Craig and Johnston, on pages 326–332. This reading presents creative exercises for workplace use, as well as providing two case studies to support the benefits that organisations reap from encouraging creativity among employees.

The use of outside consultants and experts is also proposed as a way of introducing new ideas, products, processes and services to the organisation and its staff.

Individual learning and development activities

Learning and development activities for individuals lie in the areas of:

- new or extended knowledge
- interpersonal communication (people) skills
- skills acquisition, reinforcement and practice
- teamwork, team roles and responsibilities
- performance management systems (goal setting, action planning, reviewing and providing feedback)
- performance management processes (monitoring, measuring, assessing and evaluating work practices)
- problem solving and decision making
- extending specific area of expertise
- conflict management
- behavioural change and/or modification
- attitudinal change

Team learning and development

Learning and development activities for teams lie in the areas of:

- team building and team cohesion
- group dynamics
- team self-directedness and empowerment
- performance management systems (setting KRAs, KPIs, goals and objectives, using action plans)
- performance management processes (monitoring, measuring, reviewing and providing feedback)
- effective meetings

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- team presentation and representation
 - team problem solving and decision making
 - conflict management
 - team selection and influence
 - team creativity and innovation

Learning and development planning

Learning and development planning can emanate from the individual performance improvement and development plans that are sanctioned by the organisation. These plans are the records of the performance management systems. They are formal documents, some of which are completed by employees. Others are compiled cooperatively between employees and team leaders, managers or supervisors of the functional areas in which they work.

Performance improvement and development plans are initially based on information supplied by employees before performance review and feedback. This can be called, among other things, a personal performance profile. Employees complete this form, as it applies to their current job.

The profile may include:

- a rating of knowledge and skills in relation to:
 - current knowledge of the job
 - present level of technological efficiency
 - knowledge of the business of the organisation
 - knowledge of the organisational strategic plan
 - present understanding of the role in the team
 - present ability to undertake responsibilities as a team member
- statement of current strengths
- identification of areas for improvement
- statement of current qualifications
- rating of personal attributes and attitudes required of the job, such as:
 - creative ability

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- integrity
 - dependability
 - self confidence
 - empathy
 - customer orientation
 - promptness.

This information is taken into consideration when addressing performance improvement and development.

In the past, opinion has been divided as to when, where and how performance development and improvement review, feedback and planning takes place. Where and when it takes place is relevant to subsequent learning and development planning.

It has been debated as to whether performance development and improvement should be part of the review and feedback process, or whether it needs to occur after this event and with another person. There are a number of reasons for this.

Objectivity has always been a problem. Just how much can a distant manager know about the performance of an individual whose work is sometimes far removed from the scene in which the manager operates?

This should not be a problem with performance management systems. The team leader and the team member conduct the formal performance review and feedback for organisational requirements. Informal and formal review and feedback, together with plans for performance improvement, and learning and development, can take place at any time between the team leader and a team member on-the-job or off-the-job.

Additionally, learning and development plans can be drawn up at any time and in response to any individual, team or organisational need.

Timing has also been a problem in the past. When a manager and an employee conduct formal performance review and feedback at a given time, within a given time frame, possibly once a year on the anniversary of employment, it restricts ongoing planning for performance improvement through learning and development. Learning and development may or may not be relevant to these time constraints.

Performance management systems do not pose such a problem. While the organisation identifies that formal performance review and feedback, and planning for performance improvement and development, need to take place, there is no need to be stringent with timeframes for this, as long as it

is done on a regular basis. Learning and development needs are often short-term, and in contradiction with a formal annual review process.

Performance management systems do not have this problem. They are flexible and adaptable. Any element of the entire system must be able to respond to any need at any time, and this includes planning for learning and development for performance improvement and advancement.

Formal performance improvement and development plans

Performance management systems allow for formal performance improvement and development planning to take place during or following performance review and feedback. In fact, it is best to complete them close to performance review and feedback.

This makes it more relevant to dealing with the present situation by projecting future performance improvements and advances on current performance. However, learning and development planning is not confined to this point, and can be undertaken at any time of need, and for new or changed circumstances.

Many learning and development activities occur informally, on-the-job, spontaneously and between individual workers. As one employee struggles with a computer program, another person will come along and explain what has to be done. Ideally, that person stays to ensure that the other person continues successfully, so that learning is reinforced. Or, one team member may turn to another person, whom they consider to be an excellent role model, to ask how to behave in certain circumstances, e.g. when the press attend a team celebration for completing a community project.

