

Management Report: Sports Direct

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Introduction

This report explores the importance of effective leadership and management with a view to ensuring that new innovative ideas can be used so that SportsDirect is ready for future challenges that competitors might pose. The report is divided into ten sections (including this one): an analysis of coaching and mentoring as tools for developing leadership and management; a critical evaluation of trends in workplace learning; an examination of strategies for integrating learning and development within wider organisational strategy; an analysis of indicators for success for effective leadership and management development programmes; a critical analysis of approaches to evaluating leadership and management and development programmes; an analysis of methods of developing effective teams for performance improvement; an evaluation of the role of effective motivation using theories and models of motivation in performance management; an evaluation of the relationship between effective leadership and effective communication; and a conclusion which summarises the main findings of the report.

Analysis of coaching and mentoring as tools for developing leadership and management

Coaching and mentoring tools have been used to develop leadership and management because, when used appropriately, both coaching and mentoring can help employees to learn new skills and to have higher levels of self-confidence which contributes to employees effectively utilising these new skills (Serrat, 2017). Mentoring and coaching offers a form of developing leadership through experience which allows potential leaders and managers to learn on the job whilst gaining practical skills that will enable them to lead and manage alone when necessary (Stead, 2005).

Providing leadership and management training on the job, using real world examples offers a pragmatic, effective and sustainable approach to leadership and management training that offers role socialisation, reduced feelings of isolation (through increased levels of connectivity with people with more experience than them), significant opportunities for professional development, increased levels of job satisfaction, improved leadership and management skills and leadership capacity-

building (Stead, 2005). Relational learning that is placed within the context of on the job experiences is known to co-create a rich learning environment that not only builds capacity for individual employees but which also builds capacity for the organisation through training existing employees (Hartley and Hinksman, 2013).

Coaching and mentoring is a way of showing employees that they mean something to the company because the investment made in providing coaching and mentoring to employees speaks volumes about their place in the company and the value that the company places on employees (Delmondes and Borges Afonso, 2017). In return, employees develop higher levels of trust in the company and higher levels of loyalty which provides a high return on the initial investment in coaching and mentoring (Stead, 2005).

The mentoring relationship is essentially a social relationship in which the mentor socialises the mentee into both the organisational context and the leadership and management tasks that they will be expected to perform (Townley, 2014). The aims of the mentoring/coaching relationship, if clearly established ahead of time, can allow the mentee to develop the necessary skills to be able to transition into a new leadership/management role within the company as necessary: this is cost-effective as it saves the costs associated with bringing in a new employee (Stead, 2005).

The mentor/coaching relationship with the mentee is a valuable relationship that can be fostered to the benefit of the company: whilst learning on the job from experiences that the company can offer to the mentees, the mentees gain valuable experience that can allow them to determine where the leadership/management weaknesses are and to suggest alternative approaches that could improve the leadership/management in place at SportsDirect.

In this sense, mentorship/coaching allows for routine problem solving and the challenging of assumptions within an organisation which, for an organisation such as SportsDirect, would be a productive approach to utilise because of the collective learning that this approach would enable (Preskill and Torres, 2019). In this sense, mentorship/coaching offers an opportunity for transformative learning which would

be useful not only in an individual sense but also collectively, at the level of the organisation (Preston, 2014).

Critical evaluation of trends in workplace learning that can be applied to SportsDirect

Trends in workplace learning have changed somewhat since the COVID-19 pandemic and current trends in workplace learning include the hyper-personalisation of workplace learning so that individual employees can receive highly personalised training and the implementation of adaptive learning which allows individual employees to manage their own personalised learning pathway (Fenwick, 2018). This is likely to be important at SportsDirect because of the extensive management changes that are occurring at the organisation which will require training to be delivered in a specialised manner so that individual employees can receive the training they specifically need to be able to shift jobs within the organisation if necessary.

It is likely that cross-training will also be a continuing trend in workplace learning within the next few years with cross-training allowing employees to learn skills and competencies outside of their current scope of responsibilities with a view to improving team functioning through a deeper understanding of the roles and responsibilities of each team member. This is an important trend for SportsDirect to monitor given the management changes and the changes to employees structuring that are occurring and the need to maximise the human resources available within SportsDirect in order to minimise the costs associated with hiring new employees. By cross-training employees, the company can save costs when employees leave.

Microlearning is another trend that SportsDirect should keep abreast of: microlearning (the presentation of information in small bites to employees who need to learn new information) has been shown to improve employee engagement (Bruck, 2020) and to allow employees to retain new information more effectively (Hug, 2020). In an environment like that of SportsDirect, which has a high staff turnover, the ability of employees to microlearn is important because staff might be switched from one set of responsibilities to another which requires new knowledge to be

learned quickly and effectively. Teaching staff the skill of microlearning would therefore be beneficial for this organisational context.

