

**THE IMPACT OF THE RECESSION IN IRELAND ON
TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT, A SENIOR
MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVE.**

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TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT, A SENIOR
MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVE.

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Declaration

I Cathy Martin declare that this dissertation is a presentation of my own work other than as acknowledged in the text and the references. It is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of “Masters of Business Administration” at Dublin Business School.

Signed Cathy Martin

Date 21/08/2014

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Abstract

The recent recession in Ireland has had dramatic effects across the business world. Organisations have witnessed many changes and have had to adapt to a new environment. The area of training and development is a critical component for many organisations in their overall performance. However in light of economic upheaval the training and development functions within many organisations have suffered.

The aim of this research is to discover how senior managers view the impacts of the recession on training and development in Ireland and to identify problems they have had to face and how they have managed through the recession and beyond.

The research has found that training is regarded as hugely important despite of or in fact of the recession and managers are willing to do what they can to ensure they can keep this function operating. This has led to some innovative and extremely effective training methods.

The research has highlighted the importance of aligning training efforts with organisational strategic objectives. A trend towards an increased use of internal training has emerged. The research also presents a management view of training as a reward during tough financial times and issues of retention and succession are also significant.

1 Introduction.

1.1 Background to the problem.

The global recession has forced organisations to analyse and evaluate their cost structures, and as a result, spending is often cut in areas which directly affect employees such as training and development. Many organisations do not readdress this area until the financial position of the organisation becomes clearer. This is often a necessary step for the survival of the organisation and managers are faced with many challenges as a result of reduced resources.

Cutting training and development budgets may be viewed as a less impactful way to save money than other cost saving measures. The justification for spending on training and development can be difficult to argue in times of economic uncertainty. The restructuring of organisations due to lay off, redundancies and other measures can see employees take on more and more responsibility in their day to day job roles and training and in particular development may not be seen as the most effective use of their time. However it can be argued that this is the time when training is needed to ensure the smooth transition of restructuring.

There is a need to appreciate the perspective of managers in Ireland specifically in relation to training and development and how they have dealt with the consequences of the recession.

1.2 The research question and objectives.

1.2.1 Research objective

The main objective of the research is to carry out an investigation into how senior managers have viewed the impact of the recession in relation to training and development.

The research will look at the challenges facing managers in Ireland in this regard. This research will aim to discover the ways in which managers in Irish business are managing the

training and development function within their organisations while under the pressures of an uncertain economic climate.

The research will provide insights into the training and development function and how it has changed. The perspective of senior managers is considered and presented in the primary research findings.

1.2.2 Research Questions

To achieve the research objective the research question was developed using an inverted triangle (Appendix.1) to bring the topic from the broad field of study (Training and development) to a more specific situation (the impact of recession) to the specific angle (how do managers view these impacts and manage the effects of recession on training and development).

The researcher has to answer the following research question;

How has the recession in Ireland impacted on how senior managers view training and development?

Sub questions:

- Do managers cease, reduce or increase training as a result of the recession?
- Is there now more focus on using training to fulfill short-term goals?
- To what extent has the focus on personal and professional development diminished?
- To what extent has the recession generated more creative ways of meeting training and development needs?

1.3 The approach to the dissertation.

The researcher intends to achieve the research objectives by using both primary and secondary research. The secondary research consists of a critical literature review based on academic journals, texts and business research and aims to provide the reader with an understanding of themes and issues pertinent to the area of training and development with particular relation to the recession.

The primary research involves individual in depth interviews with five senior managers in Ireland. The aim of the interviews is to present an understanding of how training and development is being managed during the recession from the perspective of senior management in Ireland. The perspectives and opinions of these managers will provide valuable information for the researcher to answer the research questions and meet the research objectives. The data collected from these interviews is analysed, discussed and conclusions and recommendations are presented.

1.4 The organisation of the dissertation.

The dissertation consists of six chapters. The first chapter is an introduction and it covers the main aspects of the research project including; the background to the problem, research question and objectives, the approach to the dissertation and the justification for the research. The aim of this chapter is to introduce the reader to the topic and to present the objectives of the research.

The second chapter is the literature review. This chapter presents a critical review of relevant themes within the research topic.

The third chapter is the research methodology. This chapter will discuss research methods and the justification for the chosen methods used in the dissertation.

The fourth chapter pertains to the data analysis and findings of the primary research carried out.

The fifth chapter presents the discussion of the research and the sixth chapter outlines the conclusions and recommendations of the research.

1.5 The scope and limitations of the research.

This research was conducted to determine how the recession in Ireland has impacted on how senior managers view training and development and how they have managed their training and development functions during the recent recession.

The population for the research is senior managers and the location of study is Ireland. The sample was five senior managers. The research period is the recession which began in 2008 in Ireland through to the current day.

1.5.1 Limitations to the research.

While managers interviewed represent various different industries in Ireland, there are a wide range of training and development issues facing organisations and as such the researcher's conclusions cannot be generalised.

Subjectivity is a limitation encountered with qualitative research. It refers to the way in which the research can be shaped by the particular perspectives of the researcher. Saunders and Lewis (2012) warn of the issues of subject bias and subject error as factors which can put the reliability of the research at risk. Ratner (2002) presents subjectivity as directing “everything from the choice of topic that one studies, to formulating hypotheses, to selecting methodologies, and interpreting data”.

Time constraints of the MBA programme present another limitation to the scope of the research.

1.6 The contribution of the research and the recipients of the research.

The main recipients for this research will be the dissertation supervisor Mr Eddie McConnon and the awarding bodies of Dublin Business School.

In addition this research will be available to the future students of Dublin Business School. The topics researched and recommendations presented may be of benefit to future students for further study and research.

The research will add to the existing body of knowledge in the area of training and development in Ireland.

There is the possibility that research on lessons learned from the recession in Ireland could be carried out and the researcher's study could contribute to this research.

The primary research carried out by the researcher has considered the candid views of senior managers this provides valuable insights that are not commonly available in published literature.

1.7 Justification for the research.

This research aims to provide a synopsis of the current challenges faced by managers in relation to training and development. The research findings provide a management perspective. The researcher intends to discover the issues that affect training and development in an Irish context as a result of the economic recession and discover how this is managed by senior managers.

Saunders et al. (2009), state that the dissertation topic must be something the researcher is competent in achieving and that it is of particular interest to the researcher. The researcher believes that this study will develop and expand her knowledge of the subject matter. In addition the researcher intends to contribute to the existing field of knowledge. It will also improve the researcher's research skills, develop critical thinking and analytical skills, enhance competencies in communication and self-discipline and provide knowledge and learning.

The researcher also believes that the study will highlight the importance of training and developing human capital even during harsh economic times. The training and development function of an organisation can be instrumental in implementing change management policies which arise during times of recession in particular.

While organisations are forced to cut departmental budgets during a recession, the detrimental effects of cutting training and development budgets is not always evident straightaway however these effects when realised can take a considerable amount of time to recover from and in some cases the ground lost is irrecoverable.

The challenges presented to managers during this time can prompt creativity and innovation. This creativity and innovation can be targeted at the training and development function not just at production, sales etc. There is a real opportunity to recognise more effective training tools and practices and to be more efficient with time and resources.

The use of in-depth interviews will provide valuable insights from senior managers who are dealing directly with the effects of the recession on their training and development functions and will present significant insights not seen in the literature alone.

1.8 Introduction to research

This researcher aims to discover how managers in Ireland view the impact of the recession in regards to training and development. The area of training and development is a broad one with Swinney (2007, p.6) defining it as “the process of helping individuals develop skills and knowledge for the purpose of improving or changing their performance”, Popescu and Popescu (2012) see training as a short term effort with development being more concerned with the future growth of an individual. With the support of the organisation an individual is poised to improve performance as a result of being offered such training and development. Resources permitting, this is the accepted view. However it is not always the case as poor motivation and misdirection of learning needs are factors but this is not the area of concern for the researcher.

Blanchard and Thacker (2013, p.21) point to the importance of investing in training even in times of economic uncertainty as it contributes to improved performance of organisations but

they do stress that some organisations do not perceive much value from training initiatives. This they argue can be related to the quality of the training and essentially the effectiveness of the training. Porter (1990) also argues that there are mitigating factors to be considered in the lack of investment in training, such as poor management, centralised decision making and a disregard for high performers.

Another consideration is the misuse of training and development in organisations where the culture of training was based on the need to spend the training budget because it was there, without a training needs analysis being carried out or organisational strategic objectives being considered.

A comprehensive literature review finds little evidence to dispute the significance of training and development as an essential part of organisational performance. There will be disagreement over the allocation of finance toward the training and development effort however it is rare to find a case against the existence of it at all. Nevertheless an external factor proved hugely influential in this arena recently. The recession has forced organisations to cut costs to remain in business. To further define the research it is important to look at the economic effects of the recession on training and development.

“Ireland's economic crisis is the most serious in its history, and the country's current economic, fiscal and banking problems are among the most acute of any developed nation”. This has been a challenging time for organisations in an environment where “between 2007 and 2009, GDP shrank by nearly 11 per cent. Unemployment rose from 4.6 per cent in 2007 to nearly 15 per cent in 2011” (Roche, 2011, p.32). It has had reverberating effects across the business world.

Previous economic crisis see investments in human capital cut, in particular in training and development (Sheehan, 2012) and (MacKenzie, Garavan and Carbery, 2012). “Training programs are among the first areas to take a hit when the economy falters. Cutting training

willy-nilly can create more problems than it solves” (Shenge, 2014, p.53). Developing human capital can be seen as contributing to competitive advantage, talent management and retention of key members of staff in particular managers is vital for survival/success (McCartney and Teague, 2001, Kennett, 2013). So it would appear that training and development should be an essential part of the organisation’s rationale for survival however it is often considered an unnecessary expense when times are tough.

However there is the argument that those who are spending on training and development are being more prudent and selective thus leading to more efficiency and effectiveness of the training and development efforts. Hence the economic challenges presented to the HR departments of organisations have given rise the opportunity to examine and improve systems “the economic instability of the European region has prompted many organisations to ‘batten down the hatches’ and cut back on spend, and as a result, we are seeing a much more focused wave of innovation in HR. . . . those who are doing it are doing it much more effectively” (CIPD, 2013, p.5) and Paradise and Mosley (2009).

This is an area that warrants further research as it is relative to the researcher’s approach in discovering how creative managers can be with limited resources in essence forcing them to be more effective as outlined by Fitzgerald (2012) “Rather than doing less of the same, the scope for doing things differently needs to be fully explored. The crisis is an opportunity to drive that change” (P.1384).

2 Literature Review

2.1 Literature Introduction

It is important for this research to be framed in context with the literature in this area of study. A comprehensive literature review is conducted to discover the relevant themes and concepts in this field of study. It is essential to look at the concept of training and development and the reasons for it.

Aligning training to the strategic objectives of an organisation is an area to be explored. There is a rise in the use of strategic human resource management (SHRM) and it is viewed as a way to focus training efforts on the strategic vision and goals of an organisation, it looks to include the human resource department as a strategic partner of the organisation. It is vital that employees are aware of an organisation's strategic objectives and are informed of how they contribute to the attainment of these objectives.

Training can be viewed as an instrument for gaining competitive advantage. It is an important driver in maintaining an organisation's competitiveness. Developing human capital in such a way can also increase employee loyalty in difficult times. This effect is not limited to employees as greater customer satisfaction can also be realised.

It is important to understand the effect of the recent recession on the area of training and development within business. Justifying training budgets can invariably be a difficult task particularly in recessionary times and care is needed so as to develop training systems that offer a return on investment and have a positive impact on the organisation. There is a danger that discretionary spending can be exploited if not monitored correctly. The incidents of this may have been more common in boom times however the recession may have presented a real opportunity to be selective and resourceful with training budgets.

It can be argued that training has never been more important than in times of economic uncertainty. Consolidating skills and knowledge is a proactive step in preparation for an

upturn in the economy. However there is increasing pressure on managers to achieve more results with fewer resources. Acting in a manner that can deliver effective training in a creative way is a challenge for managers during the economic upheaval. Conversely some organisations may indeed increase their training efforts where others have had to contract their efforts.

Finally the concept of dealing with the effects of the economic downturn on this area is addressed while taking the area of employee engagement and reward into account.

2.2 Training and Development

Organisations use training and development as a means to develop staff and achieve goals. It is a benefit to both the organisation and the employee. Schüler (2000) cited in Iacob and Andrei (2011, p.132) stated that training and staff development is essential in order to improve business performance and achieve strategic goals. If an organisation is deficient in this area it cannot grow and prosper. Swinney (2007, p.6) defines training as “the process of helping individuals develop skills and knowledge for the purpose of improving or changing their performance”. Training can also be described as a “strategic process in organisations because of the role these activities play in developing employee skills and firm-specific human capital” (Neirotti and Paolucci, 2013, p.93). Organisations can benefit from training by becoming more productive, more competitive, and therefore more profitable as a result. (Becker 1993; Blundell et al. 1999; Lynch 1992 all in Kennett, 2013, p.113).

Building organisational capabilities and capacity is supported by the training and development function as recognised by IBEC (2013), “Training can be formal or informal, external or internal, technical or behavioural; training objectives may be related to productivity, innovation or regulation; training budgets may be stable, shrinking or growing” (IBEC 2013, p.4).

Training and development is promoted by Garavan, Horgan and Cahir-ODonnell (2003, p.17-18) as an important function in the business context as a method of adapting to changing operational environments and as a way to remain competitive. “The impact of the recession was identified as a strong impetus for change in both the public and private sectors” Eurofound (2011), the use of training and development is influential in implementing change management. However Garavan, Horgan and Cahir-ODonnell (2003) stress the importance of effective implementation and the learning culture of an organisation as being significant in the acceptance of training and development. Training is viewed to increase productivity (Becker, 1975; Mincer, 1974 in Lengermann, 1996). Training can be viewed as having two positive effects, increasing productivity “through the development and application of some well-defined competence” and also by initiating “a ‘feel good’ effect which results in increased worker motivation and better performance” (Felstead et al, 2010, p.1678).

Chatzimouratidis, Theotokas and Lagoudis (2012, p.662) and Tannenbaum et al (1991, p.759) also subscribe to the idea that training and development is important for increased motivation, employee morale and job satisfaction in turn resulting in better innovation, increased productivity and higher quality of products and services which ultimately contributes to financial gain for the organisation. There is however an ongoing issue of justifying spend on training and development even pre-recession, Guthrie et al (2009), Sawitri and Muis (2014) all purport this understanding.

Coget (2011, p.85) highlights the resource-based view that an organisation can justify investing in training and development for this very reason. Building on Barney’s VRIN model (1991) Coget argues that organisations have a responsibility to develop and use valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable human resources to gain competitive

advantage. The VRIN model (Appendix 2) developed by Barney (1991) assesses capabilities for their valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable properties. If these criteria are met Barney proposes that an organisation will achieve sustainable competitive advantage but, stating that “a competitive advantage is sustained only if it continues to exist after efforts to duplicate that advantage have ceased” (Barney, 1991, p.102), however he warns that possessing a sustainable competitive advantage does not guarantee it will last forever.

Resources that are valuable allow “a firm to conceive of or implement strategies that improve its efficiency and effectiveness” (Barney, 1991, p.106). Rarity provides an advantage as competitors take longer to react to rare capabilities, “those possessed uniquely by one organisation or by a few others” (Johnson, Scholes and Whittington, 2011, p.90), Barney also suggests managerial talent as a rare resource. Inimitability is where capabilities are hard to replicate, or obtain. Johnson, Scholes and Whittington (2011) suggest competences are the best way to be inimitable, by using processes over product, and human capital and intellectual property. Barney has stated that contextual linking of these competences are important to sustain inimitability as competitors may be able to imitate some resources but not have the capacity to know how to use them effectively. Barney and Wright (1998, p.43) stated that the careful management of resources such as human capital “are most likely to be sources of sustained competitive advantage into the next century”, similarly this development of internal organisational resources such as human capital is supported by Guthrie et al (2009).

However authors such as Brewster (1999) cited in Guthrie et al (2009) warn of generalising this topic and Bryson et al (2005) cited in Guthrie et al (2009) raise questions as to advocating this approach. The reliance on human capital as an asset to an organisation is increasing and needs to be harnessed and managed effectively. The training and development of such assets is a continuous and critical function.

Hutchinson (2013, p.39) looks at training and development as part of the overall performance management field and relates the contemporary view that it must align with organisational strategy and objectives to be effective in today's business environment. This argument is supported by Schuler (1992) who proposes linking the strategic business needs of an organisation to the provision of human resources to meet those needs. Therefore a correlation can be drawn between the resource of human capital and the strategic objective in turn this should lay the foundation for training and development practices. Villachica, Stepich and Rist (2011) warn of the dangers of implementing training without aligning it to strategic goals and propose that it is destined to fail if not aligned correctly.

Barron (2003) agrees that training should be aligned with organisational goals in order to be effective and in a difficult economic climate a culture should exist whereby training supports an organisation's goals. He warns that it is not always possible to achieve this task as all "too often, alignment remains stuck in the talk stage because the learning function isn't brought into strategy making discussions" (Barron, 2003 cited in Green, 2004, p.99). O'Donnell and Garavan (1997) highlight work by Tichy et al (1982) which points to three core elements which an organisation must build on to be effective, "mission and strategy, organization structure and human resource management" (O'Donnell and Garavan, 1997, p.301). Ramona and Anca (2013) concur that human resource departments have an opportunity to utilise their expertise in the formation of organisational strategy, to be involved and proactive in the common goal for organisational success in the implementation of strategic human resource management (SHRM).