Formal performance improvement and development plans, including subsequent or 'stand alone' formal learning and development plans, need to be detailed and documented. The reasons for this are to:

- allow the organisation to track individual employee performance improvement and advancement
- have a basis from which to acknowledge performance improvement or regression
- plan for individual performance improvement, remedy or intervention
- maintain a record of legally non-compliant performance
- accumulate a data base of available knowledge and skills for:
 - organisational development
 - workforce planning

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- projects
 - product development
 - new programs
 - new services
 - provide a record for employees for:
 - references
 - job applications
 - career development
 - professional and trade affiliations
 - estimate and justify the cost of performance learning and development activities
 - assess the impact of employee learning and development on productivity outputs and outcomes

Role of the individual employee

Individual employees must take responsibility for learning and development, by reviewing their job description in relation to its relevance to the plan, setting goals and objectives, and then devising a plan or action for their achievement. These plans require the support, guidance and encouragement of team leaders and facilitators to effect implementation. In this sense, it is a cooperative effort.

There are a number of approaches that can be taken when planning for individual and team learning and development. The approach most likely determines the performance need, the type of work to be carried out by employees, and the work area function.

The approach may be remedial, with a number of possible options for action.

Learning and development plans can be approached from educational, experiential, practical, reflective, observational, conceptual, experimental or developmental perspectives.

Individual learning and development activities that are undertaken for self-directed performance improvement and advancement can include:

- observing

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- coaching
 - mentoring
 - role modelling
 - formal training
 - working on-the-job, as with apprentices and cadets
 - interactive training via the Internet, CD-ROM or video
 - undertaking internal or external projects
 - being seconded to projects
 - being involved in the community, professional groups or trade groups
 - visiting industry
 - consulting in own area of specialisation

Providers of learning and development

The providers of learning and development can be drawn from within or outside the organisation.

From inside the organisation, a learning and development provider could be any employee with the knowledge, skills and attributes that are required for the identified learning and development. These people need to be capable of transferring their knowledge, skills and attributes in a understandable, applicable and practical way to those they are teaching or training.

In addition, there are others who may have some training experience, such as workplace health and safety officers, managers, supervisors and team leaders. While an academic may have an accumulation of knowledge, they may not be able to transfer their knowledge to other people. Likewise a skills-based worker could find it difficult to explain what to do, even though they are competent at performing particular skills.

If willing and able providers exist within your own organisation, arrange for some basic training for them, so that they are able to enhance the performance of others in a cost-effective way. They may prove valuable assets for formal on-the-job coaching, as well as for contributing to workshops and seminars.

Other people from inside the organisation who contribute to individual and team learning and development activities are trainers and human resource development personnel. These people understand the learning needs of adults, and have a proven ability to transfer knowledge and skills in

appropriate ways. They also need to be able to relate learning and development to particular employees and functional areas.

A few of the many commercially available providers are:

- registered training providers
- human resource developers
- group facilitators
- change agents
- business advisors
- counsellors and behavioural therapists
- organisational development experts
- motivational therapists

They may be contracted for a fee from outside the organisation for performance learning and development programs and workplace activities. The Yellow Pages and the Internet have a plethora of companies with specialist providers available for training and development activities.

Then there are the specialists, experts and consultants from government, trade, industry, community and voluntary organisations, who provide learning and development activities for staff. They include:

- ambulance officers
- police officers
- emergency services personnel
- machinery and inspection officers
- quality assurance personnel
- accreditation advisers
- union representatives
- professional association representatives



Try it

Plan for individual learning and development.

Plan your own learning and development. First, identify a learning and development need that you may have. Then, decide a goal or objective for meeting this need. Then, design an action plan for achieving your learning and development goal and objectives.

(a) Write your goal and objectives for achieving your learning and development need.

Goal:

Objectives:

(b) Devise a plan of action to achieve your goal and objectives for learning and development:

Plan of action for learning and development need:

Date of plan _____

Action Planning Sheet

Table 1: Action Planning Sheet (5 cols)

Action	When	Who	Where	How

Figure 17 – Action Planning Sheet

Date for review: _____



Readings

Read more about planning for individual learning and team development by referring to:

Performance Management by Armstrong and Baron, on pages 222–227, 228–237, and 259–269.

Empowering Teams by Wellins, Byham and Wilson, Chapter 9.

Team plans for learning and development

Consider how a team would pursue their plan for learning and development. There are additional factors to be considered, beyond those for one individual, when a team or a number of team members are involved. The logistics could make it more difficult to organise, e.g. it is easier to arrange for one person to do coaching or make an industry visit, than it is for a number of people.

