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WITS
DigitalCampus

Maximise the return on your
investment in skills development



Wits DigitalCampus has developed a way for companies to harness the power of learning to improve performance, upskill their people and give life to the spirit of empowerment legislation.

Businesses have long recognised that investing in the development of their people's skills generates real returns – we know that better motivated and better skilled employees positively impact corporate performance. Concurrently, employees themselves have long since identified the correlation between the acquisition of skills and career advancement. High rankings on lists like “Most Admired Company” and “Best Company to Work For” are often underpinned by the training opportunities a company offers.

Companies (including their shareholders) and employees agree that offering skills development opportunities for staff has positive benefits for all. The question remaining is around how to make skills development affordable and deliver it optimally. Since companies primarily exist to make money, they to budget for money spent on skills development *and* see a good return on their investment.

Understanding skills development in the context of B-BBEE legislation

Before looking at solutions, another important driver for South African companies needs to be considered: Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment in general, and the B-BBEE Scorecards against which companies are measured in particular. Most businesses do not question the social, economic and moral imperatives for making the economy more inclusive, nor the key role that skills development will play in achieving that goal. For them, the real question is how to implement B-BBEE in a way that benefits the company while advancing the broader goals of the legislation.

While the need to comply with legislation may encourage a cynical “tick-box” approach, the legislation does provide a useful framework which can inform a coherent B-BBEE strategy. Companies that take the time to understand what the B-BBEE legislation is trying to achieve can increase the benefits they receive from their B-BBEE compliance – specifically with regard to skills development, which constitutes one of the key elements of the scorecard.

In other words, a company that simply provides skills training in order to comply with the legislation will get points on its B-BBEE scorecard, but not much else. By contrast, a company that designs a skills development programme to help employees realise their potential and acquire business-related skills will receive not only points on a scorecard, but also the multiple benefits associated with loyal and motivated employees, and true transformation..

There are many strong pull factors for taking skills development seriously. Companies, including their shareholders and staff, benefit; business as a whole benefits as more skills are available and the economy expands; and society benefits as more people are empowered to reach their potential. The trick, however, is to develop an approach that maximises the effectiveness of the skills development for all parties, and that will work creatively within the framework of the B-BBEE scorecard to maximise return on the company's investment without losing sight of the legislators' intent.

The Wits DigitalCampus solution

Wits DigitalCampus set out to provide a solution that addresses all these various issues. It is a collaboration between LRMG, a respected performance optimisation company, and the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), one of the country's premier educational institutions.

When we set out to create our offering, we were guided by the kind of thinking summarised above. More specifically, several practical considerations guided us. One is the fact that, from the corporate point of view, skills development that takes place away from the workplace is undesirable. Travel and even accommodation adds to the expense, but even more serious is the disruption to operations. Managers are therefore reluctant to motivate for key employees to attend such courses.

Additionally, we considered that skills development should be delivered in such a way that the maximum number of staff complete it, and the skills that they gain should be relevant to their jobs and improve their career prospects at the same time. The aim is to improve both the company's performance and the individual employee's career prospects.

With regard to the scorecard, courses that fall into Category B of the Skills Development Matrix are most desirable, because the full cost of the course plus the salary of the trainee for the duration of the course can be recognised. Thus the points the company earns are maximised.

Here are some of the highlights of the offering, and how they align with the imperatives we have discussed:



Online short courses mean that trainees can participate easily from any location, with minimal disruption to their normal operational responsibilities.



All courses are recognised as Category B in terms of the scorecard, thereby maximising the points earned on the scorecard, and the company's investment in the programme.



Courses all focus on pivotal areas with a direct impact on business performance and improving trainees' CVs.



Work simulation helps turn theory into practice, making the training much more relevant to real working life.



Full support from experts. Unlike conventional e-learning, our courses have expert educators in the background to enhance the learning experience and monitor progress. This support includes discussion forums with, and mentorship by, a Wits lecturer to help ensure trainees get the maximum value and are inspired to complete the course. Wits DigitalCampus has a 96 percent completion rate.



Courses are accredited by Wits University, and a Certificate of Competence based on a formal assessment is provided. This maximises scorecard points and ensures that individuals have a credible certification that will help them advance their careers.

In short, this approach enables companies to remain true to the spirit of the empowerment legislation, maximise the positive impact of their own performance and the CVs of their employees, and gain the most traction on the scorecard itself. The latter is important not just for compliance purposes but also for qualifying to tender for government work.

How it actually works: An example from real life

To understand the power of the Wits DigitalCampus approach, let's look at a client example.

We recently worked with a major technology company. One goal was to improve its scorecard rating in order to position itself better when bidding on contracts. At the same time, it wanted to make the same learning experience available to all staff across the country but without disrupting operations unnecessarily. The company was adamant that the courses had to be relevant to the business, and that what people learned on them would help improve both corporate and individual performance.

Based on the client's skills needs, we put together a structured learning journey comprising several modules or courses. Trainees had to complete all the learning items in the module using any Internet-connected device, complete the assignment and participate in the discussion forum hosted by the lecturer. The forum required trainees to discuss how they would apply what they had learnt to their work environments, or give feedback on how they had done so. Finally, they would have to write the final online exam. Each component counted towards the final mark obtained.

A total of 70 employees participated, and all bar one participant completed the course.

The pass rate was 96 percent. Learner satisfaction ratings were around below 85 percent, with the majority in the 90s. All of this goes to the continuing impact the courses will have on company and individual performance.

Sixty-one of the trainees fell into the designated groups in terms of the scorecard. The total tuition costs for this group amounted to R722 346, but because the programme was recognised as Category B, the full salary cost of the trainees could also be recognised on the scorecard. Because of this, the total spend recognised for the scorecard was R3.9 million.

We calculated that the Wits DigitalCampus programme as a whole contributed an extra 2.5 points to the client's B-BBEE scorecard, playing a major part in helping it move from a Level 4 B-BBEE contributor to Level 3 in terms of the new ICT Charter.

Everybody agrees on the value that properly structured and accredited skills development can deliver to companies, individuals and the economy as a whole. Now there is a way to ensure all these benefits are realised in a way that maximises the positive impact for all stakeholders.



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Jannie Heyneke is Operations Executive at Wits DigitalCampus. In this role, Jannie oversees the day-to-day operations of Wits DigitalCampus and plays a pivotal role in representing Wits DigitalCampus to business and corporate stakeholders in a marketing and sales role. Passionate about seeing individuals and organisations transform potential into performance, Jannie works with organisations to help their employees advance and forge new career paths, while equipping the companies with the skills they need to drive performance throughout their organisations.

About WitsDigital Campus

Wits DigitalCampus is a unique partnership between LRMG and Wits University. It offers fully supported and accredited digital learning, focused on growing competence, skills and leadership to improve individual and business performance. Based on Wits University content and delivered by Wits lecturers, the courses enable immediate workplace skills application and impact, and help fill critical business skills gaps. The unique accreditation awarded to DigitalCampus courses also helps facilitate regulatory compliance with recognised spend for B-BBEE and skills development. In this way, DigitalCampus enables companies to harness the power of learning to improve performance, upskill their people and give life to the spirit of empowerment legislation.