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) define SHRM "as an approach to the management of human resources that provides a strategic framework to support long-term business goals and outcomes" (CIPD, 2013). In essence the focus is on longer term

issues and needs of the business, looking forward and developing initiatives to benefit the organisation into the future. It leaves short term goals behind and really drives the organisation forward concentrating on key areas of culture, quality and commitment.

Most individuals feel the need to be involved in something that is greater than themselves, as such the feeling of being part of the organisation and being of value. It is important for staff to understand the strategic vision of the organisation and pull in the same direction thus creating a better sense of being valued and in turn participating in a team that gets results. However, there are difficulties in translating an organisation's strategy in a meaningful way to staff that includes and empowers them.

Nordhaug (2004) cited in Heraty and Collings (2006, p.166) presents the view that organisational competitiveness is built around investment in human resources and as such is contributing to the research into the area of human capital regarding both training and educational factors, Mc Cartney and Teague (2001) subscribe to this concept by stressing the importance of training in gaining competitive advantage but warn of the many organisations who fail to train as a result of operating pressures. Such views support the significant role played by training and development in the survival of an organisation. "Training is one of the activities that gives organisations access to resources, including human resources, material, money and methods, that will allow them to compete successfully in a changing environment, and to plan and design activities to accomplish the perceived goals of the organization" (Krishnaveni and Sripirabaa, 2008 cited in Shenge, 2014, p.50). This view is supported by Towers Perrin (2010) where people are viewed as a source of knowledge and skills and ultimately this can be used to an organisation's competitive advantage.

How an organisation reacts to a recession is a measure of how that organisation will emerge from an economic downturn. Panebianco (2008) points to a concentrated focus on training during a recession as a means to giving an organisation a competitive edge. Developing human capital and updating skills can contribute to greater employee loyalty in addition to increased customer satisfaction and improving quality. Panebianco also advocates continuing training during recessionary times to aid the survival of and strengthening of an organisation.

However Garavan, Horgan and Cahir-ODonnell (2003) point out that training and development can vary greatly in an organisation and may not be ideal in all situations depending on financial or time constraints or lack of knowledge or expertise. In worst case scenarios it is “considered to be an isolated set of activities” (Garavan, Horgan and Cahir-ODonnell , 2003, p.18) which has little or no clear objective, has not been aligned to strategic objectives and has not been evaluated for its contribution to the overall performance of the organisation. Such is the case in many organisations where training and in particular development are seen to be inconsequential to the strategic aims of the organisation.

Swinney (2007) also debates the effectiveness of training and highlights the importance of analysis, design and development coupled with real evaluation of training efforts and states that if it is used for any other reason “training can often become a corporate money pit” (Swinney, 2007, p.9). Prone (2008) also argues the point for more effective training that adds value, “the last decade and a half has seen a growth in utterly pointless training courses and I hope the recession will cause at least some of them to wither and die. These are the kind of training courses which lead to no measurable improvement in performance on the job, because they are glorified talking shops based on ‘A Model’” this is supported by the view that the recession will lead to this type of ineffective and often expensive training being disbanded to the benefit of both employees and organisations (Prone, 2008).

2.3 Economic recession

Ireland is a small trade dependant country that has suffered a historic recession, “Ireland's economic crisis is the most serious in its history, and the country's current economic, fiscal and banking problems are among the most acute of any developed nation” (Roche, 2011, p.32). Since 2008 Ireland has witnessed what is believed to be the most significant economic event since the foundation of the state. McHale, (2012) presents an overview of the Irish economy in his study of developments over the decade 2002-2012. His insight into what he classes a ‘bubble economy’ range from the over inflated property and construction culture to the “faith in efficient markets and the effectiveness of risk management techniques; and the belief in the efficacy of light-touch regulation” (McHale, 2012, p.1226) as contributors to the overall economic crisis in what he describes as a “breakdown of both market and regulatory discipline” (McHale, 2012, p.1234). Fitzgerald (2014) states “the economic crisis that hit Ireland in 2008 stemmed from an uncontrolled real estate bubble” (Fitzgerald, 2014, p.8) in support of McHale (2012).

Likewise the wave of the global economic recession coupled with catastrophic banking crisis added to a massive property crash which “led to an unprecedented contraction in national output and income and to a fiscal crisis, resulting in Ireland having to accept a ‘bail out’ from the European Union (EU) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF)” (Maître, Russell and Whelan, 2014, p.1).

Consequently the knock-on effect on the country was devastating for many with unemployment increasing drastically, house prices tumbling, and austerity measures to adjust to, leaving the economy fighting for survival. An over reliance on the property and construction sectors meant that when the construction sector collapsed it had severe consequences which saw house prices plummet, thousands of construction workers

unemployed and national debt soaring when it had previously been on the decline. The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) state that gross domestic product fell by 10 percent and gross national product fell by over 15 percent with the unemployment rate rising by 10 percentage points between 2007 and 2012 (Fitzgerald, 2014, p.8). The ripple effects of this recession were being felt far and wide with increased taxation, declining wages and reduced working hours being felt by hundreds of thousands of people across the country (Mitre, Russell and Whelan, 2014, p.43).

The natural reaction for organisations was to go into survival mode as threats to their existence took many forms such as “downturns in sales and profitability, the cost and availability of credit, falling share prices, changes in product ranges, and higher price sensitivity on the part of consumers” (Roche et al, 2011, p.15). Budget cuts were implemented and as such the area of training and development was an area that suffered greatly. In recessionary times when organisations need to rely more on their employees, the budgets for training and development are often among the first to be targeted for reduction and in some instances these budgets are decimated. Cairns (2012) points to the significant role the return on investment plays on discretionary spending. So while training and development is considered a valuable function it often fails to demonstrate a clear return on investment. It is a difficulty that faces many managers when lobbying for training expenditure.

Lieber (2009) states that within the HR function, training is often the first to be cut due to the fact that training “can be perceived by high-level executives as “discretionary” and “a good thing to do” but nonessential to their organisations in these challenging financial times” (Lieber, 2009, p.115) but Lieber argues that training has never been more important than in times of economic crisis, Rao (2009) also suggests that cutting spending in training during a

recession is a retrograde measure. A study by the Association for Talent Development (ATD) formally (American Society for Training and Development) and the Institute for Corporate Productivity entitled "Learning in a Down Economy" claims that 38 percent of companies surveyed were placing more emphasis on learning during the current recession. In preparation for the upturn in the economy these companies were aware of the "capabilities they needed to be more competitive, innovative, and customer-focused. And they had processes in place to find, hire, assign, and keep the talent they needed most." (ATD, 2014).

During a recession, many organisations focus on the necessary elements for survival, limiting expenditure, maximising profit and rationalising staffing. All too often organisations overlook the skills level of their employees and how these can be improved to facilitate the survival and growth of the organisation. Chris Sharp, managing director, Capita Learning & Development, said: "The post-recession landscape demands a range of new skills. Yet the UK workforce is critically lacking essential capabilities" he continues to counsel organisations of the perils of ignoring a skills gap "firms have failed to provide the right training through turbulent times and to arm their staff with the skills needed for recovery. There is a real risk that this will leave UK plc exposed when the upturn finally arrives." (Woods, 2010). Training is a key part of any business, and maintaining this during a recession is vital to success as maintaining a quality product or service requires well-trained staff.

It has however been noted that an economic slowdown creates opportunities for organisations to up-skill and gain an advantage over their rivals. This aims to correspond with increasing competition in the marketplace and to prepare organisations for the upturn in the economy (Felstead et al, 2011). So it is encouraging to see organisations recognising the need in the current economic climate to build their competitive advantage by investing in their people as well as keeping staff motivation and morale high. Consolidating employee skills during a

recession means that an organisation is better placed when the economy begins to recover. Staff will be up-to-date with the latest technology, possess the relevant skills and competencies which will enable the organisation to outperform the competition. By improving employee skills during a recession it may be possible to make overall savings. Natural wastage of employees can be absorbed if technology exists for systems to be streamlined; improving retention and succession rates is effective in cost savings. “In a recession, employees are worried about keeping a job. In reality, jobs should be worried about keeping employees” (Brenner, 2009, p.31).

A report commissioned by the Labour Relations Commission in 2011 highlights the effects of the economic recession on the human resource field in Ireland it presents the following argument “recessions in Ireland to date have had more sustained impacts on employment relations through their influence on macro-level developments in institutions and arrangements, than on micro-level engagement between employers, employees and trade unions in firms and workplaces” (Roche et al, 2011, p.5). This would suggest that government decisions and changes in policies affect organisations more than decisions made by management within the organisation.

Roche (2011) has indicated that one of the first victims of the Irish recession was the social partnership model which was disbanded in 2009, adding to an already solemn outlook on the economy. Roche et al, (2011) in a large study conducted in association with the Labour Relations Commission of Ireland entitled ‘Human Resources in the Recession: Managing and Representing People in Work in Ireland’ found that the HR function has had an increasing influence on business decision-making during the recession in Ireland.

As organisations struggle to come to terms with the changing world around them and the ensuing economic effects, they have relied heavily on the HR function to offer guidance and

solutions. Paradise and Mosley (2009) support the idea that the learning department of an organisation should be called upon to offer solutions. One such area that offers assistance is training as Phillips (2009, p.7) states the recession could indeed be an opportunity for HR to improve and streamline the provision of training. Placing more emphasis on the quality of training provided, thus forcing managers to be being more selective and demanding in the training policies and procedures chosen.

But failure to train in a challenging economic climate can be damaging to the organisation. The Irish Business and Employer's Confederation (IBEC) have found that "research in 2007 shows that companies that don't train are two and a half times more likely to fail than those that do" and the research also highlights the importance of training in light of economic difficulties citing that "more than ever we need people who are developed, trained, committed, motivated, innovative and driven in what they do" (IBEC, 2010). This suggests that organisations should support the training effort even in tough times. Skillnets point to the importance of being prepared for an improvement in the economy and operating environment encouraging organisations "to operate in a manner which copes with current circumstances whilst being ready to exploit the opportunities that will ensue from an upturn" (Skillnets, 2012, p.7).

Weick, (2014) in writing about economic recovery in America has expressed the fundamental importance of training for the right jobs and believes the onus is very much placed on organisations to be adaptive and nimble in order to survive. There is now more than ever a greater emphasis being placed on adding value and developing competencies like "the practices of agility, adaptability, flexibility, innovation, coordination, cooperation, mobilization, and trust are critical" (Majer and Bell, 2011, p.64). The recession has forced organisations to be accountable and masters of their own destiny.

Organisations need to be prepared to do more than just survive the recession “if survival strategies buy time, they are not likely to foster sustainable competitive advantage” (Reeves and Deimler, 2009, p.11). According to Reeves and Deimler (2009) an organisation should install a range of short- to medium-term strategies to pull the organisation out of recession and ensure competitive advantage and it is equally important to think ahead and be prepared for the new operating environment by ensuring they “institutionalise the lessons learned during the downturn” (Reeves and Deimler, 2009, p.10). Seeking new opportunities from an uncertain environment, being innovative and offering a differentiated stance are all promoted by Carrigan, (2010) and Ahmed, (2009). “Approached positively, organizations can do more than passively survive this recession; they can re-evaluate their operations, pinpoint where they deliver value, and identify the knowledge, skills and abilities required” (Ahmed, 2009, p.4). Kim and Polyhart, (2014) suggest that organisations that invested in training pre-recession and during the recession should witness a faster recovery from the dramatic effects of the recession.

2.4 Effective training and development

“As the demand for skilled workers continues to increase, training and development will be increasingly important. Having the right people in the right place at the right time makes employee retention, engagement, and satisfaction key business results” Cairns (2012, p.26). Pressure to do more with fewer resources is a challenging prospect for management. Revealing the justification for investing in training and development is also critical. This topic is raised by a report by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) in 2013 “the question is highly pertinent because the economic justification for employers and individuals to invest in training has come under the spotlight as the budgets of government, employers and individuals have tightened” (UKCES, 2013, p.1).

Evaluating the effectiveness of training efforts is significantly more important as organisations will look to match training directly to business needs. Shenge (2014) builds on the work of Kirkpatrick (1959, 1998) and Gibbons (2004) in highlighting the importance of evaluating training. Gibbons states that “most organizations do not thoroughly evaluate training and development events and that most line managers are not actively involved in the process of evaluating training and development activities” (Gibbons, 2004 cited in Shenge, 2014, p.56). Measuring the effectiveness of training efforts is equally important particularly where it is aligned with specific business goals. “Effectiveness can be measured in monetary or non-monetary terms. However it’s measured, it is important that the criteria by which the training is judged reflects the needs that the training was designed to address” (Shenge, 2014, p.53).

The report by UKCES also raises the interesting notion that there are organisations that despite economic pressures are in fact increasing their investment in training and development. “Given the hiring and firing costs involved, these employers may choose to ‘hoard’ labour – especially skilled and highly trained staff – rather than make workers redundant, in the expectation they will soon be needed as business picks up” (UKCES, 2013, p.4). This could be considered a shrewd strategic move for those organisations that are in a position to do this as they will remain competitive and will adapt more swiftly to environmental changes. Retention and succession are important areas to be considered during difficult times.

Another interesting finding from this report is that “a widespread response to the recession by our respondents has been tightly to focus training on proven business needs” (UKCES, 2013,

p.68). This echoes previous statements promoting the effective alignment of training and development with strategic objectives of the organisation.

Phillips, (2009) has drawn on research from The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) to propose how organisations are being more creative with training in light of economic pressures. “More firms are doing everything themselves or learning from external people and applying that in their organisation, they're being more savvy” (McCartney 2009 cited in Phillips, 2009, p.7). The increase of online training is explored and 48% of employers are making better use of line manager coaching with 70% still viewing training as a high priority (CIPD, in Phillips, 2009, p.7). The publication HR Focus (New York) conducted a survey which sought to establish the status of training investment and which training activities were performing well since the recession had begun. “Among the respondents to our survey, there has been an increase in in-house training by internal trainers or other employees” (HR Focus, 2009, p.2). The benefits of internal training are supported by an IBEC management survey in 2013 which reported an average of 60% of training among respondents was being conducted internally (IBEC, 2013, p.10). Thinking creatively and being proactive is supported by Carrigan (2010) as “the current economic chaos will offer organisations opportunities to think innovatively about the future, and will allow for businesses to differentiate themselves from the competition” (Carrigan, 2010, p.103).

There is a great requirement to better understand and appraise the quality of training efforts. “Quality indicators include measures of the usefulness of training in: raising skill levels; helping to improve work practices; raising pay once training is complete; and increasing well-being at work” (Felstead et al, 2010, p.1668). However, Felstead et al point to a lack of survey evidence in these areas. “Nevertheless, our interviews suggest that employers

maintained 'must have' training by shifting towards a more in-house mode of delivery that is less dependent on external trainers and more cost effective” (Felstead et al, 2011, p.27).

2.5 Reward and employee engagement

Training can be a nonfinancial reward and this is often witnessed during a recession when organisations have limited financial resources. Sammer (2011) presents the view that there is more emphasis on nonfinancial rewards when an organisation faces difficult economic times while also promoting perceptions of the overall fairness and contributing to better engagement. Sholihin and Pike (2013) support this argument by referring to the work of Leventhal (1980) in the use of nonfinancial performance measures as a means to be more consistent with procedural fairness.

Lee and Bruvold (2003) and Barclay and Barclay (2011) share the view that investing in employee development creates a value mechanism for employees, “a value that results in positive attitudes and behaviours through which final business outcomes are affected” (Lee and Bruvold 2003 cited in Glaveli and Karassavidou, 2011, p.2897). Therefore the aspect of training as reward for employees can translate into beneficial results for the organisation in addition to increasing motivation and engagement.

Studies show that employee engagement is an important factor in successful organisations (Gallup, 2010). Kahn (1990, p.694) defined personal engagement as “the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances”. Employee engagement can be influential in an organisation’s financial performance and employee engagement is “the degree to which an individual is attentive and absorbed in the performance of their roles” (Saks, 2006, p. 602).

Prior studies have found that managers' internal communication with their employees motivates their subordinates to provide superior service to customers (Lowenstein, 2006). Employees' knowledge and skills about both their jobs and the organisation provide them with the opportunity to become organisational advocates with the customers, who in turn can enhance the firm's reputation (Gronstedt, 2000). Internal communication enhances a number of important bottom line outcomes for the organisation including increased productivity and profitability (Gallup, 2012). Internal communication can effectively boost productivity by streamlining organisational roles and tasks (Benner & Tushman, 2003 cited in Mishra 2014, p.184). It is critical to keep the communication channels open and inform employees of the organisations place in the market and its strategic focus "is considered indispensable to maintaining employee commitment and engagement when adjusting to adverse times" (Roche et al, 2011, p.7).

