Corporate Universities - Reengineering the Training Department

Maria Arnone

Zusammenfassung:

Corporate Universities, d.h. hochqualifizierte, betriebsinterne Weiterbildungsprogramme sind insbes. in High-Tech-Branchen entstanden, in welchen ein immenser spezifischer Weiterbildungsbedarf besteht. Sie sind das Ergebnis eines Reengineering klassischer Weiterbildungsprogramme. Welche Besonderheiten bei der Teilnahmeauswahl, der Formulierung und Kontrolle von Leistungstandards gegeben sind, wird i.e. herausgearbeitet. Außerdem werden die Hauptherausforderungen der Corporate Universities und die diesbezüglich besten Lösungsansätze dargestellt.

1. Reengineering Contributes to the Growth of Corporate Universities

Reengineering has stimulated a reevaluation of training with the questions: 'Is this still necessary to do?' and 'How can we do this more effectively?' As corporations review their key processes and functions, an increasing number of firms have chosen to replace or supplement one of their functions - the training and development area - with a corporate university. This trend may be an important indicator for the future of corporate executive education as it represents one response to the reevaluation, relevance, and importance of corporate training.

The number of self-named universities, which are internal functions within businesses, has grown from 400 in 1988 to over 1,000 in 1995 (American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business 1996, p.1). Ten years ago "Corporate Universities" were found mainly in computer and high technology industries. Such industries needed to provide intensive training to large segments of their workforce in order to establish and maintain a competitive position. They postulated a clear link between their competitive advantage and the technological expertise of their workforce. High tech industries were facing intense competition in the global marketplace. American high tech manufacturers responded to this threat by providing their own university-level training when colleges did not provide a specific, practical, or current grounding in the new developments in their respective technologies.
The deregulation of the communications and utilities industries has led to rivalry and more competition within the industry. The leading carriers began to use more sophisticated technologies to maintain competitive advantage. As their workforce educational needs increased and became less compatible with the locally available university offerings, they followed suit in the development of a corporate university. AT&T and NYNEX have established corporate universities and many large public utilities have joined forces with their industry associations to secure university-level education targeted to their needs. Pharmaceutical firms have also followed this trend, e.g. Glaxo Wellcome. Within the past few years, financial service firms have centralized their training efforts in order to provide a more strategic orientation to training and development. Again, self-named corporate universities is a common response. Examples of leaders in financial service corporate education include: American Express, Fidelity Investments, and Charles Schwab & Co.

2. The Concept of a University Grows More Diverse

The term "university" - in contrast to a college, institute, center, program, or department - is intended to communicate a diverse group of intellectual offerings taught at the post-secondary school level. Presumably universities are the developers and primary purveyors of intellectual capital for a culture. The 1970's brought a significant expansion in the kinds of activities that were considered appropriate for university - including many work-study, practicum, experiential, and apprenticeship-based courses of study (e.g., see Freedman & Stumpf 1982; Stähli 1994). Business programs in particular have undergone major faculty and curriculum changes as they reengineered themselves to compete in the 1990's (Stumpf 1994). As more industries and firms within them launch a corporate university, the definition and characteristics of a university are becoming confusingly diverse. A decade ago, a corporate university was likely to have a physical site and a curriculum modeled after traditional academic offerings (Meister 1994). Today, most corporate universities do not have a single physical site. They are often based on a curriculum designed to teach core competencies and the curriculum is guided by a set of learning objectives closely tied to the firm's strategic objectives. This close alliance to the business interests is intended to ensure that there is a strong response to the learning needs of the internal customer base of employees. To further understand contemporary corporate universities and their challenges, consider some of the distinctions between them and their academic counterparts in the areas of standards, admissions, performance, faculty, and curriculum.