

# Cases in Human Resource Management

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# 7

## Training, Learning, Talent Management, and Development

### **Case 7.1. The Need for Training and Development: Should You Use Massive, Open Online Courses (MOOCs) such as Coursera and Udacity to Recruit and Retain Talent?**

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Juan Salmeron graduated from Small-Town College two years ago and was excited to land a job in customer service with AT&T. He rose quickly in stature at the local AT&T office and became the go-to guy when someone needed to understand some new technology.

After 2 years, Juan figured he was marketable and wanted to see if he could land a larger position with another firm. He worked hard on his resume, cover letter, references, and copies of his college transcripts.

Juan interviewed well at California Mutual Insurance (CMI), and his dreams came true! Juan was hired as a corporate trainer. His job responsibility was to teach the insurance employees at CMI about how to use the latest technology to improve their own performance on the job.

Thus, Juan had to develop a process to help teach the insurance employees about technology in the workplace. The obvious option was to actually hold courses at CMI's headquarters. Realistically, Juan could offer two or three courses a week. But each employee would have to leave their desk and job duties to attend the face-to-face (F2F) training courses.

Juan could also try to hire experts in technology topics, and they could then develop a course to train the insurance employees. However, this would require extra financial costs to hire the expert and videotape the lectures. Juan could also decide to hold courses in a synchronous or asynchronous distance learning format. *Synchronous*

*distance learning* occurs when the trainer/teacher and his employees/pupils interact in different places, but during the same time. Thus, students and the trainer might select Tuesday night as the time when they hold the training class. The trainer could be on his or her laptop computer at home, and the employees can access their training course at night. On Tuesday night, there would be a specific class where the trainer and all the students would meet online and discuss the material to learn. Synchronous learning would require the trainer and employee to meet at a specific time.

*Asynchronous distance learning* occurs when the trainer and the employee interact at different times. Students enrolled in an asynchronous course are able to complete their work within a certain time period. Thus the employee would access the learning site within a time period such as one week. The employee would review the material, watch videos, and take any exams, as necessary. Thus, the trainer and employee to have more freedom to complete assignments within a pre-established time period.

As a third option, Juan could use Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) offered by online providers such as Coursera and Udacity. MOOCs are free online courses offered by experts at no cost. MOOC course topics range from law, education, engineering, management, and all areas of technology. As Coursera describes itself, "Coursera is an education platform that partners with top universities and organizations worldwide, to offer courses online for anyone to take, for free. Learners can choose from hundreds of courses created by the world's top educational institutions. Courses are open to anyone, and learning is free."<sup>1</sup>

For example, Juan could encourage his employees to take a course on Gamification. Gamification is a course offered at the University of Pennsylvania, through Coursera, and taught by Associate Professor Kevin Werbach from The Wharton School of Business. The initial section of the course had 80,000 students followed by a section of 63,000 students.<sup>2</sup>

Gamification is taught in four to eight weekly modules and is offered in different languages. *Gamification* is the adaptation of digital game technology applied to human resource and other business issues. Thus, Juan's employees could learn to develop a game, whereby their customers are rewarded points or in-game rewards for checking their insurance policies, investment accounts, and so forth on a regular basis. The goal is to make "the game" addictive so that customers check their own accounts on a more regular basis. The idea is to simulate games such as Angry Birds where customers actually want to check their accounts.

There are many people in HR that feel MOOCs could be a major part of recruiting, training, and developing employees with online degree certifications.<sup>3</sup> Udacity has a program that allows employers to review the student resumes. Over 350 large organizations, such as Facebook, have paid Udacity and Coursera to match them with high performing students.<sup>4</sup>

MOOCs can have thousands of students that sign up for a course online. Students often earn a certificate for completing the course. HR departments can also develop their own certificate or reward for their employees that complete a MOOC. Companies such as AT&T are using Udacity's MOOCs to train their employees in new areas of science and technology. Starbucks offers their employees free tuition to participate in Arizona State University's online courses.

HR departments are also interested in recruiting people that have completed MOOCs. They were originally interested in students that completed a science- or technology-related course. Tech-oriented companies such as Amazon, Facebook, and Google have paid Udacity and Coursera to match them with their top students.

### Case Questions

1. Would Coursera or Udacity be a viable option for all human resource departments to train their employees?
2. Would HR be eliminating themselves from their own job if they use Coursera?
3. Would MOOCs be a good recruiting method to attract top talent?
4. Should Juan use a synchronous or asynchronous training format if he decides to use a MOOC to train his employees?
5. What are two advantages and two disadvantages of gamification of the HR functions?