The engagement gap poses a potential risk for employers because of the strong association between employee engagement and an organisation's financial performance. The more engaged a workforce is the better placed an organisation is to perform on a variety of key financial indicators. Thus, organisations that fail to engage their employees may fall behind in the race to secure talent in a tough market. Not to mention the detrimental effect on the customer base and existing or potential investors. Towers Perrin (2010) suggest "that organisational attributes like leadership, career and professional development, and the kind of work culture and reputation a company creates play a significant role in shaping employees' level of engagement and behaviour" Towers Perrin (2010, p.2). Lipman (2012) concurs that the issue of employee engagement is important as employees who are engaged are more productive and have a stronger commitment to the organisation thus aiding retention and reducing recruitment costs.

Sonnetag (2011) and Rurkkhum and Bartlett (2012) in Kataria, (2013) point to the positive

links between employee engagement and productivity, staff retention and growth among benefits. For example Coca Cola Ireland attributes a serious attitude towards training and development as an integral part of employee engagement within the organisation. “To attract and retain the best people, we recognise that we need to invest in their development. . . . Our success depends on motivated and committed employees” (Coca Cola Ireland, 2014).

Retention of key employees is important for organisations in the bid to keep talent within the organisation as supported by Cairns (2012). A survey carried out by IBEC in 2013 reported that 9% of respondents see retention of talent as their number one people management priority, with employee skills development standing at 11% (IBEC, 2013, P.8). There is a recognisable need to link the training and development of employees to the retention effort. Managers are facing this issue at a time when they are under increased pressure to perform and achieve results.

The CIPD (2013) presents succession planning as a process for managers to identify potential future leaders and consequently develop this talent. It also aids the fulfilment of other “business-critical positions” (CIPD, 2013) by identifying relevant successors to these roles.

2.6 Literature Conclusion

The aim of the literature review is to assess the existing work in the field of training and development with respect to the recession and in particular to the challenges faced by managers. It has presented many relevant studies and publications in this particular field from across the globe however there is limited work in an Irish context. Roche, and Garavan are the predominant writers in human resources in Ireland. There is limited current research into the effects of the recession in Ireland with direct linkage to training and development. The literature reviewed indicates several themes that arise that could be significant factors

perceived by senior managers when considering the impacts of the recession on training and development.

The major themes which can be derived from the literature review are:

- The importance of aligning training efforts with business objectives and strategy.
- Being more creative in a training capacity with fewer resources.
- Viewing employee engagement as an important component of productivity and the role training and development plays in this.
- Issues of retention and succession to be addressed by organisations.

2.6.1 Research Gap

There is a need to appreciate the perspective of managers in Ireland specifically in relation to training and development and how they have dealt with the consequences of recession.

2.6.2 Research objective

The main objective of the research is to carry out an investigation into how senior managers have viewed the impact of the recession in relation to training and development.

2.6.3 Research Questions

To achieve the research objectives listed above, the researcher has to answer the following research question;

How has the recession in Ireland impacted on how senior managers view training and development?

Sub questions:

- Do managers cease, reduce or increase training as a result of the recession?
- Is there now more focus on using training to fulfill short-term goals?
- To what extent has the focus on personal and professional development diminished?
- To what extent has the recession generated more creative ways of meeting training and development needs?

3 Research methods and methodology

3.1 Introduction

Saunders et al (2009, P.5) define research as “something that people undertake to find out things in a systematic way, thereby increasing their knowledge”. Drew, (cited in Bell, 2005, p.2) states that “research is conducted to solve problems and expand knowledge”. Therefore it is important to follow a process in the attempt to discover such knowledge. The research process is a way to develop ideas progressively towards a conclusion; the process begins by identifying a research problem, reviewing relevant literature, formulating a research design, gathering data, and finally analysis and reporting of the findings. Research methodology is “essentially a decision-making process” (Brannick and Roche, 1997, p.3). Research in the business field can be said to have a dual purpose, academic and practical (Fisher, 2004, p.34).

This chapter will explore the research methodology employed by the researcher and covers topics related to the research methods implemented by the researcher.

3.2 Research Design

It is very important to have a solid research design in order to carry out quality research. A solid research design will result in better data collection and higher validity and reliability. Saunders et al (2009, p.138) present the ‘research onion’ as a format for design (Appendix 3). The researcher has used this model to design the research as outlined in the researcher’s own research chain in figure 1 below.



Figure 1 Researcher's Own Research Chain

3.3 Research Philosophy

Research philosophy can determine the way in which the researcher views the world. Saunders and Lewis (2012) recommend that researchers in the field of business need to be aware of their chosen philosophy as it can impact on the way the research is conducted.

The research philosophy chosen by the researcher is interpretivism. This philosophy “advocates that it is necessary for the researcher to understand the differences between humans in our role as social actors” (Saunders et al, 2009, p. 116). This approach has developed from phenomenology and symbolic interactionism, where humans strive to make sense of the world around them while also continually interpreting the social world by understanding the actions of others and the effect it has.

Fisher, (2004, p.43) states that interpretative researchers “are often participants in the process they are studying”. Working in a grounded approach by allowing theories to evolve from the research or from a perspective where using theory and models help the researcher to understand what they have discovered. The work of Weick (1996) is significant in interpreting the findings of research using the concept of enactment, it forms “the process of making sense from equivocal information by selecting and editing information through discussion and interaction with others” Weick (1996, cited in Fisher, 2004, p.45).

Throughout the literature it is believed that there is a fundamental difference between research in the natural and social sciences. In studying the social sciences like business it is thought that the methods used for natural science are not appropriate as they build on theory and concepts rather than making sense of and understanding the surrounding world. The interpretive perspective enables the researchers to focus on people and concepts, “with an emphasis on meanings and interpretations rather than behaviour” (Craighead et al, 2007, p.27). Therefore the researcher is also very much a part of the research process.

Positivism was rejected as it portrays an external and objective view that is independent of those around the researcher. As the researcher is remaining subjective, realism is also not suitable as it “exists independently of human thoughts” Saunders et al (2009, p.119). Realism was also rejected for its relationship towards scientific investigation.

The researcher is trying to discover how the recent effects of recession in Ireland have impacted and effected managers in relation to training and development. To achieve this objective the researcher is dependent on understanding the experiences and knowledge provided through interviews conducted with senior managers. This is in line with the interpretivist approach and as the researcher is conducting a study of a business problem in a business context, interpretivism is therefore considered to be a reasonable choice of philosophy.

3.4 Research Approach

An inductive approach to research gains insight into the context of the chosen research and involves the collection of qualitative data. It allows the researcher to be a part of the research. Inductive analysis has a long history which pre-dates deductive approaches according to Thorpe and Holt (2008, p.112).

According to Saunders et al (2009, p. 593) the inductive approach involves “the development of a theory as a result of the observation of empirical data”. It has been suggested that inductive reasoning can be viewed as a grounded approach due to the features of the theory that arises from the research process (Saunders et al, 2009). As the research builds through the inductive approach it is appropriate to form theories that are grounded in the data gathered. In contrast to a deductive approach to research “the logical ordering of induction is the reverse of deduction as it involves moving from the ‘plane’ of observation of the empirical world to the construction of explanations and theories about what has been observed” (Gill and Johnson, 2002, p. 40).

The inductive approach sees research developing in a path from an empirical to theoretical stance as opposed to a theory based approach in deductive research (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008, p.22). It concentrates on the idea that theories can evolve through the research process as such the theory is resultant of the empirical research.

Mintzberg (1973) is an advocate of inductive research “it is discovery that attracts me to this business, not the checking out of what we already know” (Mintzberg, 1973, cited in Brannick and Roche, 1997, p.3). Inductive research is also more suited to qualitative data collection and is more flexible allowing for changes as the research evolves. “Inductive reasoning, as opposed to deductive reasoning, is common in qualitative research, along with content or holistic analysis in place of statistical analysis” (Tucker et al, 1995, p.386).

The researcher subscribes to the inductive approach for these reasons. Taking a deductive approach to research includes the testing of a theory unlike induction where theory is developed through the analysis of data. Using a deductive approach would not be a suitable approach for the researcher in this case as it is highly structured and focuses on quantitative data (Saunders et al, 2009, p.127).

3.4.1 Research choice

When choosing qualitative research it is important to note one of the main advantages of this approach “it is more open to the adjusting and refining of research ideas as an inquiry proceeds” (Tucker et al, 1995, p.386). Locke (2007 cited in Klag and Langley, 2013, p.155) alludes to the “‘irrational free play’ dimensions of discovery”, Locke is referring to the “unexpected connections that may arise when the mind is allowed to wander and explore meanings more creatively.” (Locke, 2007, cited in Klag and Langley, 2013, p.155). While Miles and Huberman (1984) advocate the data retrieved through qualitative research for the reasons stated below:

- Well-grounded, rich descriptions and explanations;
- Preservations of time flows, chronologies, causality;
- Serendipitous findings for new theory construction; and
- A quality of "undeniability."

(Miles and Huberman, 1984, cited in Tucker et al 1995, p.386-388).

According to Yin (1984), “qualitative methods assist researchers who desire to understand complex social phenomena” (in Tucker 1995, p.385). A qualitative approach is appropriate for comprehending the elementary basis of a particular research topic before drawing theoretical conclusions. It is through close contact with the research subjects that this

knowledge can emerge, and this gives the researcher an opportunity to really understand their thoughts, opinions and experiences of the topic under research.

Qualitative research is acceptable to the researcher in this instance as it “helps researchers understand people and their behaviour in a social, cultural and economic context” (Hazzan and Nutov, 2014, p.1).

3.5 Research Strategy

The researcher is using the grounded theory approach. “A grounded theory is one that is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to a particular phenomenon” (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, cited in Lawrence and Tar, 2013, p.30). The use of grounded theory can be of particular attraction to a researcher conducting qualitative research for the first time. (Lawrence and Tar, 2013, p.30).

Eriksson and Kovalainen, (2008) suggest its merits as it has gained a footing in business research in particular. Grounded theory also appreciates the development of theory throughout the entire research process. “It is important to keep in mind that theory, i.e. the aim, is not universal law-like product, but more a result of a procedure where rules guide the search for meaning and understanding in the production of theory” (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008, p.159). Duchscher and Morgan (2004) agree that in applying grounded theory the researcher must remain “faithful to the reality of the research area; makes sense to the persons studied; fits the template of the social situation being studied, regardless of the varying contexts related to the studied phenomenon” (Duchscher and Morgan, 2004, p. 611).

Grounded theory reflects an approach whereby a theoretical framework is established through the collection of data which is then tested to verify the results. It is considered as the best example of the inductive approach (Saunders et al, 2009, p. 148).

3.6 Time Horizons

3.6.1 Time Horizon: Cross-Sectional

The primary purpose of this study is to complete a Master's in Business Administration (MBA) which is time constrained therefore cross-sectional time horizon is the most appropriate option available. The major advantage of cross-sectional research is that data can be collected in a relatively short-period of time however a disadvantage of carrying out cross-sectional research is that it is difficult to establish time order. It is impossible to measure changes that are occurring in the participants over time (Saunders, et al., 2009, p. 155).

3.7 Data Collection and Data Analysis

3.7.1 Secondary research

Secondary research included a literature review which helped the researcher to establish the available body of knowledge in the area which is training and development during recessionary times. The literature review is an important and essential part of every research study.

3.7.2 Primary research

Data can be collected by two methods, qualitative and quantitative measures. The researcher will collect data using qualitative methods by conducting interviews. Semi-structured interviews were employed; these interviews were predominantly conducted face to face. However the researcher had to conduct one interview by telephone. The researcher was aware of the limitations in using interviews as a data collection method and the effort it requires to analyse the data gathered from interviews. The researcher used this approach because

interviews uncover a greater depth of insight than, for example, focus groups or questionnaires.

The researcher has chosen this method in agreement with the view proposed by Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) that interviews are useful in business research as they offer a practical way to gather information that is not necessarily available in literature. Interviews are also considered for the insight gained into how experience and personal knowledge is related to the researcher's topic. According to Behringer (2006, cited in Lamb, 2013, p.36) the appeal of conducting interviews is that they "are capable of producing rich, detailed information about the meaningful dimensions of lived experience" and interviews are also "discursive and allows the researcher and respondent latitude to explore an issue within the framework of guided conversation" (Prairie Research Associates, 2014, p.1).

This is particularly significant to the researcher in collecting data. The researcher conducted five qualitative interviews, with Senior Management in Ireland. Boyce and Neale (2006) argue that interviews are suitable for establishing the perspectives of a small number of respondents. One of the prominent advantages of interviews is the provision of more detailed information than that provided by alternative data collection methods. It has also been suggested that interviews "may provide a more relaxed atmosphere in which to collect information" (Boyce and Neale, 2006, p.3).

Approaching interviews from an interpretivist angle suggests using small samples and an unstructured format (Fisher, 2004, p.54). This method is more narrative and informal than the positivist structured interview method of having predesigned questions and rigidly adhering to this format. Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008, p. 83) propose several advantages to the unstructured interview, they are individual, contextual and can be viewed as relevant to the interviewee as well as the interviewer. It also throws up unexpected insights and revelations

however the analysis of interviews is time consuming and this is taken into consideration by the researcher.

Practical issues of objectivity, access and ethical issues are also a consideration in using this form of data collection. It is essential to have a contingency plan in place in case potential interviewees cancel or are unavailable due to holidays, illness or previous work commitments.

3.7.3 Selecting Respondents

Fisher (2004, p.142) suggests purposeful sampling to aid the identification of the relevant people to interview who can provide the researcher with the answers they are looking for. Saunders and Lewis (2012) explain purposeful sampling as a method in which the researcher uses their own judgement to select the sample “based on a range of possible reasons and premises” (Saunders and Lewis, 2012, p.138). The sample for this research is senior managers within Irish business (private sector). The samples are drawn from the following industries: Telecoms, Manufacturing (food and building materials) and Management Software Provision.

These samples were chosen for their experience in dealing directly with the effects of the recent recession and their knowledge and capabilities in providing information. Each senior manager had their own vast level of experience for example one had been a CEO for over twenty years, another had witnessed their organisation transition many times to react to market conditions. One manager had begun his career with the organisation as an accountant fresh out of college and worked up to a position on the board of directors. Another manager is part of an organisation experiencing huge growth and offers a different perspective to the recession. Between them they all have a wealth of specific experiences to draw upon from

knowledge of previous recessions, change management, international strategy, people planning and difficult decision making.

The sample population were contacted by email and telephone initially for approval and consent to interview. It was important to build trust and form a good working relationship with the respondents from the outset.

3.7.4 Data Analysis Procedures

In their reference to the process of analysing qualitative data Saunders et al (2009, p.482) state “the data that you have collected will probably need to be condensed (summarised), grouped (categorised) or restructured as a narrative to support meaningful analysis.” It is critical that the data collected is analysed correctly and carefully so as to truly represent the findings and not succumb to an impressionistic view of events. The steps in figure 2 below are taken as advised by Saunders et al, (2009).

Data Analysis Process
Transcribing data
Summarising data
Categorising data
Unitising data
Recognising relationships
Forming categories
Narrative building

Figure 2 Data Analysis

Qualitative data has a “diverse nature” (Saunders et al, 2008, p.490) and as such requires careful analysis to extract the key information. The analysis commences with the transcribing

of interviews, all interviews were recorded with prior consent from the respondents. All recordings of the interviews are then transcribed. Transcribing is a time consuming process but an essential part of the process. This activity results in large quantities of text being produced and it is therefore necessary to summarise this data. Summarising is principally “condensing the meaning of large amounts of text into fewer words” (Saunders et al, 2009, p.491).

The aim and objectives of the research are central to the formation of categories. “Categories are in effect codes or labels you use to group your data” (Saunders et al, 2009, p.492). Progressing through this stage allows the researcher the ability to recognise connections within these categories. The researcher examines the text for patterns of meaning and areas of potential interest in the data and this may even begin during the data collection phase. The researcher must pay close attention to the fine details of the transcripts to garner the most valuable information and to ensure the appropriate information is allocated to the corresponding categories. From here the researcher can build a narrative with a comprehensive discussion.

3.8 Validity and reliability

Validity is an important issue when conducting qualitative research and means “the extent to which the data is plausible, credible and trustworthy; and thus can be defended when challenged” (Muhammad et al, 2008, p.35). Saunders and Lewis (2012) also draw attention to the existence of external validity, the extent to which a researcher’s conclusions can be generalised. Validity is a critical component in realising rigor in qualitative research.

Reliability as viewed by Stenbacka, (2001, in Muhammad et al, 2008, p.39) is the “purpose of explaining” and “generating understanding” in the qualitative approach to research. Saunders and Lewis (2012) stress the element of consistency in the pursuit of reliability in research.

The researcher is responsible for the presence of reliability and validity by “implementing verification strategies integral and self-correcting during the conduct of inquiry itself” (Muhammad et al, 2008, p.35).

3.9 Research Ethics

According to Saunders et al (2009, p.183-184) ethics can refer to the level of appropriateness in behaviour of the researcher regarding the rights of those who become the target of research or are indeed affected by the research. As such a researcher has a responsibility to abide by ethical standards.

Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008, p.63) state that “the ethical principles, such as informed consent, the avoidance of deception, harm or risk and Kant’s universal principle of respect and treating others always as ends and never as means.....govern all research activities, irrespective of the researcher’s own approach to knowledge production.” They also point to ethical concerns beyond ‘entering the field’ (Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008, p.65) and point to the ethical dimension surrounding the researcher-participant relationship in so far as the flow of information, consent and confidentiality with particular inference to qualitative research.

