ASSOCIATION manager

N° and issue date : 40 - 01/06/2005
Circulation : 7500
Periodicity : Bimonthly
associationmana_40_20_306.pdf
Web Site: http://www.associationmanager.co.uk
Page : 20
Size : 85 %

continuing professional development

The professional approach

Continuing Professional Development is rapidly hitting the top of the agenda in the UK's not-for-profit sector, as membership organisations respond to increasing government requirements for professional qualifications to be developed and improved throughout the working life. But, asks Trevor Cole, how will it all be funded?

Government legislation is weighing heavy on the UK's not-for-profit sector. Not only do organisations face the increasing reporting demands of Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP), and accountability requirements of the Financial Services Authority (FSA) but individuals within virtually every business sector require new and up-to-date qualifications to achieve and retain their membership. Today, even pub and nightclub bouncers must achieve a qualification before starting work!

Continuing Professional Development (CPD), therefore, has become, by default, an important facet of strategy, particularly for membership organisations. But CPD is not cheap. Each programme must take into account an individual's abilities and define a tailored learning plan. This plan then incorporates training courses and conferences alongside self-assessment and on-the-job experience which must be monitored and tracked.

How are these organisations going to be able to offer long-term CPD programmes without incurring major costs that will have to be passed on to the membership or deducted from charitable donations?

Long-term support

CPD is a well established process for attaining and maintaining the quality and relevance of skills and professional services throughout working life. It is not new. Many professionals have long recognised the need for and value of improving skills and knowledge alongside work experience.

However, there is a growing move by government to legislate this sustained development. For

> "The use of web-based solutions significantly reduces the cost of managing the CPD process, minimising the use of paper based forms"

pharmacists, for example, CPD is now mandatory to keep up-to-date with new treatments, technologies and understanding of disease.

But how are membership organisations managing this process? Each member, or potential member, must be tracked through the CPD activity. If this activity comprised solely of training courses followed by exams, the process would be relatively straightforward. But the essence of CPD is that it combines work experience, with prescribed training courses and attendance at conferences and exhibitions. Furthermore, much of this information is completed on a self-assessment basis.

Organisations have to be able to monitor performance, evaluate the quality of self-assessment tests, and ensure correct points are allocated based on conference or exhibition visits, to ensure each individual remains on track. Furthermore, it is essential to monitor the performance of training partners – down to individual trainer level – to guarantee consistency of training, and marking, if the CPD programme is to be successful and accountable.

Yes, some organisations may opt to charge members for the CPD process. But those facing legislative imperatives may find expensive membership and CPD fees prompt negative feedback from members, Government and the press alike.

How can an organisation deliver a strong CPD programme that meets the needs of the membership without requiring a huge investment in people, an investment that simply cannot be justified in the not-for-profit sector?

Automated process

Automation is the key to achieving robust CPD without incurring high costs. The ability to combine membership information with online self-assessment submissions, information on meetings, references,

Copyright (Association Manager N° 40) No reproduction without authorisation

PROTECH COMPUTER SYSTEMS

ASSOCIATION manager

N° and issue date : 40 - 01/06/2005
Circulation : 7500
Periodicity : Bimonthly
Page : 22
associationmana_40_20_306.pdf
Size : 85 %
Web Site: http://www.associationmanager.co.uk

"The essence of CPD is that it combines work experience, with prescribed training courses and attendance at conferences and exhibitions"

CVs, and training courses provides an organisation with both a single consolidated information platform and opportunities to automate much of the CPD process.

The use of web-based solutions significantly reduces the cost of managing the CPD process, minimising the use of paper based forms and removing the need for information to be re-keyed. Self-assessment information is automatically entered into the core system enabling the organisation to automate performance tracking and monitoring.

With this information in one place, organisations can meet the legislative burden through automated reporting – or rapidly access information to respond to specific accountability or litigation demands. Furthermore, organisations can use automated, web-based alerts to prompt an individual falling behind the programme or send information on courses that must be attended.

With potentially thousands of members to manage through the process, this level of automation will become a prerequisite to cost-effective and efficient CPD programmes.

Commercial benefit

If organisations can get a CPD programme in place that does not require a huge up-front or on going investment there are additional benefits that can be achieved -- most notably in boosting public credibility. Information on CPD progress and the qualification of members can play a key role in publicising the expertise and quality of the membership. This is particularly key for charitable organisations that use street based or door-to-door fundraisers. These collectors – increasingly known as 'chuggers', short for 'charity muggers' – play an important role in achieving donations and reaching a new audience. Indeed, in the last year it is estimated that 600,000 people were signed up for direct debit pledges by these fundraisers, typically contributing £350 over five years.

But they are also the bane of retailers and councils across the country. In March, Brighton retailers called for a byelaw to regulate charity collectors and other towns and cities may well follow suit.

But these fundraisers have a strict code of conduct and they must be professionally trained. Charities with good, integrated methods for tracking fundraiser CPD can mitigate the dangers of litigation through demonstrating both the qualification and performance of their fundraisers. They can also compare public complaints with training to ascertain shortcomings in the programme and highlight opportunities for improvement.

Development opportunities

For once, government legislation is actually providing the not-for-profit sector with an opportunity rather than a challenge. Indeed, even where not dictated by government, many organisations are turning to CPD in a bid to boost membership and improve the standing, respect and credibility of members. However, the costs are potentially significant. Without a robust, automated process that enables the CPD programmes to monitored and measured, organisations may struggle to build in the accountability required to demonstrate to the public and government alike the real value and excellence of their CPD strategies. ●

Trevor Cole is the business development director of ProTech Computer Systems.

Copyright (Association Manager N° 40) No reproduction without authorisation

PROTECH COMPUTER SYSTEMS