



The Conference Board Research Working Group Project Summary

Future Skilling Current Employees to Meet Your Workforce Needs

Research Question: *How do corporations plan ahead to train and develop groups of their current employees for new skills and roles so that both the business and employee are well-prepared for future global workforce requirements?*

Research Proposal

It is now a corporate imperative to plan strategically several years ahead for the skills needed for a workforce to contribute to the success of the company, and often there is a gaping hole of capable workers ahead. As companies integrate better data into their workforce planning, they are coming to recognize a growing skills disparity between their needs in the medium term and their existing workforce. This is especially true as they move to eliminate outdated roles and ramp up hiring workers with new technology skills; but this could happen anywhere from warehouse to call center to design facility and headquarters. The big trends of globalization, the fast pace of technology and the changing dynamics in customer demands, all are fundamentally challenging companies in how they are going to change their business models and go to market strategy.

This organizational readiness issue will require a strategic approach to have a workforce ready to respond to these shifting demands. Companies no longer have the luxury of long start up times to train employees in fill new roles. Whether you are looking to avoid the expense of involuntary attrition, or prepare a group of workers to replace a large retirement class, “future skilling” can help address the accelerated pace of training implementation and prepare groups of employees to quickly contribute to the company success.

The Conference Board is launching a Research Working Group to partner with forward thinking corporate workforce planners and learning and development professionals to accelerate how companies can implement group training initiatives that transform their workforce of today. We will examine how to best train existing employees across all geographies to be the well-prepared worker with the expertise that will be in demand in just a few short years. This is an opportunity for talent and learning professionals to develop a capability to contribute to the ever tighter financial margins required today, and help their companies have the agility to respond to changing labor force needs.

We will convene a group of 12-20 companies ready to step back and look strategically at how to address this problem and ultimately identify the best solutions collaboratively across their organizations. We will look at the ecosystems partners and players that can and need to come together to rethink current approaches to capability planning and organizational learning. We will investigate up-skilling in emerging markets; re-skilling for scaled efficiency and new-skilling to create new ways to respond to the market. Each company will send two staff members from across divisions to develop a holistic approach that will incorporate the perspective of people from Operations, Learning and Development, Community Programs, and Strategic Workforce Planning.

The group will investigate the following themes:

- **Your organizational readiness:** How do senior HR leaders design and develop organizations that are prepared for scaled learning? What are best in class companies doing organizationally to support their strategic reskilling initiatives in the next 5 years? What is the horizon and timing in which we need to plan for?
- **Which employees:** How do you best select the employee populations or roles/jobs to reskill in a given organization? Do you continually train up? Can your employees become lifelong learners and not just rely on the next training program? What lessons can be applied to leadership development?
- **Your culture and partners:** What departments need to partner to make these often massive capability shifts? How do you address that in some parts of the world these shifts need to happen at an accelerated pace that often exceeds a) what HR can conceptualize; b) what Learning is resourced to deliver; and c) what amount of change can people can consume and absorb?
- **What are the benefits:** How can the ROI of reskilling programs be assessed in the short-term and over time? In which group training endeavors should organizations invest their limited resources? What are the key measures of short and long-term success, and how do they contribute to the bottom line?
- **What programs are most effective:** What learning methods are best incorporated? On-site, or with an educational partner? What is the role of social-learning and games to reskill? How does the shift to gamification and social learning get applied across generations and global populations? What can we learn from existing college-company partnerships? Can we increase their effectiveness?

What Companies Would Benefit from Participating?

Companies that face staffing disruptions in the next few years are ideally suited to participate in this Research Working Group. Examples include: financial services companies that face new accreditation and certification standards; those with customer service teams that need large scale training to integrate new product lines; companies undergoing mergers or acquisitions that need to level skills across teams; manufacturing companies that see the need to create new roles to replace outdated ones, or bring up the skills of workers in new facilities; those companies facing large groups of retirements and need to quickly bring online new, well-trained workers. All companies looking to develop their rank and file staff with the same focus that they have given to individual talent development should consider joining.

What is a Research Working Group?

A Research Working Group (RWG) is a collaborative project that convenes peer companies and researchers in a rapid deep dive and targeted focus on a compelling business issue. When firms across industries with similar concerns come together and are guided by subject matter experts, there is a rich transfer of ideas and knowledge. The result is comprehensive findings designed to shape a platform for enterprise-wide action and impact. Our team of researchers, partnerships with leading organizations and deep commitment to our members make us uniquely positioned to produce high quality, innovative research.

Format & Takeaways

Timing: Launching **June 24 & 25, 2014 in New York**, this Working Group will work together over 6 months to develop actionable solutions. The group will meet 3 times in-person to share their own practices and challenges in a confidential, hands-on environment. These two day meetings are planned for June, September and November 2014. The participants typically commit 2-3 hours a month for the duration of the project, outside of the in-person meetings.

Format and Participants: Each company sends two participants from their teams who are best able to represent thinking and experience about the evolution of sustainability programs at their firm. There will be 3 in-person meetings, virtual meetings and small group teleconferences throughout to continue the group's collaboration. Together with top specialists, thought leaders and researchers, the members will build tools and frameworks to effect change throughout their organizations. The meetings are held in a confidential setting to allow the free exchange and examination of ideas, and self-evaluation with peers across industries. We encourage inter-departmental participation and generally suggest that participants be senior manager and above.

Deliverables: This is a dynamic process focused on helping your team develop useful new strategies throughout the working group. RWGs provide actionable items throughout the process, as well as benchmarking and peer networking. This collaboration will result in a report comprising detailed findings, conclusions, and recommendations for action; this may include short, focused Executive Action reports, in-depth Research reports, case studies and surveys. Groups often prepare additional material such as webcasts, PowerPoint presentations and other media to share their findings with their colleagues to drive impact into their corporation.

Research Contribution: Membership is \$18,000 per company, which enables two executives per company to fully participate.

Membership is reduced to \$14,000 for companies that hold a membership in one of The Conference Board's Councils on Learning and Development, Strategic Workforce Planning, and Business & Education. Membership for a single participant from a company is \$12,000.

The contribution will be invoiced, and is requested to be paid in full by September 1st. The fee covers all materials, access to research and subject matter experts, and peer benchmarking. It includes meals during meetings, but does not include travel & hotel to in-person meetings. RWGs are only open to member companies of The Conference Board.

To join or for further information, please contact Daria Lamb, Director of Research Working Groups: Daria.Lamb@conference-board.org or +1 212-339-0428.

The Conference Board meetings are held under the Chatham House Rule: Participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed. During the writing of the report, any attribution to specific companies or individuals will be secured in writing before publication.