Meloy (2008) warns of ethical issues that arise during qualitative research such as anonymity and confidentiality. Ethics must be foremost on the researcher’s agenda when establishing contact with interviewees and while conducting research. The researcher ensured that all respondents were aware of the aims of the research and the nature of the study being carried out and consent to proceed was acquired. All interviews were recorded with consent from the respondents. Security clearance forms were completed and signed for each interview (Appendix 4). It is critical that the researcher treats the data gathered in an ethical manner due to confidentiality and data protection.

3.10 Limitations of Methodology

The competency of the researcher to carry out interviews is important in order to deal with issues relating to difficult participants during the course of the interview process. It is possible that interviewees will give monosyllabic answers, wander off topic or be critical of the questions being asked. It is important to be aware of the possibility of these situations arising and be prepared and practised in dealing with them. Face to face interviews were carried out in all but one case where one telephone interview was necessary.

Time is another limiting factor. The research period of three months limits the researcher's scope to interview candidates and it was vital to make efficient use of the time available. The depth of information provided can vary depending on the time constraints of the senior managers and their availability to interview. The researcher found all respondents to be generous with their time and the information provided.

Also, interviewees needed to be made aware of the level of input needed from them, it was important to understand how long the interview could take therefore not underestimating the time involved. Care was needed in scheduling the interview to allow time to travel to and from locations and to prepare notes and write up recordings. The structure of the questions is essential as the researcher needs to be efficient with the time allowed to attain the most relevant information out of the interview in the allotted time.

The quality of the data collected can be a concern. Saunders et al (2009, p. 326) outline the following issues: reliability, forms of bias and validity and generalizability. The main area of concern is interviewer bias in both the collection and interpretation of the data. Care is needed to keep bias at bay and to remain impartial to the findings.

Another consideration for the researcher was travel costs involved in conducting interviews. The researcher had access to a car but used public transport where appropriate. Also while arranging interviews it was necessary to consider the fact that interviewees may prefer to be interviewed outside of business hours and in a location that is not their place of work so choosing safe, appropriate and accessible locations for interviews was vital.

4 Data analysis and findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis and findings from the primary data secured through qualitative interviews conducted with senior managers. The researcher aims to summarise and present the findings of this research.

Five in-depth interviews were conducted in this phase of the research. The researcher interviewed five senior managers from various industries in the private sector of Irish business: Information and communications Technology (ICT), Food manufacturing, Building materials manufacturing, and Business management software.

Each respondent was asked eighteen questions (Appendix 5) concerning training and development and the effects of the recession in this area. When the researcher felt the need for clarification additional questions were asked. The average time of each individual interview was approximately forty minutes. Each interview was recorded and then transcribed into individual word documents (Appendices 6-10). The use of a recording device is prudent as it can ensure that the researcher does not overlook any insights from the discussion which may be lost if note taking alone were relied upon.

Key findings from the analysed data are presented at the end of the chapter; these findings are then discussed in Chapter 5.

For the purposes of the analysis the researcher has referenced the responses of respondents as:

Respondents 1 to 5.

Respondent 1 is the Country Manager of an international telecommunications company with over twenty years management experience within the information and communications technology sector.

Respondent 2 is the Staff Facilities Manager for a large snack food manufacturer and has over fifteen years' experience with this organisation seeing it grow dramatically over the years.

Respondent 3 is a former CEO of a management software provider with over twenty years management experience. Respondent 3 also runs a consultancy firm.

Respondent 4 is the Managing Director of a building materials manufacturer with almost twenty years' experience with this organisation.

Respondent 5 is the Vice President of People Operations at an information and telecommunications company with eight years' experience in people management.

4.2 Analysis of Qualitative research

1. What are the key drivers for training in your organisation?

Respondents 1 and 2 spoke of the need to maximise efficiency and focus on what is essential to see a return on investment whilst looking to achieve medium term operational objectives.

Respondent 4 pointed to the importance of having the right skills and knowledge to achieve the organisational strategy and objectives. Respondent 5 presented three drivers for training, up-skilling, talent development and retention.

However respondent 3 stated the focus for his organisation's training is on people development,

"You need to grow people in order to grow the business".

He also stated that,

"If you don't train people the company grows at a pace that is faster than the ability of the people (staff) to keep up with it".

2. Is the training focus on short term or long term objectives or both?

Respondents 2 and 3 stated that training is focused on long term objectives.

With respondent 1 stating that,

“I would only think short term if there was a real business need but that is poor planning from a strategic perspective”.

Respondents 1, 4 and 5 said the focus is a mixture of both short term and long term objectives. Respondent 4 stated that,

“If you are investing in training you have a long term view but there are clearly short term and medium term benefits”.

3. Has the focus of training goals shifted in light of recession?

All respondents agreed that the focus of training goals has shifted in light of the recession. Respondents 1 and 4 refer to dealing with tighter budgets and the pressures that come with cuts in training expenditure.

Respondent 2 explains that there is a big difference in training goals with a focus on

“Training to get more out of staff”.

Respondent 3 states that,

“We had to focus on what training we wanted to do and how that would play out in benefits to our customers”.

Respondent 5 was in a unique position in that while the focus of training goals have shifted it has had nothing to do with the recession, the organisation is in the growth phase of the business life cycle and despite the recession is experiencing rapid growth,

“Our training goals have shifted but it has nothing to do with the recession it is to do with the individual cycle within the organisation”.

Respondent 5 also highlighted the increased buy in from management in the organisation towards training that had not previously been the case in the organisation.

4. Do you carry out training needs analysis?

All respondents except respondent 1 carry out training needs analysis. Respondent 1 would like to see it done on a continual basis but states that it is not done. It is common for issues of training needs to arise during the appraisal process. Respondent 3 recounts how during the appraisal process he looks at people's development and attempts to seek out the gaps. Respondent 4 looks at the strengths and weaknesses and what can be improved upon. He also describes a new training initiative that came about as part of the appraisal process,

"We devised a multi-dimensional training where staff from different departments train together".

Respondent 5 carries out training needs analysis at a very high management level but also places some of the responsibility on employees,

"We encourage staff to identify their own developmental needs; the employee is equally culpable for it. It is actually in our employee handbook".

5. Do you consider personal and professional development important?

All respondents agreed that personal and professional development is important.

Respondent 1 states,

"You never stop learning"

Respondent 4 describes how personal and professional development is part of an overall five year strategic plan which includes succession planning. Respondent 1, 3 and 5 refer to the expected participation of staff in personal and professional development and how important the aspect of 'buy in' is from both sides for it to be effective.

Respondent 5 gives an example from their organisation,

“We encourage staff to identify their own developmental needs; the employee is equally culpable for it. It is actually in our employee handbook”.

Respondent 5 also states the importance of personal and professional development in their specific industry,

“I mean you can have the world’s best developer but they can’t communicate with people so you have to develop this”.

6. Has personal and professional development suffered as a result of the recession?

All respondents except respondents 3 and 5 said that personal and professional development has suffered, citing cuts in expenditure and a lack of vision and focus as the reasons.

Respondent 3 however saw a slight cut in budget but found that he was more focused and looked to find more value for less stating,

“I don’t think it suffered, it was probably more valued, and people found themselves in a very fragile economy, jobs were very fragile so people valued what they had in a job more so than ever before”.

Respondent 5 notes that due to the growth in their organisation the area of personal and professional development hasn’t suffered.

7. How has the recession affected training budgets?

All respondents except respondent 5 claim that training budgets were cut but with varying degrees of severity.

Respondent 1, *“You can imagine every budget is squeezed and obviously they have cut the training budget”*

Respondent 2, *“When recession hit there was no training it was put on the back burner”.*

Respondent 3, *“Ours would have been decreased but it was not decimated. Every expense line on the P&L got cut”.*

Respondent 4, *“We clamped the overhead spending in all divisions. We reduced overhead spend dramatically”*.

Respondent 5, *“what has affected our training budgets is the individual mind-set of the organisation, our budgets have increased because there is far greater buy in from senior managers”*.

8. Have training efforts increased or decreased?

While all respondents except respondent 5 recorded decreases in training spend when the recession hit however some have witnessed an increase in training currently.

Respondent 4 argues that while the expenditure on training fell they used internal training to fill the gap created so there was very little change in the amount of training provided.

Respondent 1 also points to positive growth in training in more recent times,

“So at this time of year when I look at my budget and realise I have a little headroom coming closer to the end of the year I could be in a position to spend some more money on training. It is defiantly more positive than in recent year”.

Respondent 2 reveals that their organisation is actually doing more training now than it did pre-recession, an interesting finding.

Respondent 3 presents the view that larger companies have an advantage over smaller companies in being able to hold onto training efforts during the recession,

“When the recession hit we did not react in a knee jerk reaction and larger companies like us can do this they can take a strategic approach to the recession they have the correct level of skills competencies at a leadership level to deal with it”.

9. Why have training efforts increased or decreased?

Cuts in training budgets were the predominant reason for witnessing any decrease in training.

Respondent 4,

“We had to cut overheads across the board. It is as simple as that”.

Respondent 1 pointed to a lack of focus and interest,

“It does in a way go back to people not putting themselves forward because they feel it wasn’t worth their while”.

Respondent 2 stated time as another issue; production was the focus so having staff away for any length of time was an issue.

Respondent 3 presents the outlook that their customers were the most important thing to them in the recession and training was heavily focused here,

“The most important thing for us was that when we came out of recession was that our customers to say ‘that during the recession the customer support from our company didn’t diminish in any way in fact it improved’ and that was our sole objective we only had one and that was why we did all that training with the customer support teams”.

Respondent 5 relates back to the shift in mind-set by senior management including the CEO in relation to training.

10. What has been the main focus of the organisation post-recession (growth, restructure, survival, market leader) How has this affected training?

The overriding focus for these respondents was growth and revenue generation. This has brought change to some of the organisations; one had seen two plants amalgamate into one, while another has launched new products. The effects on training have been,

Respondent 2,

“A lot more training is being done. Nobody starts a job now without being trained and properly inducted”

Respondent 4,

“With new products we have had to recruit new staff and that has brought a whole host of training. We also do contractor training we have a training academy for contractors to train them on all our products across the range”.

Respondent 3,

“The focus was not to get new customers and it was all about maintaining these customers and extracting more value from them and this is where we executed our training strategy for customer service. This was a business plan we had put in place in 2008 and customer service training had been built into the strategy and it has paid dividends five years later”.

11. For staff that have taken on more responsibilities in their roles, have they been supported with additional training?

All respondents agreed that training is given to staff who take on more responsibility or if the staff member is promoted. Respondent 5 outlines how training can support staff who have taken on more responsibility through promotion,

“It is all part of the deal giving them support mechanisms to do their role”.

Examples are given of how detrimental it can be if training is not given.

Respondent 1,

“Unfortunately we have anecdotal evidence of this where people have been put into roles where they are given a pen and paper and told to log on and it hasn't work. We had people asked to use applications and they have done their best and invariably they get through it but then you have a disgruntled employee who has worked very hard and not been respected”.

Respondent 3,

“If you don't give people the skills and competencies to do the job you are just setting them up for failure and you could end up losing a very diligent hardworking staff member”.

12. When recruiting is there more emphasis on hiring experienced professionals for specific roles (rather than train up for role)?

Respondents believe it very much depends on the role and agree that for a sales position in particular experience is very important. Two respondents raise the issue of culture and fit as very important factors for their organisations. Respondent 5 states how important succession is through promoting from within.

Respondent 3,

“The overwhelming recruitment factor is ‘fit’ you could have the most qualified successful salesperson but if they don’t fit then it doesn’t work”.

Respondent 4,

“If you are talking about customer service or production, you would be looking for the right personality, attitude and someone who will show initiative there isn’t a great need to have huge experience but in a way it is better to be able to mould them into the culture it works very well”.

Respondent 2 also feels that training to the organisation’s ‘way’ is the way forward.

Respondent 1 sees experience as very important in sales roles but for technical roles states that,

“We work with such a hybrid network here some of it is off the shelf but it is unique the combinations are very unique so really it would be unusual that someone would have the skills we need unless someone was returning to the company”.

The need for training is very apparent for this organisation for these technical roles.

13. Is training aligned with strategic goals of the organisation?

All respondents said the training is aligned to the strategic goals and objectives of the organisation.

Respondent 3 had a very specific example of this is the training of customer support staff,

“For indigenous business that didn’t export it was a case of retaining those customers (the ones that managed to stay in business at all) so the focus was not to get new customers and it was all about maintaining these customers and extracting more value from them and this is where we executed our training strategy for customer service. This was a business plan we had put in place in 2008 and customer service training had been built into the strategy and it has paid dividends five years later”.

For respondent 4 the right skillset is paramount to delivering the strategic plan of the organisation.

14. Do you see training as a way to retain key staff?

All respondents except respondent 2 thought that training can be a way to retain key staff. Respondent 3 mentions training in the context of an overall plan for people management. Respondent 1 and 4 bring up the topics of loyalty and commitment from staff that have been supported with training and investment by the organisation. Respondent 5 sees training as part of the retention and succession planning strategies of the organisation.

Respondent 1,

“I would like to stop people even thinking about leaving and use training as a tool in this”.

Respondent 4,

“Yes. It is logic, if someone invests in you with time and financial resources the commitment should be there but of course it not always the case but nine times out of ten I would say it works”.

15. Do you feel training helps to keep employees engaged in their roles?

All respondents apart from respondent 3 thought that training helps to keep employees engaged.

Respondent 3 states,

“I don’t see training as a mechanism to keep employees engaged that would be the wrong reason to do training”.

Respondent 3 continues by referencing the use of an employee engagement survey within the organisation and states,

“Training never came up as a reason for not being engaged, it was issues with communication, reward or problems with a boss”.

In contrast Respondent 2 states,

“Yes, very much so they (staff) are more involved they feel they have a voice. If they have a voice they are going to be more enthusiastic”.

However Respondent 5 warns of the importance of matching the training to the employee,

“If you give people training that they feel they need or that they want then yes but if for example you are giving softer skills training and they don’t feel that they need it then there can be a feeling of indignation. You can demotivate people if you get it wrong”.

16. Do you see an opportunity now to make training and development more effective and efficient?

All respondents except respondent 2 found that there is an opportunity now to make training and development more efficient and effective. Respondent 2 stated that the recession didn’t impact on the effectiveness of the training in their organisation.

Respondent 1 highlighted the area of quality in training professionals and training courses stating,

“The quality of training courses that is there I hope and I haven’t tested this but I hope they have improved without a jump in cost that is obviously always a concern when things get better. Because I know the quality of trainers was questionable in some places when you talk about losing people who are ambitious the same would apply in the training companies that I would talk to”.

Respondent 3 raises the influence of technology and access to information making it easier for staff to be accountable for their own development. Respondent 3 goes on to explain how the organisation is being more selective in the sourcing of external training,

“Yes we are definitely being more selective and the HR people would be very selective and are clever at getting really good value”.

Respondent 4 sees increased internal training as a way forward with a reduced reliance on external training.

Respondent 5 explains that as a young organisation it will take time to tailor the training efforts and with time the hope is that the organisation will be in a position to do more for its employees.

17. Do you think it is important to continue training during a downturn in the economy?

All respondents agree that it is important to continue training during a downturn in the economy. Respondents 1 and 2 see it as a way to value employees and in essence reward them for continued hard work in difficult times.

Respondent 1,

“it is the one time that because everything in the downturn is so negative and so downtrodden, we’re going to fail etc., the one shining area can be ‘you are still here’, ‘you can learn’.”

Respondent 2,

“We couldn’t reward staff with money but we could reward them with training days and other things and it did help”

Respondent 3 advocates continuing training during tough economic times,

“Yes absolutely and we would have proved that, you certainly can’t stand still. I think companies that would have said ‘I am cutting my training budget’ and take it out of the P&L altogether I think commercially they would come out of the recession a lot slower than companies who continued with training”

Respondent 4 while advocating training in the recession warns about being practical and working within a constrained budget.

Respondent 5 feels that training has to be continued in order to retain staff during a downturn.

18. What creative ways has your organisation used to deliver training?

All respondents cited using more internal training and more informal training. They all used online training but not all were entirely convinced of its benefits. Mentoring and shadowing were also mentioned. Principles such as Lean Six Sigma and Kaizen were practiced. Several unique and inventive approaches to training emerged.

Respondent 3,

“Training the customer support staff on how to run a business that is creative that is thinking outside the box. You need to take a risk to, one has to be courageous courage is one of the things that comes out of the recession”.

Respondent 4,

“One piece we have found that shone, while not training directly is that programme where we had the ‘Next Leader’ piece that we talked about, there were about 30 people and you can imagine when you get that level of people they are all varying levels of skill. Some people of that level will think if an external trainer comes in ‘well I know more than them’ others won’t so you have a whole mix of personalities. One thing that we found from that development group was that they were all together and had the opportunity to talk about subjects, for example each managing director had a Q&A session where staff got to ask us ‘where did you start your career’ ‘where do you get your inspiration from’ things like that so it was a very open piece. People got an awful lot from that and it improved their ability to network and talk among themselves. If anything I think staff got more out of that than an external guy coming in to talk about strategy. For me that was a new way to develop, find new ways to grow the business, it was interactive and about sharing experience and it is the way forward”.

