

PEOPLE ARE A CONSTANT, PROSPERITY IS A VARIABLE ...

It is axiomatic that successful companies constantly overcome the cycle of crises that they periodically face. Those crises may be long running, deep-seated, ones like the current global economic downturn, or, shorter-run, more acute ones, like an outbreak of swine flu.

Setting direction through development of relevant strategies at *Personal*, *Organisational*, and, *Governmental* levels is a key determinant in whether a business survives, or thrives.

Moreover, successful execution of chosen strategies that lead to ultimate survival or prosperity, relies on the need for a large Talent pool of *Motivated*, *Performing*, and *Competent* staff.

PERSONAL DIRECTION - MOTIVATION

The nostalgic days of "*Life-long Earning*", where staff signed over responsibility for the totality of their lives & livelihoods to their company are mostly now behind us. Today, change has given way to a dawning new age of "*Life-long Learning*".

However, some Individuals may not have grasped the full semantics of that transition, yet.

To have embraced fully this change, requires staff to pay attention to their own personal development needs, and, to accordingly set the direction for their future learning. Rather than "training for training's sake", "*Training for Training Outcomes*" now has more valence.

Yet, how can Individuals come to own the competences they will develop through training?

Individuals can begin to take ownership by playing a more active role in choosing training programs that have most relevance to them, as well as their company. Selecting training designed to overcome business limiting weaknesses as well as develop personal strengths, will provide people the best investment payback in the longer-term.

ORGANISATIONAL DIRECTION - PERFORMANCE

"When the rate of change outside your company exceeds the pace of change inside ..." the old adage says "... you're dead". Successful companies therefore constantly strive for renewal of their products, their processes, and of course, their people.

In a changing world, HR management & organisational development are a challenge; How do companies tactically measure performance & develop individual contributors? How do they align their people with company strategies & direction? How do they do this both tactically for short term survival, and, strategically for longer-term prosperity?

Organisations can play their part in determining what skills levels exist in the company, what skills are required for future growth, and what opportunities present themselves for bridging the skills gaps identified through training. Choosing development pathways that respond to & resolve shorter-term business strictures as well as ones that build future organisational potential, will deliver better performance returns over the longer term.

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NATIONAL DIRECTION - COMPETENCES

Crises bring uncertainty, uncertainty creates fear, fear reduces momentum, taking away inertia, leading to a listlessness and inability for the company to drive forward. Breaking this vicious cycle is challenging. It requires courage & foresight, as well as a farsighted vision to see beyond the here and now, well into a perceived brighter future.

Dealing with long-term dislocation of industries and consequential impact on skilled manpower is typically a responsibility of government, and the challenge for any nation is threefold. First, to know their *Sunset* industries, the ones freeing up talent. Second, to ID the *Sunrise* industries, the future consumers of talent. Third, to determine the competences that *Sunrise* industries require, and encourage investment for a more prosperous tomorrow.

The Singapore Workforce Development Agency (WDA) has assembled in recent years a competency based framework, called the *Workforce Skills Qualification* framework (WSQ). The WSQ framework maps out the competences required in two dimensions. First, at a *Sector*, or Industry specific level, and, secondly, at a more *Generic*, foundational skills, level.

The *Employability Skills System*, or *ESS*, cover the Competences in the foundational business skills arena. *ESS* targets *Personal Effectiveness*, by developing a set of ten generic, portable, foundational business skills.

The WSQ framework maps out a strategic direction for training, based on a competency framework that provides a set of validated, transferable skills, backed up with certification. Participation in WSQ courses helps reduce uncertainty, and affords some assurances that training is relevant to the future, both for *Personal*, as well as *Organisational*, benefit.

Looking out into the future thus brings more certainty into the investment decision surrounding relevant training, and is one key role that Government plays. Providing a more structured approach to training also focuses attention on the competences gained and outcomes possible, meaning that the fear of investment in inappropriate skills is lessened.

Reducing uncertainties may not by itself overcome the lack of inertia & build momentum. Hence, the *Skills Programme for Upgrading & Resilience (SPUR)* provides financial support to WSQ framework participants at two levels; a top-line subsidy for *Course Training Fees*, and, a below the line subsidy for *Absentee Payroll* for those staff undergoing training.

SPUR acts in harmonious concert with the WSQ framework, as funding support requires *Approved Training Organisation (ATOs)*, delivering *Approved Courses*, using *ACTA (Advanced Certificate in Training & Assessment)* Approved Trainers.

Government is playing its part by creating an investment framework with skills relevant to the future growth of the nation, which in turn encourages investment through targeted funding support. The creation of the WSQ framework to map out future competences, as well as providing appropriate quality assurance, also helps reduce uncertainties, allowing companies to drive forwards by targeted investment in relevant training.

LONG-TERM SYNERGIES ARE POSSIBLE ...

Individuals, Organisations & Nation states all bring a healthy trinity of perspectives. Each has its own set of responsibilities, which when discharged appropriately, collectively contribute to the overriding goal of survival & prosperity. Resultant synergies convert simple addition into a multiplier effect, as parties prosper more together, than alone.

The SPUR & WSQ frameworks enable companies to look at training not just in the narrow sense of cost suppression, but, in the broader sense of Business investment decisions. They provide potential to focus not just on day-to-day management of issues, but also on developing the skills & competences required for the longer-term Business growth.

That said, the decisions rest with each Company: do they spread training thinly like icing on a cake, or, target it to where it best provides their longer-term business impact? Given that People are the constant, and Survival, or Prosperity, is the Variable, those that choose the later will more likely Survive & Prosper, and so be around to face the next "new crisis" ...