Additionally, SportsDirect would also benefit from an increasing emphasis on soft skills, which is another workplace trend (Lee and Lai, 2019): focusing on soft skills more than hard professional skills is beneficial in an environment such as that at SportsDirect where employee turnover is high because transferrable skills such as effective interpersonal skills are necessary in employees who will need to shift around across jobs and across different teams (Lester and Costley, 2020). Flexibility, for example, is a soft skill that SportsDirect should be encouraging its employees to learn so that employees are resilient to the negative effects of change and, as a consequence, can do their jobs effectively even when changes are afoot in the organisation (Bolt, 2021).

Examination of strategies for integrating learning and development within the wider organisational strategy

The essential components of a successful learning and development strategy include realising the strategic nature of learning and development and realising that learning and development straddles five main strategic areas, including the attraction and retention of talent, the motivation and engagement of employees, the building of an employer brand, the creation of a values-based organisational culture and the development of people capabilities within the organisation (McKinsey, 2020).

Each of these five strategic areas of talent management need to be considered when integrating learning and development strategy with the wider organisational strategies that are in place at an organisation. This is because an organisation is a dynamic entity that learns collectively through the individual learning that occurs within each employee and the team-based learning that occurs through the teams in place within an organisation (Van Dam, 2008).

By focusing the integration of learning and development within the wider organisational strategy through these five main areas, the learning across the organisation can be optimised which will ensure that the collective learning process is not only dynamic but also feeds back into the wider strategic organisational

strategies that are in place. Focusing on attracting and retaining talent, for example, is necessary so that the organisation can continue to attract and to retain the talent it needs to perform optimally (Swanson and Gradous, 2020).

Developing people capabilities across the organisation is also necessary so that the workforce is capable of effectively implementing the wider strategic plans of the organisation. Research shows that companies that invest in developing leadership and management talent are 2.4 times more likely to hit performance targets than those organisations that do not invest in leadership and management talent (McKinsey, 2009).

Creating a values-based culture within an organisation is important because this focuses employee efforts on learning and development which, in turn, helps to generate a strong sense of community and a strong sense of employee loyalty which reduces staff turnover and increases the likelihood that strategic goals will be met (Krohn, 2000).

Building an employer brand, similarly, helps to position an organisation as a great employer which means that any money invested in learning and development is returned to the company and not lost when the employees leave to go to work at a different organisation. By positioning learning and development as an investment in the reputation of the company as a way of retaining staff, this learning and development strategy becomes an integral part of the wider strategic organisational strategies (Daniels, 2013).

Similarly, motivating and engaging employees is also a valuable investment strategy for learning and development, situating this strategy in the wider organisational strategic aims: employee engagement can be fostered by teaching employees new skills and offering them new responsibilities which require them to use their new competencies. By engaging employees in this manner, as part of the learning and development strategy tied to wider organisational strategic strategies, the money invested in learning and development is returned to the organisation multiple-fold through higher levels of employee satisfaction and higher levels of employee engagement and productivity (Harrison, 2020).

Analysis of indicators of success for effective leadership and management development programmes

Indicators of success for effective leadership and management development programmes include measurements of employee satisfaction which could be something as simple as a survey of employees to gauge the impact of the development programmes on them and their satisfaction in their role and with the organisation.

Other indicators of success that could be used to assess the effectiveness of leadership and management development programmes could include an assessment of employee attrition and retention rates: a successful leadership and development program would be expected to lead to improved rates of employee retention given the specificity of the leadership and management development programme to the specific context of SportsDirect and the fact that leadership programmes generally improve employee loyalty (Al Qadah, 2018).

Leaders and managers trained under this programme would not learn skills that would make them more desirable to another organisational context given the highly specialised information and skills they learn under this leadership and management development programme that makes employees trained under this programme desirable only to the SportsDirect context. Assessing employee retention would therefore be a good indicator of the success of the programme (Creighton, 2019): employees would not be expected to leave if the programme was good and they found it useful because completing this programme would lead to them having a better job with better pay.

Another indicator of the success of the leadership and management development programmes would be a comparison of measures of employee productivity pre- and post-engagement in the programme: the programme would be expected to increase employee productivity because of the motivation the programme would give them that they could improve their prospects at SportsDirect by passing through the programme. Undertaking the programme should, therefore, lead to increases in employee productivity. If this does not happen then the programme is not inspiring or

motivating employees and the programme would need to be changed to one which does inspire and motivate employees, otherwise the money invested in developing and implementing the programme with employees is being wasted (Creighton, 2019).