Respondent 2,

“We would get a mixture of staff from across the plant and get an unusual team together take a project and work on it, they have done 110 projects and some have worked extremely well some haven’t, I’d say 80% have worked well. Everybody has been trained in the lean six sigma principles and we follow those guidelines. They have fun training days too, we lay on catering and we go back to the basics say like basic food hygiene and they do role playing

and fun, very inexpensive to do but it is a big boost to staff, and people feel they can back and put more into their job and the company, they are motivated”.

Respondent 5,

“our head of customer care has kicked off an initiative where by everybody in the organisation has to sit with a member of the customer care team for a couple of hours and you get a great understanding of (a) their job and (b) who our customer is what their complaints are, which is a very good eye-opener to the organisation”.

Varying methods of internal training emerge and some have proven to be extremely beneficial and successful.

4.3 Findings

Through the data analysis process many key findings have emerged, these findings are presented below. These findings form the basis for the discussion in the following chapter.

A trend has emerged where organisations are moving away from external training towards internal training with many finding internal training to be more effective.

The importance of training and development is still regarded as highly significant despite the recession and all managers interviewed agree to the importance of the continuation of training during a downturn in the economy.

The issue of aligning training and development to the strategic objectives of the organisation is universally accepted as best practise.

Training employees that have taken on more responsibility or promotion is viewed as very important. If this training is not provided, it can be detrimental to both the employee and the organisation.

Training needs and gaps appear to arise from the performance review and appraisal systems within organisations. These systems are significant in analysing the need for training and development.

Training is viewed by managers as a tool to retain staff and in turn this supports any succession planning that may be in place within the organisation. Succession planning is an issue of concern for managers.

Training and development is often viewed by managers as a means by which to reward employees. In tough economic times where salaries are frozen or reduced and bonus payments are halted the provision of training can be a nonfinancial reward mechanism.

The quality of training courses and training providers is raised as an issue for concern. Managers are looking to get the most value for their limited resources and have noted that the recession has had an impact on the quality of training providers. The inferior quality of training providers has also been a contributing factor in manager's preference to using internal training.

Innovation and proactive thinking have led to examples of creative training methods such as using workshops, online tools, role playing and mentoring to support the training efforts of the organisation. In doing so, managers have often discovered very effective and often economical means of delivering training. One such example is a 'start your own business' campaign run by one organisation. The whole customer support team of this organisation were involved in this process which aimed to introduce greater empathy to their customers. Another organisation has taken an alternative to the traditional training of employees only and through the inception of a training academy has begun training their customers (contractors who install their products). This initiative is proving to be very effective.

Any one of these findings could form the basis for further study and exploration. It is clear that the area of training and development is a critical one to managers in Ireland and they are making every effort possible to maintain this function despite economic pressures.

5 Discussion

The research objective is to answer the initial research question posed: How has the recession in Ireland impacted on how senior managers view training and development? In achieving this objective several sub questions were also investigated and answered.

The diverse nature of the organisations researched from telecommunications to manufacturing and software development presents a wide array of training policies and strategies. However despite the differences between organisations throughout this research some common themes and trends emerge. These themes and trends are discussed below. The opinions of individual managers while distinct also draws comparisons to each other and to the literature reviewed in chapter 2.

5.1 Research Question

How has the recession in Ireland impacted on how senior managers view training and development?

Managers in Ireland have had to adapt to a changing economic climate as a result of the recent recession. This has presented challenges to managers in delivering training and development to employees with limited financial resources. While these challenges prove difficult it can be said that they are not impossible to overcome. The findings suggest that the recession has not been as hard on the area of training and development as thought in the literature where Liber (2009), Woods (2010) and Felstead et al, (2011) propose training and development are among the first departments to witness severe cuts as training is viewed as discretionary. The managers interviewed present a situation where cuts were made in line with other departments and in some cases these cuts were not excessive or detrimental to the organisation. Some managers interviewed fought to keep their training budgets in line with other departments so that training was not seen to be disproportionately treated.

The training and development function is valued by managers as purported by Garavan, Horgan and Cahir-ODonnell (2003) in so far as it is an important function as a method of adapting to changing operational environments and as a way to remain competitive, this is supported by Roche et al (2011) who claim that the human resources department of an organisation can be instrumental in implementing change management. The impact of the recession has had a direct effect on the training and development budgets and as such managers have had to adjust accordingly. Cairns (2012) points to the significant role the return on investment plays on discretionary spending and this is a key driver for managers in considering expenditure on training and development. A current issue that is repeatedly highlighted by managers is the concept of ‘getting more for less’.

Theme 1: Alignment

Training now more than ever has to prove its worth and one such assurance of this it to align training goals to strategic objectives of the organisation. Aligning training to the strategic objectives of an organisation is viewed by managers to be of critical importance, particularly in light of the recession as a means to gain firm specific human capital as outlined by Neirotti and Paolucci, (2013). Organisations have become more focused and are seeing the benefits of working in a proactive manner towards training, using it to support the strategic vision. Collaboration between the activity of training and the achievement of specific strategic goals is witnessed more and has greater buy in and clearer communication between relevant stakeholders than before as indicated to by the managers interviewed

Alignment is not always a straightforward process as Barron (2003) argues; making the leap from talk to action is often difficult. However the researcher has witnessed organisations that have managed to successfully align training efforts with the strategic goals of the organisation. All managers in the research are aware of the importance of alignment and have worked hard to establish effective training programs to match their specific strategic

objectives. Very tangible examples are provided and the benefits are clear to the senior managers of these organisations. Alignment is also regarded as being of particular importance since the impact of the recession and has in fact been seen to be essential in continued survival and growth of these organisations.

Communicating the strategic goals of an organisation to its employees is noted by many as a difficult task. Participants in this research have specified how important it is to include employees in the vision of the organisation. Giving staff a voice, creating more transparency and a greater sense of individual accountability and contribution to the organisation have all been highlighted as reasons to effectively communicate organisational strategies as compounded by the managers interviewed. Managers interviewed regard open communication between departments as vitally important and see the use of informal, internal training among these departments as a way to improve this. This view is supported in the literature by Roche et al (2011), Majer and Bell (2011) and Lowenstein (2006).

The successful alignment of training with organisational goals as witnessed during this research would point to a more open and collaborative way of working which during a recession can be seen as a way forward.

There is wide support in the literature for the strategic alignment of training and organisational objectives by managers as reinforced by Barron (2003), Schuler (1992), Reeves and Deimler (2009) and Villachica, Stepich and Rist (2011). This concept is strongly agreed upon by the managers interviewed and has emerged as a significant element in the overall delivery of training and development. While examples were given during the course of the interviews with managers of the effective use of this strategy it is important to note that not all organisations are as open to the concept of strategic human resource management. It

can greatly depend on the culture of the organisation but it is believed that the recession has brought a change in attitude towards strategic human resource management and its benefits.

Theme 2: Training needs analysis/appraisals

Training needs analysis appears to come out of the appraisal process for the majority of managers interviewed. It is developed through the annual review system and one to one meetings. Organisations are placing more responsibility on employees to be proactive and actively seek training and development. It is in the employee's interest to be accountable for their own growth and development within the organisation. Indeed evidence from interviews shows that it is often written into the employee handbook that such efforts should be made in this regard.

It is apparent that training needs analysis is important to make the most efficient use of the resources available if they are limited. If organisations are to be successful training gaps need to be identified and filled. It can be argued that the annual review process may not be the most effective way to achieve this if time is an issue for the organisation as when the training gap is identified it may be too late to adapt to this required need.

Theme 3: Reward, engagement, retention and succession.

An interesting outcome of the research is the view of some managers that training can be a reward for employees continued hard work throughout the recession. In incidences where monetary rewards can no longer be considered it is evident that some managers see training as a way to reward and recognise the efforts of their employees. Training is viewed as having a dual purpose, developing the skills and knowledge of employees and also offering a reward other than financial gain as supported by Sammer (2011).

For many of the managers interviewed, employee engagement has arisen as a significant factor in relation to training. Many feel that training does contribute to employee engagement and the more engaged the employee the more productive they are. It has however been noted that matching training to the employee is fundamentally important as if not done correctly can have negative consequences on the employee and ultimately the organisation. It has also been discovered that while engagement is vitally important to the productivity of an organisation, training for some may not be the way to achieve this employee engagement. Issues of communication and relationships between employees and management surface as key problems witnessed by the managers interviewed.

The area of retention and succession is very present in the research. Succession in particular is a common thread in the mind-sets of managers. The aspect that you cannot replace years of experience once a long serving employee leaves or retires is an issue managers are contending with. Retaining key employees and developing talent to promote the next generation of leaders is also a common issue raised by managers interviewed.

Theme 4: Internal training

There is a trend towards the increased use of internal training among the managers interviewed and this would appear to support the literature where HR Focus (2009) and IBEC (2013) point to an increasing focus on internal training practices. The benefits of internal training as viewed by managers in the research include cost savings, increased participation, quality and the opportunity to develop and utilise talent from within the organisation to provide training to the rest of the organisation.

5.2 Sub questions

Do managers cease training, reduce or increase training as a result of the recession?

The research has found that while the majority of organisations have reduced training budgets they have not been decimated as would have originally been thought. The perception of managers interviewed is that a knee jerk reaction to the recession in the form of slashing training budgets can only be detrimental to the organisation. In light of the recession organisations are trying to find ways to maintain their training efforts despite having to reduce budgets relating to this function. The message would appear to be to maintain the level of training by using internal resources and by being more creative with the limited finances available, this is supported in the literature by McCartney (2009, cited in Phillips, 2009).

Managers interviewed are in agreement that training and development is a very valuable function and needs to continue through a recession, some stress that it is even more important in times of economic difficulty to train and develop employees as supported by both Lieber (2009) and Rao (2009). This view is extended to include training in preparation for the upturn in the economy as agreed by Woods (2010) and Felstead et al (2011).

How an organisation reacts to a recession is often viewed as a measure of how the organisation will emerge from such an economic downturn. Managers have agreed that continuing to train throughout a recession is vital and as Panebianco (2008) and Mc Cartney and Teague (2001) suggest it can contribute to a competitive edge. However managers interviewed stress that they have to be practical in the face of financial pressures.

Barney and Wright (1998) proposed that human capital was most likely to be a source of competitive advantage in the 21st century. This concept is reflected by the managers in this

research who all value the human aspect of their organisations and see the importance of developing human capital. One manager regarded the development of the customer support team as a vital component in remaining competitive. Investing in training for the development of such services was instrumental in the organisation surviving the recession and ultimately achieving growth. Other managers looked to the experience and talent within the organisation to provide a framework on which to build from. Recognising the availability of internal talent as a resource and using this talent to improve competitiveness is a valuable asset. Care has to be taken however in the development of human capital in a bid to gain competitive advantage as warned by Brewster (1999) and Bryson et al (2005) cited in Guthrie et al (2009), and managers have noted this.

Is there now more focus on using training to fulfill short-term goals?

While the recession has forced many organisations into survival mode, short-term goals could be viewed as a priority. The research has found that there is no focus on short-term goals in isolation, the focus is on a mixture of both short and long-term goals and short-term thinking is viewed by managers interviewed as poor planning and detrimental to the future of the organisation.

Long-term thinking is the priority for managers interviewed and this can be witnessed in the alignment of training with the strategic objectives of the organisation. All managers found this to be the case and were very much in agreement that training should be and currently is aligned to the strategic objectives of the organisation.

In light of the recession managers have witnessed the training goals of the organisation change, training for long-term objectives has emerged as most common, this can relate back to the strategic alignment of training. The CIPD (2013) state there is greater focus on longer term issues and needs of the business. This is reflected by the organisations researched while

some view a mixture of short-term and long-term goals as necessary there is a definite focus on longer term goals. The training goals have to ensure that benefits are accrued for both the organisation and its customers. Training over the long-term is viewed by many as being beneficial as it will ultimately return value to the organisation. Short-term fixes are rarely beneficial and in some cases are costly to the organisation in time and resources.

The recession has impacted on the training goals of organisations. There is shift towards getting more out of employees, essentially trying to achieve more results with fewer resources. The issue of creating value is paramount to the managers interviewed. The training and development function while still regarded as very important within these organisations is evolving and adapting to the economic environment. Paradise and Mosley (2009) have suggested that there is an opportunity to use the training and development of employees as a solution to challenges faced by managers. Phillips (2009) has also subscribed to this concept, and this has been the case for some of the organisations in this research. IBEC (2010) has highlighted the detrimental effects of not training during the recession and again this is reflected by the attitudes of managers in this research.

To what extent has the focus on personal and professional development diminished?

The area of personal and professional development is viewed as highly important by managers. It is seen as a tool to cultivate talent and develop future leaders of the organisation. The concept that 'you never stop learning and developing' is raised and the onus on organisations to support this is a crucial element.

However the recession has had a significant impact in this area and affording expenditure to personal and professional development is not always a viable option. The emphasis will often be placed on training to benefit the organisation rather than the individual employee. It has been found through the primary research that the budgets for personal and professional

development have suffered and the focus for organisations is on training to get the job done and to achieve results. It is not what managers want to do but it is the as a result of the economic situation they find themselves in where training takes priority over development. Nevertheless for organisations that have maintained the function of personal and professional development the perception has been one of more value. Employees value their positions within the organisation and consequently value the efforts made for their development. In the case of an organisation in the growth phase of its life cycle the significance of personal and professional development is deemed very important by the manager.

Personal and professional development can often form part of the strategic vision of an organisation. The issue of 'buy in' is raised in respect to the effectiveness of any personal and professional development plans. In times of economic difficulty it can be problematic gaining 'buy in' from both management and employees. The nature of the business can also be a contributing factor in the level of personal and professional development. One organisation researched is in a period of significant growth and views the area of training and development as very important and despite the recession it has not made any cuts to this area and in fact it has increased efforts.

To what extent has the recession generated more creative ways of meeting training and development needs?

Necessity is the mother of all invention, and so it would appear in the recession, organisations are being more creative as restrictions on expenditure curtail their training and development efforts. The opportunity presented by the recession to do things differently is supported by Fitzgerald (2012) and creativity and innovation are driving that change.

A trend that emerged from the primary research is a move away from external training towards internal training. Many factors have contributed to this: decreased budgets, time

constraints, the quality of external training providers and improved technology. All of the managers interviewed have witnessed a shift in the type of training used. Internal training is very much on the increase as proposed by Felstead et al (2011) and supported by IBEC (2013).

As training budgets witnessed cuts like so many other departments in an organisation it was an opportune time to think outside the box. All of the managers interviewed referred to the increase in internal training often as a direct result of decreasing budgets. Training by external providers or off site training is viewed by managers as too expensive. For some it is still used but not to the same degree as before the recession. An issue of quality among external training providers was raised during the interviews and this corresponds with the view held by Phillips (2009), so organisations are looking for the best possible value with limited resources as put forward by Felstead et al, (2010) in their work on quality in training.

The recession it seems had prompted organisations to be more creative in providing training. The increased use of internal training is clearly a result of this, HR Focus, (2009) alluded to this in a survey carried out in the USA. Managers are looking inside their organisations for ways to improve and very often there is a wealth of talent available to be developed. Organisations are cross training employees from different departments. Experienced staff are sharing their knowledge and training others within the organisation. Barriers are being broken down and greater transparency among departments is forming.

6 Conclusions and recommendations.

6.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present conclusions drawn from the research. This research was completed through secondary research by way of a critical literature review and by primary qualitative research consisting of five individual in-depth interviews. These individual in-depth interviews were conducted with senior managers in Ireland who come from different industries. The research question of the dissertation is ‘How has the recession in Ireland impacted on how senior managers view training and development’.

6.2 Conclusions

While the recession has hit Ireland in a profound way, senior managers have dealt with the impact on training and development in a proactive manner as is represented in the conclusions below.

It is interesting to note the universal acceptance of aligning training and development with organisational strategic goals. Managers are very aware of the importance and benefits of this approach as was discovered through the primary research. Where possible, training is used to support an organisation’s recovery from the recession as one manager clearly stated the use of training to implement a new customer service strategy ultimately led to the growth in business today. The importance of both training and development is regarded highly. In contrast to training, personal and professional development has seen a decline during the recession. This would suggest that training to increase productivity or implement strategies take precedence over employee development at least until managers recover ground lost in the recession and have healthier budgets at their disposal.

The recession has led to many organisations restructuring their operations and employees find themselves taking on more and more responsibility. The provision of training for such employees is seen as vital by managers and evidence was provided by managers interviewed of the detrimental effect that can be felt if relevant training is not undertaken. However the research has not delved deeply enough to fully support this. The view from the employee's perspective may be quite different and would require further research to discover this.

The performance review and appraisal system is the most common way to assess training needs however this could be viewed as a retrograde measure. If managers wait until the end of the year to assess training gaps it could prove detrimental to the organisation in times of economic uncertainty and change. Specific training needs analysis does not exist outside of the appraisal system used by managers interviewed. However it is noteworthy that managers interviewed are aware of the importance of training needs analysis and recognise it as a crucial component in the performance review of employees.

Training has a very important role to play in employee retention and ultimately succession planning as seen in the literature. Both retention and succession are issues facing managers and as such the perception is that if employees are trained and developed there is a higher likelihood of them staying within the business and this in turn can lead to a succession path. Ensuring there is sufficient talent to fill future roles in particular leadership roles is a difficulty faced by the managers interviewed, as expressed by one manager, it is not possible to just replace years of experience. Therefore succession planning is a very complex domain.

