# Blood: Water Technical eUpdate Vol. 28 – A Discourse on Good Practice in Effective Staff Development

**Dear Partners,**

I hope that we are ending the year well. On reflection on how the year has gone, I wanted to share some thoughts on staff development practices. Even in saying so, I am cognizant of the fact that many organizational leaders seem to view employee training and development as more optional that essential… a viewpoint that is proving costly to both short term and long-term effectiveness of the organizations. The truth of the matter however is that successful work environments thrive on symbiotic relationships between employers and employees, where the employer focuses on achieving their goals and the employee finds ways to support that goal while achieving their personal and career growth facilitated by accreditation and remuneration by their employer.

This interrelationship makes strategic workforce development paramount for any organization that wants to invest in "*getting it right*". A workforce development strategy is therefore critical for many reasons and I want to focus on two main reasons:

1. It **keeps employees challenged and engaged** in their line of work. If the employees are challenged and engaged, then there are more chances of them being more productive and stick around for longer or at least serve out the duration and terms of engagement in their respective contracts. This means that employers benefit from a positive return on investment in their employees and are *saved the cost of high staff turnover*.

2. Continuous workforce development also means that **employees feel empowered with the understanding and competencies necessary** to deal with change and challenges in their work. This makes them more resilient and less anxious; and also equips an organization with a more agile workforce.

In today's VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous) world, it becomes even more critical that employers deliberately enforce policies and practices that build employee staff capacities in order for them to adapt and thrive in this ever-changing world-whether it is in their personal or professional life. Both of which ultimately sustain an organization's growth agenda.


**GOOD PRACTICES FOR STAFF DEVELOPMENT**

Staff development programs can typically be divided into one of four levels, including:

- **On-the-job training:** unstructured and informal
- **Training and development:** professionally delivered

- **Talent and performance training:** included in a career development program
- **Capability development:** focused on improving the organization's capabilities and culture

Small organizations tend to focus on on-the-job training and professionally delivered training and development. This is the one that has been most popular amongst our cohort of partners as well as the occasional training and development opportunities we take advantage of when funding becomes available.

Blood: Water is advocating for organizations to become more adept at the more deliberate i) Talent and performance training programs as well as the ii) Capability development programs. So how do we successfully transition to this way of working? Organizations that have successfully made this leap have established the following practices:

### 1. Facilitate a learning-first organizational culture.

The desire to learn and develop should be embedded in an organization's culture. Every leader and manager must make employee development a priority across all teams and departments—to keep all staff on the same page.

A good first step starts with performance reviews. To cultivate a learning mindset, standardize your performance review process to be built around learning goals. We recommend that managers meet with employees individually to reflect on how they've grown within their given role. This helps an organization set tangible goals that align with the organization policy. You can assess your organization's readiness for this with this Free Learning Culture Assessment tool; and read this HBR (Harvard Business Review) article on learning organizations. I have also attached it onto this email.

### 2. Personalize learning and development programs.

A one-size-fits-all learning and development program simply doesn't cut it anymore. Each individual staff member in an organization wants personalization. We are now living in a world where we customize everything-from our phone ringtones to our workspaces. Training programs must also be customized as much as is possible. In addition, staff have different level of experience and expertise. They also have unique and differing priorities regarding their own professional development. Generic programs are just not that effective on a large scale anymore.

The key is to make an organization's learning and development programs specific enough that staff members can glean actionable insights, but open-ended enough that they can apply it to their own specific career goals. The leadership in an organization also needs to decide *how* it wants to present staff development learning content. With the multi-generational workforce today, this becomes even more critical. Younger employees are more adept with technology, so they might favor digital learning activities. But the leadership should also include more simple and accessible learning content for employees who might be less comfortable with advanced technology. (If you refer to the Vol. 16-July 2017 of the B:W E-Bulletin on "*Effective Training Programs for Organizational and Staff Development*).

**3. Define a clear career path.**

A good employee doesn't just strive for excellence in their current role. They want to know there's room and opportunity to progress over the course of their career with an organization. For this reason, it's crucial for an organization's leadership to outline a clear career path for each employee —sometimes referred to as talent mapping. I find this [blog on talent mapping](#) loaded with tips on getting the mapping exercise going (attached on this email). If a junior employee, for instance, has the ambition to grow into a managerial role, an organization's learning and development program should provide them with the tools to develop the skills they need.

A comprehensive learning and development program won't just aid individual employees, it also serves a bigger purpose i.e. succession planning. Professional development prepares employees for more advanced roles, which comes in handy when the management needs to fill a position. When managed correctly, employee development will prepare an organization for the future and nurture employees into leadership roles thus, saving an organization a significant amount of time and money as well as build a strong leadership pipeline in the organization which enhances its resilience in the long run.

**FINAL THOUGHTS ON STAFF DEVELOPMENT**

If implemented correctly, a learning and development program can be a huge driver of staff engagement. And, remember, an engaged staff is a happy staff. In fact, recent human resource engagement surveys show that engaged staff members are 87% less likely to leave their jobs. This demonstration of commitment to staff is most certainly a mark of strong leadership in an organization. which ultimately builds a strong and performing teamwork culture. However, it is important to take note that if a learning and development program is mismanaged, it can have the opposite effect. For this reason, it's critical that a leader communicates how much they value personal growth in employees. Otherwise, it may just appear like a leader is demanding that employees learn new skills as a formality with no passion or strings attached.

In conclusion, we are saying that a successful learning and development program will help organizations attract top talent; improve staff satisfaction and productivity; and set the goals and objectives up for success. Remember,

i)      the details of one's learning and development program will depend on a specific organization.

ii)     Staff members are unique and the techniques that work for one organization might not apply to another.

For these reasons, it's important to listen to colleagues and workers in the office and implement their feedback. This ensures that an organization's leadership is regularly fine-tuned and improves on both the employer and employee development strategy. With staff preferences in mind, collective effort on staff development will help the organization meet its vision.

Tell me and I'll forget. Show me and I may remember. Involve me and I'll learn.

- [Benjamin **Franklin**](#)


**Annex:**

1. **Harvard Business Review Article -**"**Is Yours A Learning organization?":**
   Highlights key characteristics of the learning organization and gives some insights
   on the building blocks of a learning organization. This article is useful in providing
   tips to those interested in beginning to establish systems and policies that will build a
   learning culture in an organization.

2. **An information blog on Talent Mapping**: Gives some insights on key steps to
   mapping employee talent with an aim to identifying capacity gaps and support them
   in developing a capacity development and career development plan. This gives very
   simple steps in identifying the talent in the organization. HR leads can use these tips
   to conduct skills audits and then populate a database of the available skills in the
   organization. These suggestions are useful to further strengthen your performance
   management and staff development plans.

3. **A CDC Guide to Promoting Professional Development**: that is a handy handbook
   on steps to designing, implementing and evaluating your professional development
   strategies. It is best utilized by your HR leads to customize it for your own internal
   staff development plan. A concise guide with useful tools and tips on how to build a
   strong individual and even group development program. It is especially useful for
   those primarily responsible for in-house talent development.