Another indicator of the success of such a programme would be the organisational results pre- and post-programme: measures of this could include profitability or measures of client satisfaction, for example. If the programme was developed and implemented successfully, the programme would be expected to lead to better organisational results, both in terms of profitability and in terms of client satisfaction: failing to achieve better organisational results or better levels of client satisfaction would mean that the programme has not achieved its aims of producing more effective leaders and managers (Creighton, 2019).

Critical analysis of approaches to evaluating leadership and management development programmes

Evaluating leadership and management development programmes depends on the specific content of the programme: some leadership and management development programmes are extensive and cover a wide range of activities including assessment (of personality, for example), competency development, seminars on leadership and management, coaching, mentoring, learning portfolios and/or developmental assignments, all of which can be evaluated individually in terms of their impact on the individual employee (Tamkin, 2002).

Alternatively, leadership and management development programmes can consist of one or more of those activities, each of which can, again, be assessed individually or the whole programme could be evaluated as a whole via the use of different metrics including metrics that have been specifically developed to evaluate the aspects of leadership and management that are most important to the organisation (Mole, 2000), in this case SportsDirect.

These metrics could include assessments of the learner's reaction, the learner's satisfaction, the learning that was accrued as a result of the programme, the results

from the programme and/or the business impact of the programme (Mole, 2000). Each of these specific assessments could be applied to each individual module of the programme (through surveys or interviews at the end of each module) or to the programme as a whole (through a final survey or interview at the end of the entire programme) (Tamkin, 2002).

Usually, given the high level of investment in such programmes, organisations like to evaluate each module of the programme for each individual employee as this can indicate to the organisation where the programme is lacking in rigour and where improvements need to be made to the programme.

The specific questions asked in the evaluations (generally surveys) depends on the specific organisation and the specific components of the leadership and management development programme: generally, however, in order to evaluate learner reactions and learner satisfaction, a determination needs to be made regarding how much the learners liked the programme, how much new information the programme offered them and whether learners would recommend the programme to others (Boxall and Purcell, 2008).

The amount and type of learning from the programme can be assessed by testing learners on the content of the programme that has been seen and then asking learners whether they feel they learnt a lot and whether they are confident about applying what they learnt. Application and implementation of the learning is an important aspect of the evaluation of any leadership and management development programme and this needs to be carefully evaluated in order to determine whether any changes need making to the programme.

Business impact can be evaluated using any number of metrics including return on investment or cost effectiveness evaluations of the programme. It is not an easy matter to establish causal links between the learning accrued in a leadership and management development programme and any improvements seen in employees following attendance at such a programme (McGurk, 2020). This is because it can take a while for employees to feel confident at applying what they have learnt which can produce a time lag between the end of the programme and any benefits to the

organisation that might have been caused by attendance at the programme (McGurk, 2020).

Analysis of methods of developing effective teams for performance improvement

There are numerous methods of developing effective teams for performance improvement including increasing the efficiency, effectiveness and productivity of teams which can be achieved by ensuring that teams work more harmoniously together with the aim of achieving a clearly stated goal.

Team performance can also be improved through ensuring that the right employees are selected to be a member of the team: failing to select the right employees means that the team will fail because there are gaps in the knowledge across the team which will slow the team down and lead to the team failing in its objectives (Gleeson, 2020).

Additionally, performance improvement can only occur when teams have clearly defined goals and expectations: by taking the time to clearly define the goals of the team and the expectations for each team member, in terms of their roles and responsibilities, the team can work more harmoniously together because each team member will fulfil their specific roles and responsibilities, contributing to the attainment of the overall goal (Gail, 2020).

Teams that are badly organised from the outset, either because of a poor allocation of team members or because of poorly defined roles and responsibilities and/or poorly defined team goals are unlikely to achieve the performance expectations for the team (Gleeson, 2020).

It is also fundamentally, important, for performance improvement, that the team selected is aware of what conflicts might arise and also aware of how to utilise conflict management strategies effectively in the event that a conflict arises (Gleeson, 2020). This would require team members to intervene to smooth over the conflict because it threatens to limit the performance of the team and so will limit any

performance improvement that the team might have been able to achieve (Gail, 2020).

Having regular team meetings can also be an effective way of developing effective teams for performance improvement because regular team meetings can be used to highlight any problems that are occurring within the team and to develop solutions to these problems (Gleeson, 2020).

Teams are, after all, only put together to offer a way of combining the collective talents of employees: if a problem arises in a team, this will limit the performance improvement that is possible and so it is important that there are regular team meetings to troubleshoot problems before they threaten the utility of the team as a whole.