There may need to be a varied approach to address a number of learning and/or development needs among the individuals in the team. For the same reason the methods of learning and development may need to be different. For example, the approach and methods may be different for the captain of the boat compared with the deckhands, although they are all aiming for the same team (crew) learning and development goal to “learn to maintain net integrity during night trawls”.

Do not lose sight of the fact that you are continuing to work within the framework of performance management systems, and need to address learning and development within this context. This is re-iterated in **Figure 18**.

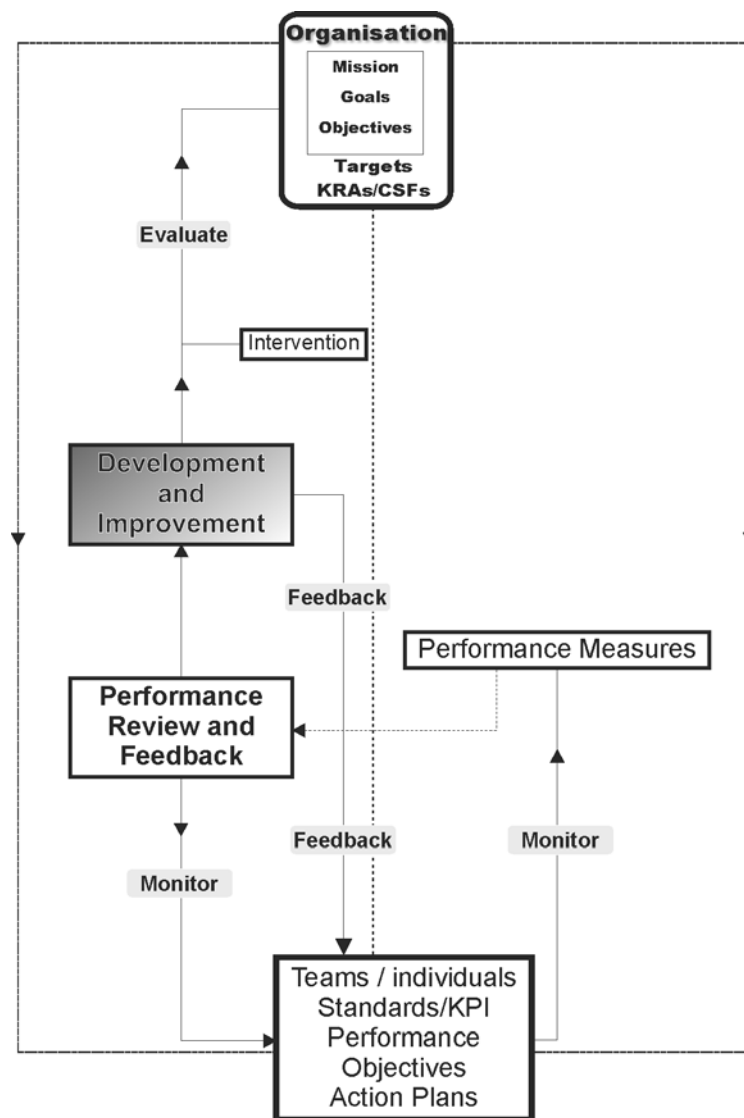


Figure 18 Performance Management System, highlighting the function of performance development and improvement

Stay focused on:

- organisational implications of planning for team performance learning and development
- links to the strategic goals of the organisation
- your team targets or goals
- your team KRAs and KPIs

Remember to consider the standards and legislation that may impact on your proposed plans.

Hold a team meeting to complete an Action Planning Sheet, and enable all members to give and receive feedback on the proposed learning and

development plan. Gather information, confirm the facts, and record who, what, where and how plans will be formulated. Allow for open dialogue and address any concerns and resistance.

From the initial team meeting, members need to work on the plan of action, as well as review their own individual goals, objectives and plans.

If a core working party has been suggested, then that group can work specifically on developing the plan, then report to the organisation and back to the team.

You also need to design a checklist for planning a team learning and development undertaking. This could include:

- the need to approach other teams, managers and providers
- logistical needs for arranging or rearranging the working time of team members
- release from work or secondments
- any organising for material resources and locations
- dates and times

When drawing up your plan for a team learning and development activity, you will find the Action Planning Sheet helpful. Another helpful guide is a Gantt chart.

