



Workplace Best Practice

Starting a Corporate University

Introduction: The Corporate University – not your average training department

A Corporate University is a portal within a company through which all education takes place. Corporate universities link an organization's strategies to the learning goals of its audiences. It functions as the umbrella for a company's total education requirements – for employees and the entire business chain, including customers and suppliers.

The Corporate University philosophy is very different from this, pulling together all learning in an organization by managing education as a *business initiative*. It has clear goals and long-term strategic plans. *It is proactive*. Most important: a corporate university's activities are *linked to business goals*.

How is a Corporate University different from a traditional company training department? By nature of the way each operates. Training departments tend to deliver training in a fragmented, decentralized way – and it is usually reactionary. Training departments usually offer a wide array of open enrollment courses, but with different departments participating sporadically based on their own 'perceived' needs.

The "best practice" of creating a Corporate University can shape the culture of a company by fostering leadership, creative thinking, and problem solving. Corporate universities are designed to provide employees with practical business knowledge, managerial competence, and task-oriented education – all aimed at making an organization more competitive.

Did you know... There are currently more than 1,600 corporate universities in the United States. By the year 2010, corporate universities will likely outnumber traditional universities. The ever-changing nature of the job market and constant increases in needed skills is the driving force behind the development of corporate universities. The most successful employers realize the need to invest corporate resources in maintaining the skills of their employees. Establishing a Corporate University is one of the best ways to manage employee development as a needed business function.



Steps to Success: Five ideas for starting a Corporate University at YOUR organization

<p>1. Work with management to create a long-term educational vision.</p>	<p>The process of starting a Corporate University is a collaborative one. Gather together all levels of management at your organization and create a shared vision of the future. What sort of company do you want to be? Will your core business change? What about your employee base? Communicate your vision to the entire organization and <i>keep on communicating it</i>. Let employees know about future plans for the Corporate University and get them excited about it.</p>
<p>2. Link the proposed training strategy with corporate business goals.</p>	<p>Use the vision to draft outlines of the needed employee skills and share with corporate leaders. Stress the need to align skills with corporate goals and objectives. Traditionally the relationship between training and specific business goals has been weak. Companies invest thousands of dollars in training programs without any idea of how the training will improve their bottom line or achieve business goals. Aligning your company's business initiatives with an annual training plan is essential in creating a successful Corporate University program.</p>

<p>3. Decide on your delivery method.</p>	<p>Technology has enabled training to be delivered in a number of different ways, from video-based and multimedia CD-ROM courses to teleconferencing and distance learning. Sometimes traditional classroom-based training is the best and most cost effective method – sometimes not. Investigate all of your options, and think about the requirements of your employee-base. Also consider <i>where</i> training will be conducted. For example, at employee workstations, in a company classroom, offsite, etc.</p>
<p>4. Partner with training vendors and traditional colleges for maximum results.</p>	<p>Partnering with outside sources of education is a great way to get the most out your training dollars to create dynamic training programs. Calling on assistance from local community colleges, universities, and outside training organizations can open the door to innovative educational solutions. For example, a large Call Center and their local Community College teamed up to create an associate’s degree program in customer service – benefiting the company and the college.</p> <p>To potentially save money, choose specific ‘key’ learning institutions to partner with to deliver your long-range training. If you partner with just a few training vendors they will get to know your organizations needs better and most likely will provide you extra services if you treat them as a strategic partner. Consider including them in your annual training planning process.</p>
<p>5. Prepare a funding strategy and budget.</p>	<p>Because funding a Corporate University can be very costly upon startup, some companies expect that the Corporate University will become self-funded or even generate income. How? By setting up training programs like a traditional university and charging tuition to their internal business clients, as in the ‘fee-for-services’ strategy. Another way to create a self-funded Corporate University is to copyright and market your in-company training programs to your outside customers and suppliers. Your local WEDnetPA Partner can assist you with this type of planning.</p> <p>Of course, a well thought-out preliminary budget will determine what funding initiatives your organization needs to pursue. And if your training programs meet the company’s business goals, the Corporate University will pay for itself many times over in increased profits and employee morale and well being.</p>
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For more information or help in implementing this best practice, contact your local WEDnetPA Partner.