Team performance can also be monitored using different metrics including productivity, time management, communication effectiveness, problem-solving ability, or others, with a view to using such metrics to identify when the team is struggling and when the team might need an intervention to improve the potential of the team to work towards effective performance improvement (Gail, 2020).

Evaluation of the role of effective motivation using theories & models of motivation in performance management

Various theories have been put forward to explain the role of motivation in performance management. The expectancy theory of motivation, for example, suggests that performance management will improve the motivation of individual employees because human motivation rests on valence, expectancy and instrumentality (Vroom, 1964) and performance management is motivational because it increases all of these three factors (Lee, 2018).

As Vroom (1964) suggests, employee motivation increases when performance management is linked to organisational rewards such as pay and promotions. Research shows, however, that performance management has little to no motivational power (Nigro et al., 2012). Empirical evidence suggests no link between

performance management-related rewards and increased employee motivation (Pearce and Perry, 1983).

These findings suggest that whilst motivational theories suggest that performance management linked to rewards should be motivational, this very much depends on the specific situation and the specific employee. If employees are not motivated by rewards but are motivated by other factors including work-life balance (for example), then offering employees performance management-related rewards will have no effect on their motivation.

For motivation to be effective it needs to be tailored to the specific employee otherwise rewards can be offered (which costs an organisation money) which will not offer a return on investment in terms of improved employee performance. As Lee (2018) suggests, performance management cannot be applied in a blanket manner for all employees: personnel decisions about the distribution of rewards needs to be individualised and personalised across employees otherwise a system which is assumed to be motivational will simply end up costing the company excessive amounts of money with no real returns for this investment (Lee, 2018).

As Lee (2018) suggests, the motivational effect of performance management is contingent on different conditions and situations with three main types of moderators having been identified as being important in moderating the motivational effect of performance management: whether employees are intrinsically or extrinsically motivated (Belle, 2015); individual characteristics of employees including gender and demographic characteristics (Jones, 2013); and the amount of the financial incentives being offered (Greene, 2013).

This means that organisations such as SportsDirect need to take these moderators into account when designing their strategic performance management systems. Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943) can be useful, for example, when attempting to understand what factors might motivate employees according to their placement along this hierarchy of needs (Ma'ruf, 2019).

Evaluation of the relationship of effective leadership with effective communication using relevant theories and examples

Effective leadership can only occur in the presence of effective communication (Luhtra and Dahiya, 2015). Different leadership styles utilise different communication methods: transformational leaders, for example, use motivational and inspirational communication whereas goal-oriented leaders use communication that is focused on the delineation of goals and the steps necessary to achieve these goals.

As Van Ruler (2018) discusses, communication theory underpins strategic communication, including effective leadership communication, with communication theory allowing the construction of meaning from the utterances of the leader to the information the employee has understood from these utterances to the ways in which this information is implemented by the employee.

By communicating effectively, the leader can minimise the errors in their communication which can allow the construction of a continuous meaning across the communication from the utterances that the leader voices to the ways in which the employee translates and implements the information contained within these instructions (utterances) (Van Ruler, 2018).

Communication theory suggests that strategic communication is, therefore, a continuous process of meaning making that begins with the leader and is translated into action by employees each of which are responsible for ensuring they have understood the instructions and are able to carry out the instructions effectively (Van Ruler, 2018).

The communication process is interactive and participatory at all levels: it is a multi-directional narrative process that continuously constructs meaning, allowing organisations to develop new ways of working through iterative changes that improve the processes within the organisation (Van Ruler, 2018).

Effective communication is important at all stages of the leadership process with effective communication being vital for effective leadership especially during

moments of crisis when employees need to see that leaders are in control (Nordin, 2020). Leadership can only be effective when there is effective communication because communication is the basis of all relationships within organisations: if communication fails then these relationships will fail (Van Ruler, 2018).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this report has explored the importance of effective leadership and management with a view to ensuring that new innovative ideas can be used so that SportsDirect is ready for future challenges that competitors might pose.

The report recommends that SportsDirect make some changes to the leadership and management in place at the organisation: SportsDirect should, for example, start to utilise mentoring and coaching as a way to deliver management and leadership training because the research suggests that it is a cost-effective way of delivering such training.

Additionally, the leadership and management programmes should be evaluated using different metrics to the ones currently used and new on-the-job training should be implemented which follows the current workplace trends for training including microlearning and cross-training which would reduce the costs of training and improve the cross-transferability of employees across the organisation, reducing the costs associated with needing to hire new staff.

In conclusion, there are a myriad of leadership and management changes that could be implemented at SportsDirect to improve the leadership and management in place at the organisation and also to improve the effectiveness of the leadership and management training programmes that SportsDirect uses, which would improve the return on investment of training employees across the SportsDirect organisation.

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