Gantt chart:

Table 2: Gantt chart (4 cols)

Task No	Task	Duration (Days)	Precedence
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			
12			

Figure 19 Gantt chart

Before you proceed to the next topic, investigate any formal standard forms that exist in your organisation for completing team planning and associated learning and development activities.



Research

Investigate organisational performance improvement and development planning, and learning and development planning documents in organisations.

Investigate your own organisation and/or approach other organisations to determine the documents that are in existence for:

(a) Performance improvement and development as part of the performance review and feedback process.

(b) Learning and development for individuals and teams

They may be available from the HRMIS or from HR services. Alternatively a professional association such as the Australian Human Resource Management Institute, or the Australian Institute of Management may have templates for these purposes:

If you have been unable to locate these documents, you can design your own using the performance and development plan and action learning plan you developed. You can build into these documents those elements that your organisation might want to add, particularly in relation to review dates and measurement that indicate performance outcomes.

Coordinate performance learning and development activities

The work you have done in planning for learning and development needs to be coordinated, so that activities can be implemented. If you are the person responsible for the coordination of learning and development activities, you need to have a detailed plan of action.

Also, you need to put in place monitoring and measuring mechanisms for determining the degree of achievement of learning and development. Goals and objectives, action plans, Gantt charts, team meetings, review sessions, and feedback (formal and informal) contribute to the monitoring and measuring process. Have computerised and/or hard copy data that can be collected to track progress, and collated to assess outcomes.

If processes and procedures for recording data and activities are beyond what is usually done, then they need to be formulated, explained and provided for use by participants in learning and development activities.

Communicate with team leaders and area managers to gather information from them on their needs, and provide feedback on your progress. Together, set dates for implementation. This allows all of you to work in the direction of the target date. Individuals, teams, and functional areas of operation have to be involved in organising their work areas to accommodate the upcoming program of activities.

If learning and development is to take place away from the work area, individuals and teams need to be informed, operational activities assessed, times organised, venues arranged. Work areas may have to be re-organised, and additional staff sourced to free existing staff to undertake programmed activities. All the details that you included in your planning stage need to be discussed with relevant people in preparing rooms, work areas and material resources; people including:

- managers
- team leaders
- teams
- individuals
- providers
- facilitators
- other organisational personnel

There may also be a need to bring in additional material resources, either to the workplace, or to the selected venue. Cost has to be justified and funds obtained.

Approach internal providers regarding their requirements for learning and development training. They will need to provide details of their content and processes for activities. You may need to negotiate services and equipment for the agreed training dates.

Identify appropriately qualified external providers to facilitate employee learning and development. This can be an expensive undertaking to obtain the quality and expertise that these people have to offer.

When the companies they represent carry quality endorsement standards, then you can be assured that you are importing quality assured trainers, facilitators and therapists. Organisational directives will guide you with tendering arrangements, and the completion of documents and contracts to procure the services of external providers.

You may need to apply for the necessary funding for learning and development activities, as material and human resources cost money. Providers have to be paid, and additional staff may be needed to replace exiting staff, while they are released for learning and development.

Submissions for additional funding go to senior management. Formal proposals for funding for learning and development must follow the organisational policies and procedures that are in place for this purpose.

Arrangements must not detract from any urgency that may accompany the learning and development need. It is amazing what can be accomplished in limited time. Prioritise the time lines with team or organisational leaders, if this is the case.

Coaching

Coaching can help meet an individual or team learning and development need. It can be an ongoing activity, that needs a timeframe to be projected for achieving learning and development results.

Performance needs to be monitored during the coaching process, and you will need to consider what techniques, mechanisms or measures you will need to do this effectively. Also, feedback will need to be shared during and after coaching, and you will need to ensure that the feedback is constructive.

In all of your planning, coordinating and implementing, you need to consider how the learning and development activities will be monitored, measured, and reviewed, and feedback shared to assess the outcomes.

Points to consider include:

- the parameters of performance of the individual
- the job description in relation to what you are expecting the employee to perform
- the goals, objectives and action plans that are already in place for achieving the performance, while at the same time being coached
- any or all of these need to be monitored, measured and reviewed given the coaching taking place, and in relation to the job expectations and capabilities of the employee

Learning and development activities also need to be monitored to ensure that there is compliance with workplace health and safety, quality assurance and legal requirements. Incorrect information and training for managing a fire, a bomb response, and a heart attack could have far reaching personal impacts, as well as the possibility of litigation. Be aware of underpinning standards, policies and legal issues when planning, coordinating and implementing learning and development activities.

Adapted from Open Learning Institute (2003) **Learner's Guide**
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