

B-BBEE hacks for skills development

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Introduction

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Step 1: Strategy

Have you ever thought about aligning your Skills Development with your business strategy? Or is it a case of get the points, no matter what? How disconnected are you from your L&D Strategy? Do you even *have* an L&D Strategy? Well, you might be wasting money and opportunities. To turn things around, consider the following:

1. Align with business strategy – One of your primary tasks should be to develop and shape your company's L&D strategy based on the company's overall business and talent plans. Your strategy must seek to support professional development and build capabilities across the company, on time, and in a cost-effective manner. You need to take into account your Skills Development targets and investment when planning your B-BBEE Skills Development initiatives.
2. Co-own Skills Development between business units and HR – Enhance your partnerships with business leaders by establishing a governance structure in which leadership from both business units and HR share responsibility for defining, prioritising, designing and securing funds for Skills Development programmes.
3. Assess capability gaps and estimate value – Now that you have identified your business priorities, you must verify that you can deliver on them. Assess the gaps between your current projects and what the business strategy requires you to do. Give yourself a score for each of them to quickly identify major differences.
4. Design learning journeys – Using the B-BBEE Learning Programme Matrix and your gap analysis, now identify learning journeys and programmes. Always try to maximise internal training efforts vs unemployed training. Use the other elements on your B-BBEE Scorecard to create opportunities for skilled unemployed people, and remember that micro-businesses are a great way to reduce poverty.
5. Execute and scale up – An established Skills Development agenda consists of several strategic initiatives that support capability building and are aligned with business goals. It is vitally important that you test your hypothesis before scaling it. Once it has proven successful, or you have identified and made the required changes, scale it to bring maximum business value.
6. Measure the impact on business performance – Set KPIs for your Skills Development initiatives. Yes, the points awarded vs cash investment is important, but what was the engagement rate? How many learners completed? How many 'new' leaders have you developed? How many permanent jobs have you created?

When you formulate your Skills Development strategy, think of ways to tip the scale toward more points for less cash. There are multiple ways of doing this, and if you need some advice, reach out to us and we'll gladly share.

Step 2: Governance

Now that you have your strategy in place, you need to create a framework for decision-making to ensure that you can

efficiently and effectively execute the strategy. Assuming that you have an L&D department but not an accredited academy, you will face increasing pressure to design and deliver efficient, high-quality and fit-for-purpose learning solutions. Doing this on time and on budget is critical yet challenging. Thus, you need to empower your team to make the best possible vendor sourcing decisions based on an identified learning need.

Structure a decision-making committee consisting of executives, managers, operational staff and identified learners. Share the strategy you have developed, the goals, timelines and decision-making process. If you have already identified potential vendors, allow the committee to review the vendors against your strategy.

Step 3: Partner up

The challenge of selecting the right partner for your Skills Development programme may seem daunting. You cannot afford to waste time on relationships that won't bear fruit, making your choice of vendor critical for results and sustainability. There are thousands of vendors, and only the top 1% deserve your business. But although selecting the right vendor can be challenging, you have more power than you may realise. Before committing to any potential long-term relationship, follow these simple guidelines to identify and qualify the best vendor:

- Reputation – Research the vendor and identify awards, recognition, existing clients, news articles and previous results. It is vitally important that you partner with a vendor that holds an excellent track record.
- Test responsiveness – First impressions last a lifetime. Attempt to get some sort of technical assistance from the vendor *outside* of the existing relationship (if there is one). For example, go to their website and use the contact form to submit a support query. How the support transpires will give you an indication of how things are likely to be once you sign up.
- Level of service – Find out whether you will be allocated a dedicated contact to whom you can reach out for support. Whatever you require must be supported – whether this is an update on the skills development programme or a board pack. As a minimum, you should have a formal launch for the programme, monthly progress reports, continuous learner feedback, and a full pack of BEE evidence.
- Are you just a number? – You are about to invest a big amount, and it is important that you are not regarded as just another client. You should be treated as if you are the *only* client. And make sure you meet the vendor's Chief in Charge.
- Share the workload – Collecting Skills Development evidence is time consuming and requires a solid effort to get it right the first time. Understand your vendor's commitment towards you earning your full BEE points.
- Credibility check – Do your due diligence. Ask the vendor to introduce you to one or two of their clients with similar programmes. Then spare 15 minutes to have a private conversation with the client and hear them out on the good, the bad and the ugly. While you're at it, test the vendor's value proposition with the client.
- Content check – Ask for first-hand experience of how learners will engage with the training intervention; you need to get a feel of what to expect.

Step 4: Go live

Your Skills Development programme must be formally launched, and the launch should be properly planned and scoped. Onboarding learners onto your programme will familiarise them with your strategy and what is expected of them. A strong onboarding plan results in happier learners and clear expectations, creates camaraderie, and boosts commitment and energy. Get it wrong, and you risk incomplete programmes, dropouts, poor results and, ultimately, fewer BEE points.

Follow these simple steps for a successful onboarding programme:

- Kick it off with a 'What to expect' guide.
- Conduct a formal launch event (face-to-face is always better, but go online for maximum reach).
- Introduce the role players.
- Explain how the programme fits in with your strategy.

- Present the programme in detail, allowing for Q&A.
- Set the timeline with milestones.
- For the first quarter of the programme, remind remind remind, i.e. “By now you should be at Module 2. Are you there? Can we help?”
- Throughout the programme, do regular check-ins with the vendor, learners and line managers.
- Talking about line managers, get them involved. Give them the power to support the learning journey.

Step 5: Measure the impact

In your next board or management meeting, you’ll be asked to provide feedback not only on your B-BBEE Scorecard, but also those learning interventions that you’ve been promising will be a success. Since 2003, when the BEE Act was introduced, HR/Finance/Transformation/L&D custodians have consistently faced one demand: demonstrate the added value of BEE investment for learners and the organisation.

Inherently, Skills Development should feed employment equity with new black talent, and promote existing black employees into higher occupational levels.

Here are some of our favourite KPIs to measure the Rol of your Skills Development programmes:

- Connection rate – Out of your cohort of learners, how many have interacted with classroom or online learning interventions? Realistically, and depending on cohort size, 85% is generally a good target.
- Usage – Now that you have people connecting, you should aim to have 85% of them actively doing training.
- Completion – Although this can generally only be measured at the end of the period, you can measure the status based on the number of learners behind, on par, or ahead of the target date, and the number of completed learning interventions.
- Satisfaction – Measuring learner satisfaction is a crucial part of Rol, and should be done by module or by month. You want to get those promoters to stand out and speak their minds.
- Cost per BEE point – Take your last Scorecard and the actual points earned, and then divide that by the total BEE investment; now you know your current cost per point. You should work towards reducing the cost per point for your next Scorecard, and if you achieve this, report it in BIG BOLD letters in your next feedback session to management.
- Absorption/promotion – Monitor how many of your learners are permanently absorbed into a role, or are promoted, within your measuring period. Bonus points are lurking on the horizon, automatically reducing the cost per BEE point.
- Business revenue and client retention – You might need your Chief Revenue Officer to help you here, but find out how much sales were generated and/or retained because of your BEE Level. Your procurement recognition (BEE Recognition Level) will have a major impact on your clients’ Scorecard.

In summary, B-BBEE Skills Development is seen as an extraordinary expense in most businesses, but if you have the right strategy and the right delivery plan, you’ll see great returns.

Contact eSTUDY today to find out how we can help you!

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