Rewarding staff during a recession is very difficult for managers, it would appear that training is being viewed as a nonfinancial reward mechanism. Similarly it shows continued support and loyalty to the employee from the manager as is supported by the literature.

One of the significant issues to consider is the current trend towards the increased use of internal training in organisations both from the primary research and in the literature. This appears to be as a result of economic pressures however managers have found it to be so effective that despite the economy picking up and many returning to a growth situation they are reluctant to return to the pre-recession reliance on external training. It could be said that the use of internal training will remain at the forefront of manager's decisions on training and development policies.

The trend towards increased internal training could also be as a result of the difficulty in sourcing high quality external trainers. Quality is a key issue of concern among managers in relation to training providers and consequently presents a need to address the effect of the recession on the training industry. In times of economic difficulty it is easy to see why managers are slower to hire external training providers or send employees off site when the emphasis is very much on achieving value for money and this is agreed in the literature.

The recession it seems has prompted a wave of creativity and innovation in training and development practices. Reduced budgets and time constraints have forced managers to think creatively about how they deliver training to their employees. As discovered through the course of the interviews the use of training workshops such as 'starting your own business', question and answer sessions with senior managers, e-learning and cross departmental learning have all contributed to more creative and proactive training than traditional classroom training situations. This is a promising development and has by managers own admissions led them to consider the area of training and development much more than they ever did pre-recession. Managers are more involved in the area of training and development and have opened up the discussion of how best to provide for employees. This can only be seen as a positive move and one that hopefully continues.

6.3 Recommendations

The researcher can make the following recommendations from the research.

Managers could use organisation specific training needs analysis in isolation from the performance review process to identify gaps in skills and competencies in order to better align training efforts with strategic objectives of the organisation. Using the performance review process alone could provide a distorted view of how employees are performing under the pressures of a recession, it is also presenting information on past performance and this is not a proactive way of assessing training needs. In addition this would provide an opportunity to act on potential training needs sooner than at a year-end review.

Managers are seeing the benefits of increased internal training in particular the practice of developing training sessions based around the wealth of knowledge and experience within their own organisations. The use of these talented employees as trainers raises some issues, are these employees being trained themselves, are they being exploited to save money and how do the employees themselves feel about the practice. Concerns such as these need to be addressed in order to avoid any issues arising with disgruntled employees.

The findings of this research can be investigated further by using a larger sample size to increase the credibility and validity of the research. The research could also be targeted at a specific industry or sector or used to compare and contrast industries.

Further research could be conducted to include the perspective of employees and their views on training and development during the recession. Not only would this research provide an interesting comparison or indeed contrast to the current findings, it could add valuable information to the literature.

The findings of this research could form the basis from which to research lessons learned from the recession in Ireland.

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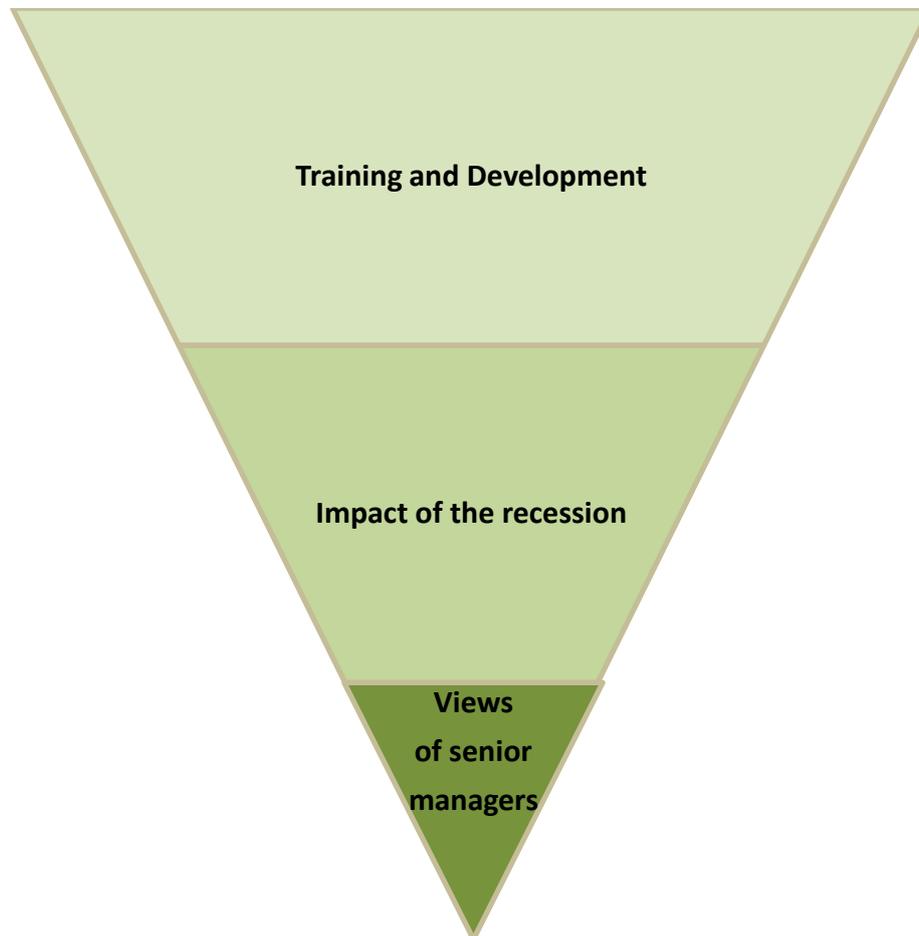
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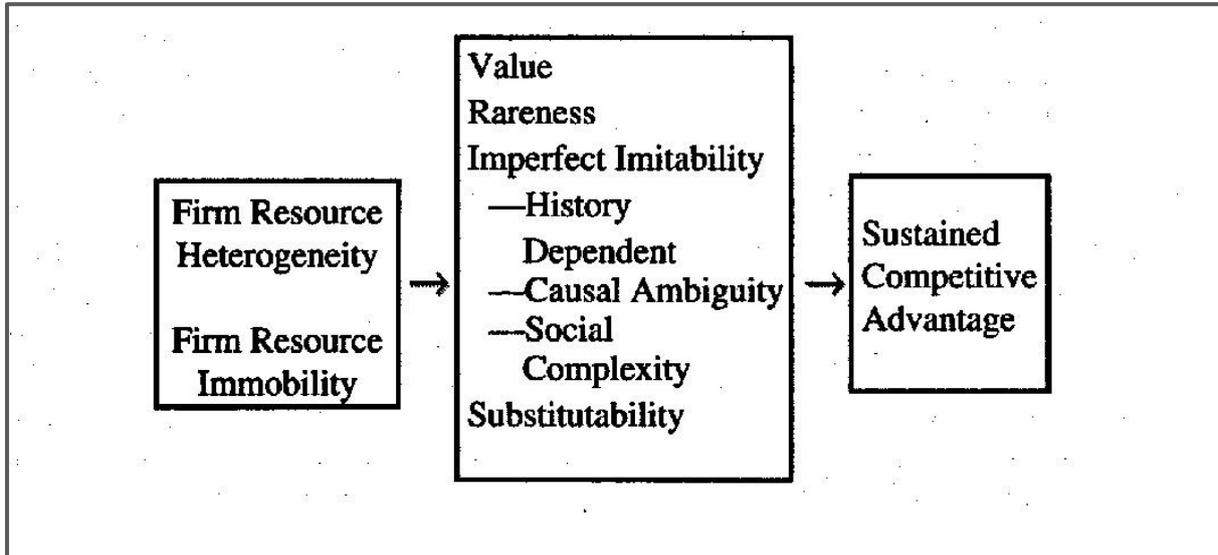
Appendix 1: Research question process.

Below is the process used by the researcher to arrive at the research question working from the broad subject area to a specific problem:

How has the recession in Ireland impacted on how senior managers view training and development?

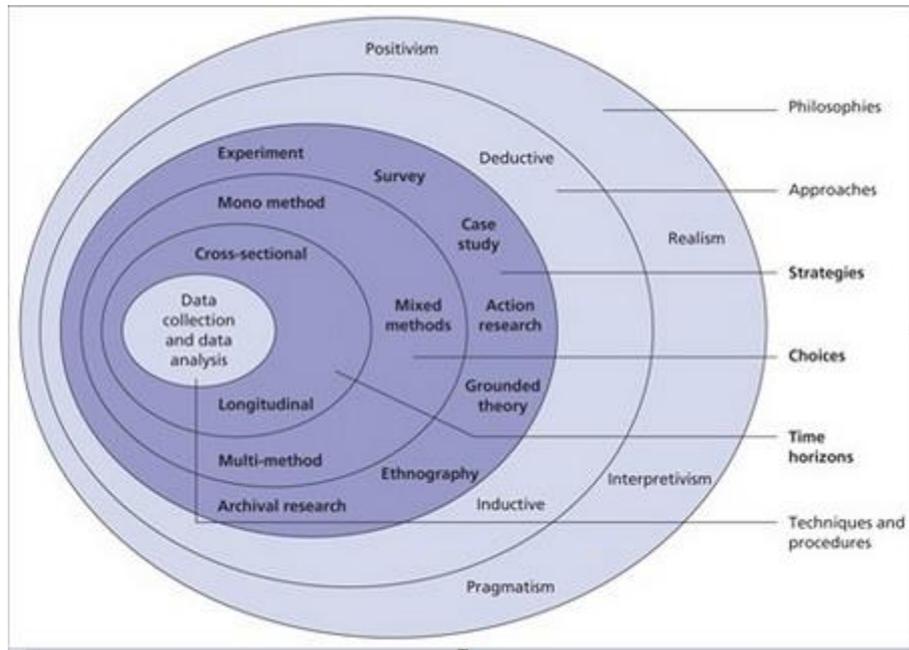


Appendix 2: VRIN Model



Source: Barney, 1991, p.112

Appendix 3: Research Onion



Source: Saunders et al 2009, p.138

Appendix 4: Security Clearance

Dublin Business School Company Security Clearance

Name: _____

Student Number: _____

Dissertation Title: _____

Company Security Clearance

Please initial as appropriate

- We agree that the student(s) may undertake a dissertation of the nature indicated above and that he/she/they will be given access to appropriate information sources within our Organisation
- We agree that copies of the finished project will be made available for assessment by staff of Dublin Business School and External examiners

Company Name: _____

Signed: _____

Position: _____

Date: _____

Note to Student:

Please keep the original signed copy of this form and ensure a copy is included in the Dissertation Appendices.

Appendix 5: Interview Questions

Section 1: Training and development

1. What are the key drivers for training in your organisation? (E.g. Legal, H&S, customer service, competition).
2. Is the training focus on short term or long term objectives or both?
3. Has the focus of training goals shifted in light of recession?
4. Do you carry out training needs analysis?
5. Do you consider personal and professional development important?
6. Has personal and professional development suffered as a result of the recession?

Section 2: Economic Recession

7. How has the recession affected training budgets? (% decrease, per head, training days).
8. Have training efforts increased or decreased?
9. Why have training efforts increased or decreased?
10. What has been the main focus of the organisation post-recession (growth, restructure, survival, market leader). How has this affected training?
11. For staff that have taken on more responsibilities in their roles, have they been supported with additional training?
12. When recruiting is there more emphasis on hiring experienced professionals for specific roles? (Rather than train up for role).

Section 3: Effective training/Creative training

13. Is training aligned with strategic goals of the organisation?
14. Do you see training as a way to retain key staff?
15. Do you feel training helps to keep employees engaged in their roles?
16. Do you see an opportunity now to make training and development more effective and efficient?
17. Do you think it is important to continue training during a downturn in the economy?
18. What creative ways has your organisation used to deliver training?

Appendix 6: Interview transcript 1

Respondent 1: Country Manager International Telecommunications Company

Date: 07-07-14

Section 1: Training and development

1. *What are the key drivers for training in your organisation (E.g. Legal, H&S, customer service, competition)?*

It really depends on the time, the economic situation. At the moment it is on what is essential, what is going to generate a return on investment for the person involved. It is difficult to quantify the return on investment. When there is a restriction on operational expenditure and fixed costs you do not have the luxury to look too far into the future. So the drivers right now are on near term to medium term operational requirements and budgetary controls, something that is within the confines of my training budget.

2. *Is the training focus on short term or long term objectives or both?*

Mixture of both, I would always want to focus on long-term as short term is rarely advantageous because you tend to get the same people looking for training all the time and sometimes it is more about themselves than the benefit of their colleagues or the company. I have to be pragmatic and put a proposal forward that is appropriate for the company not just me. I would only think short term if there was a real need but that is poor planning from a strategic perspective. If we were laying out a new product onto the market then it would be OK but always think long term, good training will take time anyway, short courses, three days have minimal impact, longer training means staff can use the equipment as they train so it becomes embedded. Historically short training can leave large gaps between the training and people using the equipment.

3. *Has the focus of training goals shifted in light of recession?*

Yes, very much so, I think it has because of the previous points I made about costs and operational needs also the range of training available is not fantastic, whilst some of the training companies are flogging the same old courses, they have not moved with the times, and because a lot of what we do here is bespoke to us we do a lot of

internal training courses when we have a small training budget and small training department and a lot of people on training it can cause issues and logistics become a nightmare so what we have done here is a lot of online training while arguably it has its merits it is difficult to absorb online training when dealing with something tangible like working on equipment so yes it has changed, the needs are still there but we have to cut our cloth to measure.

4. *Do you carry out training needs analysis?*

I would like to say we do on a continual basis but I would have to say no. I think that the needs of the business in the short to medium term certainly involves personal development plans for people but they involve ensuring we are hitting our budgets, we are generating revenue and are profitable on a day to day basis. I always ask the team here to please put yourselves forward for training but invariably what I get back is 'I do all the work and it goes nowhere', I'm told it won't be passed unfortunately that's a reality but unless you put your name down and put your best foot forward you don't know, you have to be in to be considered. It has changed I would like to bring it around to a more progressive and collaborative way of doing it but that will come in time, the indicators are good.

5. *Do you consider personal and professional development important?*

I think professional development, personal development plans. Personal development can take many forms and putting someone in an environment where they have to manage people is training every day, it is not a formal training course but you never stop training, goodness me I am managing people 22 years and you never ever stop learning, never stop training however I put an emphasis on people managing themselves, pushing themselves out, people have to be prepared to move outside their comfort zone, if you're not then a training course is useless and a development plan is useless. So short answer would be absolutely yes it is very important as long as both sides buy into it, no point in me saying yes the person putting themselves forward and just filling out a box on a form, they have to engage with me, they have to make sure what they are putting forward is something they really want to do not just something they think I'd like to see.

6. *Has personal and professional development suffered as a result of the recession?*

I think it has suffered not so much because of the recession but as a lack of visibility and a lack of focus within the organisation. Many of the top 100 companies in Ireland would have a very good HR department and will have made conscious efforts to focus on it. Unfortunately our required focus has been on revenue and budgetary control so invariably these things get dropped it's not something which I can say I am happy with, I regret it I really do it shouldn't have happened but we have a very small number of people and we have to prioritise our time and effort and at the same time courses in the main involve time away from the office and I can't afford to have someone out for a week, if they say they need holidays I can't say no to holidays but if they say they need a week on this training course I have to balance that against the workload and whoever else is here at the time and unfortunately as important as it is we have to make a decision based on the needs of the business rather than looking forward.

Section 2: Economic Recession

19. *How has the recession affected training budgets? (% decrease, per head, training days).*

You can imagine every budget is squeezed and obviously they have cut the training budget what they have done is they have pushed a lot of subjects that have been asked for onto the (LMS) Learning Management System training. Which is a sunken cost it's an application they have bought there is no license cost for it which means there is no incremental costs for us and a lot of people use it. I get notification any time my team go for a course and use it I hope they are using it and really learning from it rather than just doing it for the sake of it and being seen to be doing it. Nothing beats the hands on, face to face stuff that people do, but it's not always possible so unfortunately it has been cut in line with everything else.

20. *Have training efforts increased or decreased?*

During recession yes they decreased but only in the last six months they have increased we have seen the classic green shoots. In our business we are not recession

proof in ICT but we are not a discretionary service either, people have to have what we offer so it's being at the table and offering what people want however the downside of our business is price erosion it's our biggest challenge, it is a bottom line effect which means when doing our budgets in September for the following year we have to plan for the worst and hope for the best. So at this time of year when I look at my budget and realise I have a little headroom coming closer to the end of the year I could be in a position to spend some more money on training. It is defiantly more positive than in recent years. In recent years when we had upside the budget was reduced but now the upside will be maintained obviously we will still have to make conscientious decisions on how to spend money but it won't be pulled year end.

So you have more wriggle room than before?

Considerably yes, national performance and company performance is important, if our country was losing money from a P&L perspective I wouldn't even ask to be honest but we are a profitable business from that perspective so it gives me an opportunity.

21. Why have training efforts increased or decreased.

Money and focus are two main reasons for decreased training. I couldn't say that if I had focused more I would have got more money and got more through it was having to deal with the different challenges that came our way. It does in a way go back to people not putting themselves forward because they feel it wasn't worth their while I'm not going to beg people to put themselves forward I have to ask, and my managers do one to ones with the team and I do some and I ask the same question very directly "tell me what you want to do". More recently while we don't have the luxury we have to make a conscious effort that we have worked through the last four years and the people that are here while they have been rewarded in terms of their salary and what bonus we could give but the next development must be the continuation of what they have been doing with respect to their growth, and training must be the next step so I do want to spend more time and money on it this year. I will rely on people to be proactive and come to me but the opportunities are there.