## Case 7.2. Talent Management and Development: The Talented Harry Saunders' Career Development at the Big Buy Supermarket

Developing talented employees requires planning on the part of human resources. The career of Harry Saunders is a good example. Harry progressed in his career by using three options: formal education, experience, and employee assessment.

Harry's father worked in the marketing department at The Big Buy Supermarket chain in Florida. With a little help from his father, Harry was able to get a job as a bag-boy during high school. Harry enjoyed using the cash register since he liked numbers. Harry also displayed social skills since he liked talking to customers.

After high school, Harry went to college and tried different business majors until he concentrated on accounting. Harry knew he had knack for numbers and accounting came easy to him. After graduating college, Harry was offered quite a few positions to work for local and national accounting firms. At such a firm, he would go on the road and conduct audits of his clients accounting books. He would travel quite a bit—but he would be well paid and eventually would become a certified public accountant (CPA).

However, the HR Department at The Big Buy had no desire to lose an employee they felt had the potential to be a top-level manager. Thus, HR offered him a position in the accounting department at a competitive salary with the CPA firms. Since Harry liked working at The Big Buy, and even followed in his father's footsteps, he accepted the position.

Harry enjoyed organizing the accounting department at The Big Buy for nearly a decade. The supermarket chain grew to over 100 stores. Harry felt he needed to get a graduate degree in marketing to help further his rise in management. The Big Buy offered 100 percent tuition reimbursement. It took Harry 2 years to complete his MBA in marketing.

After 20 years in accounting, Harry felt he was tired of running the same old accounting data. He was also not as marketable as he once was because he had never become a CPA. He also missed working directly with customers.

Thus, Harry contacted HR and they worked closely with him to find a new spot in the organization. Harry took a *psychological test*, which is a series of multiple choice questions about what motivated Harry in a work environment. The test results indicated Harry was equally happy working with data and people.

Harry was promoted to the new position of database marketing manager. In that position, Harry would work with large amounts of sales data that were being generated by the computer systems at the 100 plus stores Big Buy owned. Harry's job would be to analyze sales data to find products that were selling unusually well or poorly at each of the stores. Harry hired two young computer science majors to run the computer programs, sort the data, and help Harry make a weekly presentation to senior management about the results of the data.

Harry felt a strong resurgence in his career. He was thrilled to be working with customers again. He often visited stores to ask customers about various food items. He felt this boots on the ground strategy would help him to better understand the overall sales data produced by his two employees back in the home office.

Harry became a popular speaker at supermarket conferences, as mining the data from large computer systems was an increasingly important task for all supermarket chains. Harry used his mathematical skills honed by a decade in accounting to understand the trends in food shopping. Harry was the first person to create a grocery store customer loyalty card, where shoppers paid \$20 a year for the right to get lower prices on selected products. The idea of shoppers paying for a membership to buy groceries at a traditional supermarket was unheard of at the time Harry tested the idea. The result was that the customers of The Big Buy loved paying for the card so they would get lower prices on selected items throughout the store. For Harry and his team, he can better track customer purchases and buying habits because the shopper is using their Big Buy card.

Harry took a few quiet moments to review his career by using the four stages of career development: Exploration, Establishment, Maintenance, and Disengagement. He felt fortunate to have started his career in the exploration stage by considering different job opportunities after he finished college. He experienced the establishment stage in his career by working in the accounting department for what felt like a long time—20 years. He feels refreshed to have transferred to marketing and has found the whole process of tracking customers a great part of the maintenance stage in his continued career at The Big Buy. Harry also felt he was in no rush to disengage from the company anytime in the near future. With the full support of his wife, Harry plans on working at The Big Buy instead of taking any type of early retirement offer.

## Case Questions

1. How did Harry and HR use formal education to further his career?
2. How did employee assessment help Harry to advance?
3. Explain how Harry went through the career stages of Exploration, Establishment, Maintenance, and Disengagement.
4. What are some of the individual and organizational consequences that occurred as a result of the organizational career planning process at Big Buy?
5. Why did Harry's attitude and performance dramatically change after changing from the accounting to the marketing department?

## Notes

1. <https://www.coursera.org/about/>.
2. McWilliams, Julie, "Coursera at Penn Surpasses One Million Enrollees," *Penn Current*, May 9, 2013.
3. Quinn, Jody, "Mining the MOOC: HR Looks to Online to Recruit and Train Employees," *Skilled Up.com*, August 25, 2014.
4. Wheeler, Kevin, "Why MOOC's Might Change Your Recruiting Methods," *ERE Media*, March 4, 2014.