22. What has been the main focus of the organisation post-recession (growth, restructure, survival, market leader) how has this affected training.

Revenue generation.

23. *For staff that have taken on more responsibilities in their roles, have they been supported with additional training?*

Yes, a lot have a combination of LMS and hands on. In some cases not necessarily in Ireland where there has been a lot of change there is an economy of scale to allow the business to bring 10-15 people into a classroom and train them up which makes much more sense it gives people in these new roles a feeling of being integrated and obviously a feeling that they are respected in terms of what they are doing and that they are being given tools rather than just a log on and a password.

Could it be more costly if you don't train them up?

Oh 100% and unfortunately we have anecdotal evidence of this where people have been put into roles where they are given a pen and paper and told to log on and it hasn't work. We had people asked to use applications and they have done their best and invariably they get through it but then you have a disgruntled employee who has worked very hard and not been respected and ultimately that's what it comes down to, respect, not respecting an employee not treating them appropriately like you would want to be treated.

24. *When recruiting is there more emphasis on hiring experienced professionals for specific roles? (rather than train up for role).*

It really depends on the role; in a sales environment the more experience the better and experience of a specific technology. We work with such a hybrid network here some of it is off the shelf but it is unique the combinations are very unique so really it would be unusual that someone would have the skills we need unless someone was returning to the company. Specific technical people would have to go on classroom training and onsite training with other technicians to give them field experience it is not structured training but it is hands on experience to back up the classroom training.

So if they have previous experience they will catch up quicker?

The technologies tend not to vary too much but some of the structures and coding do change.

Section 3: Effective training/Creative training

25. Is training aligned with strategic goals of the organisation?

Yes absolutely, the team and respect of employees is very much what we want to do, in truth we could do it better and we tend to focus somewhat on more than others, the ones that add financial value to the business. Yes training is very much part of our goals.

26. Do you see training as a way to retain key staff?

Yes, I think the last four, five years during the recession people were concerned and were afraid to leave as there wasn't the dearth of roles out there that there was in the past so being conscious of that but not taking anything for granted I would try to make a situation the best for an employee within reason. My hope is that by maintaining an element of support and loyalty to an employee, then that will be reciprocated when times are better and it is then that I can make sure that they are dealt with appropriately from a training perspective because that is really the next step. We must assume that salary, pay and conditions are all met, they are still here so that should mean that, so the only other part is training and development if we have worked cooperatively in the tough years it makes my conversations with them much more positive 'right we've been through it you've worked with me I've worked with you we've worked together let's move on' I think it is a consideration I would like to stop people even thinking about leaving and use training as a tool in this.

27. Do you feel training helps to keep employees engaged in their roles?

For most employees yes, you do have some who would not have drive while they are hard working or good with customers but are happy and won't push themselves out of their comfort zone. There is space at the table for every type of employee if you were to ask me if I prefer someone with ambition and wants to grow I would say you need a blend you need those type of people on the team and you also need the people who are happy to work away. It is very much a balance.

28. *Do you see an opportunity now to make training and development more effective and efficient?*

Yes it will really depend on what is asked of me and also what is available to me. The mediums which we use won't change in short to medium term. LMS will always be a tool that is there. The quality of training courses that is there I hope and I haven't tested this but I hope they have improved without a jump in cost that is obviously always a concern when things get better. Because I know the quality of trainers was questionable in some places when you talk about losing people who are ambitious the same would apply in the training companies that I would talk to. The best trainers will go where the best work is; there may be a good strong brand of training company that has lost its good employees and trainers. Yes I think I will take it more seriously but thread carefully on it. When you take a step back and you know actually that is something we have to consider as having done all my mid-year reviews training didn't come up in any of them, everyone is so focused on our goals, they are single minded which is good for us it is what we asked for. Our rewards scheme is based on performance not on training.

29. *Do you think it is important to continue training during a downturn in the economy?*

Personally yes absolutely, it is the one time that because everything in the downturn is so negative and so downtrodden, we're going to fail etc., the one shining area can be 'you are still here' 'you can learn'. We had a lot of people do LMS we had people on secondment we had people come in from college to train, this has all happened quite recently and in terms of giving people a view of the future very much so and poor show on us for not doing more during that time. Personally speaking, I did my masters right in the middle of the recession and it was brilliant for me as I had a goal. A couple of other people did training courses off their own bat as well. So yes it is a perfect time.

Do you think it helps prepare the organisation for the upturn?

I wouldn't necessarily say specifically I would say that it should ease any transition that is there so moving from recession into positive or into growth shouldn't need preparation it should be business as usual and we should have been in a positive position in 2003,2004,2005, we didn't change anything in terms of how we did it

obviously prices were different and budgets were higher in some social areas, training must be seen as an essential part of business whether it is good or bad times, it just so happens that training is reflected differently in the two times and it is treated differently in the two times. If we are structured correctly we should be doing it anyway.

30. What creative ways has your organisation used to deliver training?

We have done online training, sent people out on courses, sent people to other countries. We have had instructors coming in here, we have done one on one, and one on fifteen which is the limit, I think it was manual handling, health and safety course. I would like to see training as a fun environment but it tends to be seen as something more onerous than that particularly if it is something people don't want to do like manual handling and health and safety is a classic one because it is essential that it is done from a legislation perspective but people don't like doing it. Unfortunately for some of these courses there is a legal requirement for us and they are not viewed correctly for that.

Have you used more informal methods?

One to ones, shadowing, we have done mentoring programmes we cover as much as we possibly can with the budget we have.

Appendix 7: Interview transcript 2

Respondent 2: Facilities Manager snack food manufacturer

Date: 14-07-14

Section 1: Training and development

1. *What are the key drivers for training in your organisation (E.g. Legal, H&S, customer service, competition)?*

Maximise efficiency, basically get the work done. Health and safety requirements because of the nature of the manufacturing process we would have to have certain levels of health and safety. But it was never a priority it was always about production, get the figures get the amount of product out that you can get out. In the last five to seven years health and safety has become a very big important part. Another part of that is the suing culture, litigation, litigation. People are more aware of what they should have and shouldn't have.

2. *Is the training focus on short term or long term objectives or both?*

Long term

3. *Has the focus of training goals shifted in light of recession?*

Big time, there is an awful lot more training. Last year they gave over two full days, two 12 hour shifts to training all production staff, to make sure that every single staff member be it office staff or production staff know exactly what they should be doing. They have really changed the focus on training to get more out of the staff also to value the staff so the staff feel they are part of the team and that really carried through big time especially with the supervisors they really felt that they had an input that their voice counted which they hadn't had for years and some of these people are here 25 years. So a big difference.

4. *Do you carry out training needs analysis?*

Yes the health and safety officer would do that with my assistance.

5. *Do you consider personal and professional development important?*

Oh absolutely and so did the health and safety and training manager he insisted that everybody was individually assessed and what were their needs and what can we do for them to benefit them and to benefit the company. And match the pair together.

6. *Has personal and professional development suffered as a result of the recession?*

Oh absolutely oh God yes, you're working longer hours, working harder, working more you are not getting any reward and it is thankless at times but you have to do it to keep your job. It has come back up, it went downhill but it has come back up I think they realise that they are after getting a lot of extra work out of the staff and they need to be rewarded and acknowledgement and they have really intensified the training in the last three years.

Section 2: Economic Recession

7. *How has the recession affected training budgets? (% decrease, per head, training days).*

When recession hit there was no training it was put on the back burner unless it got a grant and that is truth. If a grant was made available, training was made available. If someone needed training the finances had to be found and if they could get away with it they didn't do it in the beginning (of recession) but in the last three years training has become a priority. But back in 2008 it was a case of 'forget it'. They did in-house training but it wasn't professional it wasn't done properly and there was no structure it was make do and mend training. Where now it is completely different there is structure, manuals, you follow the programme and you have to pass each module before you get to the next one which is much better much more professional.

8. *Have training efforts increased or decreased?*

It is increasing, we are actually doing more training now than we were doing pre-recession.

9. *Why have training efforts increased or decreased?*

Budget and time were the issues when training decreased. They increased because they increased production facilities in the plant and staff needed training on the new

equipment and the training manager insisted that a proper training system was put in place brought in external people and put the proper structures in place. The company is growing so it was important to do this for the future.

10. What has been the main focus of the organisation post-recession? (growth, restructure, survival, market leader) How has this affected training.

Growth, there are two plants amalgamated into one so it is double the size it was it is doing treble the production it was doing pre-recession. A lot more training is being done. Nobody starts a job now without being trained and properly inducted in the last three years not just health and safety but everything, staff on the production line right through to managers.

11. For staff that have taken on more responsibilities in their roles, have they been supported with additional training?

Yes, all the managers have had to be retrained as a result of a change in the production processes. There are two processes and they have been cross trained but with a focus on their own specific area.

12. When recruiting is there more emphasis on hiring experienced professionals for specific roles? (rather than train up for role).

No. defiantly not it would be hire and train them up the way we want them to do it. The way we work is different to our competitors we are very people orientated where some of our competitors are automated and use robots. We very much have a structure in place now. People never leave here once they are here they work up, it is like hotel California you can check out but you can never leave.

Section 3: Effective training/Creative training

13. Is training aligned with strategic goals of the organisation?

Yes definitely.

14. Do you see training as a way to retain key staff?

No not particularly.

15. Do you feel training helps to keep employees engaged in their roles?

Yes, very much so they are more involved they (staff) feel they have a voice. If they have a voice they are going to be more enthusiastic.

Do you think this was important during the recession?

Absolutely staff felt like they as though they had a contribution to make. When 5% pay cut was introduced, yes the staff were upset but the training kept going in smaller ways it was low key in the beginning but then it became more efficient and people felt that when they got their 5% back they had been rewarded because they had put in the effort and their voices were heard.

16. Do you see an opportunity now to make training and development more effective and efficient?

I don't know. There is a cross training effect. The recession didn't really effect the effectiveness of the training being done it was happening anyway.

17. Do you think it is important to continue training during a downturn in the economy?

Yes. People feel valued and if people feel valued they will continue to work hard. There was a phrase used 'head down and keep going' we couldn't reward staff with money but we could reward them with training days and other things and it did help.

18. What creative ways has your organisation used to deliver training?

We have started lean six sigma programme. We also use Kaizen. We would take an area and Kaizen it. We would get a mixture of staff from across the plant and get an unusual team together take a project and work on it, they have done 110 projects and some have worked extremely well some haven't, I'd say 80% have worked well. Everybody has been trained in the lean six sigma principles and we follow those guidelines. We have fun training days too, we lay on catering and we go back to the basics say like basic food hygiene and they do role playing and fun, very inexpensive to do but it is a big boost to staff, and people feel they can back and put more into their job and the company, they are motivated. We also do online training.

Appendix 8: Interview transcript 3

Respondent 3: Management consultant and former CEO management software provider.

Date: 15-07-14

Section 1: Training and development

1. *What are the key drivers for training in your organisation (E.g. Legal, H&S, customer service, competition)?*

The key driver is people development you need to grow the people in order to grow the business. Recruit bright people and keep those people moving as the business grows. If you don't train people the company grows at a pace that is faster than the ability of the staff to keep up with it you won't have succession or talent management. The key for me has always been to keep people trained so they are part of the growth story.

2. *Is the training focus on short term or long term objectives or both?*

Long term goals.

3. *Has the focus of training goals shifted in light of recession?*

Absolutely. The recession has been the biggest thing to hit the country. When it hit people in business found themselves in a situation where they hadn't been before. We were used to fast growth, but now we were faced with decisions about staff numbers and infrastructure projects and that would have affected training. We had to focus on what training we wanted to do and how that would play out in benefits to our customers.

4. *Do you carry out training needs analysis?*

As part of an annual appraisal we looked at people's development and look for gaps. We would look to support people who wanted to change career or move into supervisory roles and look at skills gaps. We would also co-sponsor people to do courses outside for example MBA.

5. *Do you consider personal and professional development important?*

Absolutely, and it is part of the annual appraisal, we would expect people to participate in any programmes we had put in place. We have always had different programmes at various times in the life cycle of the company. We would have management-leadership type programmes. In the recession one of the focuses we had was on customer service and support. We felt that in the recession our customers would be struggling using our software and we wanted to make sure they continued to use our software and not stop paying us to use it. We ran a training programme over three months for our customer support department about starting your own business, culminated in a dragon's den type scenario. It helped staff empathise with the customer and see things from the customer's perspective.

6. *Has personal and professional development suffered as a result of the recession?*

I don't think so I think we cut the budget slightly we didn't decimate it. In our case certainly it was cut but it was much more focused and we got more value from it because that is what you do in a recession you got more for less. I don't think it suffered, it was probably more valued, and people found themselves in a very fragile economy, jobs were very fragile so people valued what they had in a job more so than ever before. People were very conscious of change and as a result had to up their game that is how it felt.

Section 2: Economic Recession

7. *How has the recession affected training budgets? (% decrease, per head, training days).*

Ours would have been decreased but it was not decimated. Every expense line on the P&L got cut but I can say from my perspective as the CEO during this time I would not stand over a situation where it was cut totally, it just goes against every ethos that a good leader has, you have got to have the best people and they need to learn and be continually trained.

8. *Have training efforts increased or decreased?*

It very much depends on the culture of the organisation. In our company we operate on a three year business plans in cycles based on strategic goals and objectives and we value people and we have people plans in place. When the recession hit we did not react in a knee jerk reaction and larger companies like us can do this they can take a strategic approach to the recession they have the correct level of skills competencies at a leadership level to deal with it.

9. *Why have training efforts increased or decreased?*

The most important thing for us was that when we came out of recession was that our customers to say ‘that during the recession the customer support from our company didn’t diminish in any way in fact it improved’ and that was our sole objective we only had one and that was why we did all that training with the customer support teams. It was expensive but it was our strategy we justified it.

10. *What has been the main focus of the organisation post-recession? (growth, restructure, survival, market leader) How has this affected training.*

As time went on, I recall 2012 was our first growth year, so post-recession wasn’t a defined time but I think what we did and companies did was to get through it and in some respects reinvent ourselves. Our business focused on the Irish market and we were reliant on businesses in Ireland some were exporters and we wanted to put a focus on them we knew because they were exporting they were growing and had money to spend and needed more sophisticated software so strategically we looked there. For indigenous business that didn’t export it was a case of retaining those customers (the ones that managed to stay in business at all) so the focus was not to get new customers and it was all about maintaining these customers and extracting more value from them and this is where we executed our training strategy for customer service. This was a business plan we had put in place in 2008 and customer service training had been built into the strategy and it has paid dividends five years later.

11. For staff that have taken on more responsibilities in their roles, have they been supported with additional training?

I am a fair believer in staff don't take on more responsibility without receiving the proper training. I don't condone just giving people more work to do, I have an expression that 'you are just setting that person up to fail' if you don't give people the skills and competencies to do the job you are just setting them up for failure and you could end up losing a very diligent hardworking staff member. If we identified someone we had various corporate courses to put these staff through. We have also given our managers and supervisors training on having 'honest conversations' with their staff for doing performance management tasks such as monthly one to ones. It was important in the recession to do this to get our people aware of how their work influenced the performance of the company. We wanted to set people up to succeed.

12. When recruiting is there more emphasis on hiring experienced professionals for specific roles? (rather than train up for role).

It depends on the role. The overwhelming recruitment factor is 'fit' you could have the most qualified successful salesperson but if they don't fit then it doesn't work. For roles that are technical you are involved in aptitude testing etc. we were very clear of the type of score that was acceptable. If you stick to the policies you put in place it works. For senior management you are looking at experience and references. Sometimes you get it wrong and the more senior the level the bigger the mistake.

Section 3: Effective training/Creative training

13. Is training aligned with strategic goals of the organisation?

Yes absolutely. The customer support training is a good example of that.

14. Do you see training as a way to retain key staff?

Yes, in the context of an overall people plan. Really succession planning and talent management would be the two initiatives training is one of the factors to execute this and this is aligned with overall strategy of the organisation.

15. Do you feel training helps to keep employees engaged in their roles?

Training is there to help employees to be the best they can be there but it is also there to add value to the business we are not doing it just to keep employees happy. I don't see training as a mechanism to keep employees engaged that would be the wrong reason to do training. We do employee engagement surveys where we have an engagement index. Training never came up as a reason for not being engaged, it was issues with communication, reward or problems with a boss.

16. Do you see an opportunity now to make training and development more effective and efficient?

One of the great things about technology is access. And people have much greater access to a plethora of information and the ability to encourage people to educate themselves and be naturally inquisitive is important. That is not down to the company. Spoon-feeding is very much going away and people are taking much more accountability for their own development and career. That is not to take away from training because it is still required, for example there are new acts European directives on bribery and corruption etc. that weren't there twenty years ago so everyone in the company has to be trained on this compliance level and one does this at their pc. So training is evolving. It's not just about learning it is about compliance as well.

Do you think you have had to be more selective during the recession with the types of training?

Yes we are definitely being more selective and the HR people would be very selective and are clever at getting really good value. The swing towards compliance and data governance and that type of training was never there before. Before if you had a 100% training budget it would all go on education and learning whereas now a big chunk of the training budget has to go on this compliance training so the budget is being spread differently.

17. Do you think it is important to continue training during a downturn in the economy?

Yes absolutely and we would have proved that, you certainly can't stand still. I think companies that would have said 'I am cutting my training budget' and take it out of the P&L altogether I think commercially they would come out of the recession a lot slower than companies who continued with training, I think because they would be internally focused. Training in itself is not the strategy; training is the execution of one element of the strategy so if they cut training I think they would struggle.

18. What creative ways has your organisation used to deliver training?

There is a lot more internal training done, not going out to hotels etc. The example of training the customer support staff on how to run a business that is creative that is thinking outside the box. You need to take a risk to, one has to be courageous courage is one of the things that comes out of the recession.

Appendix 9: Interview transcript 4

Respondent 4: Managing Director Building materials manufacturer

Date: 23-07-14

Section 1: Training and development

1. *What are the key drivers for training in your organisation (E.g. Legal, H&S, customer service, competition)?*

Making sure that staff have the right level of skills and knowledge to achieve the strategy and objectives. It is a multiple level, making sure that roles are defined clearly and people are trained adequately to undertake those roles. Training is critical to the organisation.

2. *Is the training focus on short term or long term objectives or both?*

Both, there is no such thing as a short term fix, if you are investing in training you have a long-term view but there are clearly short term and medium term benefits. Ultimately you are investing in the individual and retaining staff and over time the long term objectives bring the value back.

3. *Has the focus of training goals shifted in light of recession?*

They did, Ireland is still not a positive position compared to our other markets. We clamped the overhead spending in all divisions. We reduced overhead spend dramatically.

4. *Do you carry out training needs analysis?*

We do definitely as part of annual performance appraisal. Let's talk about strengths over the year, weaknesses where we can improve on. Also as an individual how can we develop and grow with the organisation and that is a secondary part. We devised a multi-dimensional training where staff from different departments train together, this came through the individual appraisal process.

5. *Do you consider personal and professional development important?*

Definitely, we do a 5 year strategic plan and that is refreshed and presented to the group annually and part of that is all around people, be it succession planning, skills and how do we develop people. Over the last few years we have looked specifically at trying to identify a certain group of talent to identify who are the next leaders of the organisation are. On a training level we do ensure that the personal development piece is given a fair degree of importance.

6. *Has personal and professional development suffered as a result of the recession?*

Yes we certainly clamped expenditure. Overall unfortunately it has.

Section 2: Economic Recession

7. *How has the recession affected training budgets? (% decrease, per head, training days).*

We clamped the overhead spending in all divisions. We reduced overhead spend dramatically. Pre-recession we would have relied heavily on external training. As a result of the recession the focus was put more on internal based training. Using in-house skills as an alternative to external. So for example Customer Service Department you look at the professional skills base there. Having someone within the organisation who knows and understands the customer base, issues etc. can be more targeted in one sense.

8. *Have training efforts increased or decreased?*

You could argue no change, yes spend on training decreased but we used internal training to fill the gap.

9. *Why have training efforts increased or decreased?*

We had to cut overheads across the board. It is as simple as that.

10. *What has been the main focus of the organisation post-recession (growth, restructure, survival, market leader) How has this affected training.*

Regain growth and gain our position in markets. We lost a bit of share, so we are trying to increase geographic expansion. Grow our product range looking at new product opportunities and add value to existing products. From a training perspective, with new products we have had to recruit new staff and that has brought a whole host of training. We also do contractor training we have a training academy for contractors to train them on all our products across the range.

11. For staff that have taken on more responsibilities in their roles, have they been supported with additional training?

If you are promoting someone and in the course of the appraisal, then the training needs would come from that discussion. It is all part of the individual assessment so yes we would.

12. When recruiting is there more emphasis on hiring experienced professionals for specific roles? (rather than train up for role).

It is very much role specific. If you are talking about customer service or production, you would be looking for the right personality, attitude and someone who will show initiative there isn't a great need to have huge experience but in a way it is better to be able to mould them into the culture it works very well. But if we are looking for commercial sales manager then experience is very important. We also have a graduate recruitment programme that is extremely successful. We are getting highly educated people and they get a lot of on the job training.

Section 3: Effective training/Creative training

13. Is training aligned with strategic goals of the organisation?

Definitely, how we make sure we have the right skillset to deliver our strategic plan is centre stage.

14. Do you see training as a way to retain key staff?

Yes. It is logic, if someone invests in you with time and financial resources the commitment should be there but of course it not always the case but nine times out of ten I would say it works.

Is succession important?

Succession is very important in fact it is an issue to be perfectly honest with you, it is about making sure we have the next layer of leaders and goes back to our idea about finding the next layer of people who can step up and that is not an easy thing to do. We have people here over thirty five years and have huge experience and we are coming to a stage where some of those people will be looking to retire, and having the right succession plan is not easy you can't replace thirty five years of experience no matter what you do. There is a culture of commitment to the organisation it is very much a commitment to the family even though it is a public company. The loyalty is there.

15. Do you feel training helps to keep employees engaged in their roles?

Natural answer is yes, the company investing in them then you should see a commitment to their roles.

16. Do you see an opportunity now to make training and development more effective and efficient?

I would say what we have seen the benefit of internal based training as opposed to external and for us going forward as things are improving in terms of our own performance I still think we will reduce the reliance on external training. It can come back to culture and the innate knowledge of what we need to do and what the business does. So no matter who you bring in they're not going to understand the culture and they're not necessarily going to understand the nitty gritty detail of what we do and why we do it. Sometimes you can argue that you need a fresh pair of eyes and that can be the case sometimes but I think we have seen the benefit of internal based training and going forward we will probably do more of that and less of the external based training.

17. Do you think it is important to continue training during a downturn in the economy?

Yes is the answer and people might say that is the time to invest in training, invest in marketing etc. but we had no choice but to clamp down for us the effect of the recession was catastrophic. Yes is the answer where practical but in all honesty you have to be practical and it was an area that got cut along with marketing, unfortunately.

18. What creative ways has your organisation used to deliver training?

We have done some e learning not sure how successful that has been to be perfectly honest with you because I do think face to face training is definitely better. One piece we have found that shone, while not training directly is that programme where we had the 'Next Leader' piece that we talked about, there were about 30 people and you can imagine when you get that level of people they are all varying levels of skill. Some people of that level will think if an external trainer comes in 'well I know more than them' others won't so you have a whole mix of personalities. One thing that we found from that development group was that they were all together and had the opportunity to talk about subjects, for example each managing director had a Q&A session where staff got to ask us 'where did you start your career' 'where do you get your inspiration from' things like that so it was a very open piece. People got an awful lot from that and it improved their ability to network and talk among themselves. If anything I think staff got more out of that than an external guy coming in to talk about strategy. For me that was a new way to develop, find new ways to grow the business, it was interactive and about sharing experience and it is the way forward.

Appendix 10: Interview transcript 5

Respondent 5: Vice President of People Operations Information and Telecommunications Company

Date: 31-07-14

Section 1: Training and development

1. *What are the key drivers for training in your organisation (E.g. Legal, H&S, customer service, competition)?*

Training falls into three sections, all related. The first is up skilling the people we have now, the best example of that would be when someone gets promoted from a role where they are just doing the work, they are brilliant at doing the work but we have decided to take the chance on them and promote them to a supervisory or managerial role something they haven't done before then you are having to up skill them in the softer skills of people management etc. The next one is developing talent. The biggest teams here are technology and online marketing, and they are the two in demand areas in the country at the moment. There is a shortage of technical people and there is a shortage of online marketing people. So when you find good people you want to invest in them and you want to develop them plus there is also the idea that if you hire people at the very beginning of their career and train them up then you are more likely to keep them and also get the benefits of everything you have done to train and develop them. Trying to hire developers at graduate level and train them up is a practice here. That leads quite neatly to the third area which is retention side of things trying to hold onto staff that you have spent time trying to find and then train. It is also an important motivational tool. When people enjoy a job and they feel they are actually learning something and adding bullet points to their C.V. then they are not going to start looking elsewhere for a job. So it is very important.

2. *Is the training focus on short term or long term objectives or both?*

A mixture of both. The example I gave earlier of someone moving into a supervisory role they would have short term objectives as they are taking on managing people so it is imperative that you give them the training straight away and get them up to speed

on that. Then there are the long term objectives in that will they continue in this role and you need to keep training and developing.

3. *Has the focus of training goals shifted in light of recession?*

Our training goals have shifted but it has nothing to do with the recession it is to do with the individual cycle within the organisation. So the focus of training goals have shifted in that before, the uptake for training was very low from the managers here, whereas now there are more people focused managers within the organisation so they are putting more of a priority around training and development it's not just we will give staff training for the sake of it which was the original thought process, now it is about identifying needs asking the people themselves to identify needs and tailoring accordingly. The goals have definitely shifted but nothing to do with the recession.

4. *Do you carry out training needs analysis?*

Yes at a very high level with the managers. We put our budgets together at the end of year for the following calendar year so come September/October I will sit down with the managers and we go through it with them. The way managers are getting this information is from observing staff and also from performance reviews. We encourage staff to identify their own developmental needs; the employee is equally culpable for it. It is actually in our employee handbook.

5. *Do you consider personal and professional development important?*

Yes, very much so. I think if you are a tech organisation one thing you will find is that there is a stereotype that goes around techy people in that they don't necessarily have a love of, or a natural flair for interpersonal skills. It becomes quite noticeable that are the softer skills that have to be developed. I mean you can have the world's best developer but they can't communicate with people so you have to develop this.

6. *Has personal and professional development suffered as a result of the recession?*

I imagine it has in other organisations where the recession has really hit them. But with us our peaks and flows have nothing to do with the recession. We have been growing since our inception so it hasn't really affected us.

Section 2: Economic Recession

7. *How has the recession affected training budgets? (% decrease, per head, training days).*

It hasn't but what has affected our training budgets is the individual mind-set of the organisation. So three years ago there was no HR function so it was a case of educating the organisation of the importance of having one. Our budgets have increased because there is far greater buy in from senior managers because there are more people focused managers in the organisation and also the CEO has bought into from a perspective of (a) developing softer skills for people who have taken on managerial roles and (b) from a retention point of view as well.

8. *Have training efforts increased or decreased?*

Increased without a shadow of a doubt.

9. *Why have training efforts increased or decreased?*

It is down to that mind-set shift we talked about.

10. *What has been the main focus of the organisation post-recession? (growth, restructure, survival, market leader) How has this affected training.*

Online marketing. We did a strategic review two years ago and last year it was very heavily tech orientated, this year it is focused on online marketing. Training has had to match this strategy.

11. *For staff that have taken on more responsibilities in their roles, have they been supported with additional training?*

Yes, definitely. The way we are going now is that a lot of people who are getting internal promotions within the organisation are offered a package and part of the package that is put to them are a training and development promise. Recently we promoted two people in the tech area and as part of the package they got managerial training, coaching and mentoring. It is all part of the deal giving them support mechanisms to do their role.

12. *When recruiting is there more emphasis on hiring experienced professionals for specific roles? (rather than train up for role).*

It is very much role dependant. We are great at promoting from within but we have got much better at is making sure that people have the skillset to take on that elevated role.

Section 3: Effective training/Creative training

13. *Is training aligned with strategic goals of the organisation?*

Yes very much so.

14. *Do you see training as a way to retain key staff?*

Massively so, training feeds into the retention and succession planning goals we have.

15. *Do you feel training helps to keep employees engaged in their roles?*

If it is the right training, and you have to be really careful about this. If you give people training that they feel they need or that they want then yes but if for example you are giving softer skills training and they don't feel that they need it then there can be a feeling of indignation. You can demotivate people if you get it wrong.

16. *Do you see an opportunity now to make training and development more effective and efficient?*

Yes, especially in an organisation like ours that is still very young and going through expansion so you have to keep tinkering with it and as we get bigger we will be able to provide more for the organisation I would hope a time goes by that we would have our own online diplomas where people could get actual meaningful qualifications.

17. *Do you think it is important to continue training during a downturn in the economy?*

Yes massively so. You do need to train people or you're going to lose your best people.

18. *What creative ways has your organisation used to deliver training?*

The internal training is crucial, I think the traditional mind-set is to send people out to a classroom style course and that's not what we want. We have a lady who does

presentation skills courses where she comes in and you are videoed and during the course of the day it gets played back to you to see how you are improving.

Another example of our internal training is our head of customer care has kicked off an initiative where by everybody in the organisation has to sit with a member of the customer care team for a couple of hours and you get a great understanding of (a) their job and (b) who our customer is what their complaints are, which is a very good eye-opener to the organisation. We have another example, as we have offices all around the world we have just this week flown the operator's team in and they are here for the week of training it is a mix of external training providers and internal people taking about what is going on in teams and talking about the brand. For example the operators team will spend two, two hour stints tomorrow with each of the department and it is a good way to show people what each function is, because people can get a silo mentality in their own area and they don't understand what their contribution is to the organisation.

Appendix 11: Self reflection

Introduction

The act of self-reflection is an opportunity to evaluate the experiences of learning during the MBA programme and the dissertation process. Reflection can build a better understanding of strengths and weaknesses; it can also raise questions about values and beliefs. The process of reflecting on oneself can mean confronting fears and inadequacies which may have gone unrecognised.

In choosing to do an MBA I had many decisions to make. In making these choices my goals were formed, I want to graduate with an MBA, I want to learn and develop and I want to challenge myself and face my fears whatever they may be.

Reflection is an iterative process that takes practise and is most beneficial when you learn from it. The CIPD (2014) promote reflective learning as it enables you to “accept responsibility for your own personal growth”, while providing “a clear link between the effort you put into your development activity and the benefits you get out of it”. This is very true during the MBA experience. The reflective journal has given me the opportunity to evaluate what I have learned and how it related to my future, specific examples are presented below:

Evaluation of learning and development

I was very much aware in the beginning of the MBA that it had been fourteen years since I had been an undergraduate. This presented a feeling of not being able to keep up and this worried me greatly, however I found that I acclimatised to academic life quite quickly and this surprised me.

The prospect of assignments was both exciting and terrifying; I had very high standards and grades whilst doing my degree and was setting the same standard now. In hindsight this was possibly a little unrealistic considering the length of time I had been out of college. For

example the first group assignment I undertook I received a grade of 60% and I found myself disappointed by this. However I was determined to speak to the lecturer and learn as much as I could from his feedback to make the necessary improvements I felt I needed to make to help me in all of my other assignments. This initial speed bump as I saw it helped me to be more critical in my writing and also to be more systematic in my research.

The volume of knowledge imparted by lecturers and the information overload I felt was at times overwhelming. However I relished going to class and found several modules particularly enjoyable and rewarding I gained new dimensions on time management and learned planning skills from the Project Management module. This helped me to prioritise and organise my work and study more effectively.

I found the thought of a module on Financial Analysis frightening and was sure I would not perform well in it, I surprised myself by receiving a good grade by being thoroughly engrossed in the required assignments and I was able to make connections between the course material and every day business decisions. This strength was something I was unaware of before the MBA process.

The module on Personal and Professional development was of particular interest to me and I found it so interesting, from this I discovered both my learning style and team role. Through the use of the Honey and Mumford learning styles questionnaire I discovered that I am a reflector which was quite interesting because during my undergraduate time I was an activist so it was remarkable to see how my learning style had changed over the years. Belbin's team role placed me as an implementer/completer-finisher this I could relate to as it would have been evident in my working life. Both tests were very insightful and useful when it came to working with others in a group. Knowing the team role of a colleague made such a difference in the performance of the group as it made communication clearer and the division of tasks

and roles was substantially easier. The group was very cohesive co-operative and achieved an excellent grade as a result.

I also gained a lot of perspective from the performance management class and found I could use practical examples from my working life experiences to relate to the theory. Being able to do this made understanding theory easier but also I was able to resolve issues I had from my working life that I never fully understood but now I had a theory to explain it and this brought a lot of clarity for me. It also affirmed my interest in the area of human resource management as a career avenue.

Research methods was perhaps a module that while influential during the semester for assignments, the gravity of it only emerged in writing the dissertation proposal. I found that I needed to do a lot more reading in this area both in preparation for and during the dissertation process itself. I found the time management skills I had learned stood by me during this process and the ability to prioritise tasks certainly proved useful in achieving personal targets set out during both the research and writing phase.

While I gained a lot from the academic side of the MBA I feel I have also gained hugely through the personal relationships I have built. I found the interaction with lecturers very rewarding and have also formed some lasting friendships. Seeing different approaches to study and learning has given me a new respect for working in teams which I believe will be extremely beneficial in my future career as effective teamwork is a highly desirable competency.

While doing the dissertation it was necessary to use influencing skills in the data collection phase by arranging interviews. I feel I developed these skills whilst working on group

assignments. It is rare to get an opportunity to speak to people in such senior positions and I learned a lot from the experience.

Conclusion

I feel I have achieved all my goals in doing my MBA and hope to use the skills I have learned in developing my career in the human resources and people management field. I have a better understanding of theories and concepts and the application of key competencies like teamwork and communication that are key requirements for a career that involves managing people. I would like to pursue a role within a human resources department of an organisation with the aim of developing a role in training and development in particular. I am passionate about getting the best out of people and feel this is the best avenue for me to pursue.