

Across The Ditch - October 2009

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An air of anticipation is beginning to permeate New Zealand in the learning and development industry. And not just among corporate training professionals. Across the different industries the race has started to identify this year's top training and talent initiatives. Yes, it is awards season.

Perhaps the excitement is the backlash from a year when talk has revolved around cutbacks to training for youth at risk, refugees and migrants, teachers, nurses, Maori, the police and just about every other profession, industry and corporation. Or perhaps it is something that is always there, but seems to take on a special significance when business confidence is low, employee engagement is clouded by fear of job cuts, and the opportunities for those training to enter, or re-enter, the workforce are drying up.

In the news recently was the Victoria University of Wellington's Language Centre, taking out top honours in the prestigious International Association for Language Learning Technology's Showcase Award¹. This international award gave a great boost to the tertiary sector who are fighting to prove their value in a climate of funding cuts and overseas competition.

But it is not just the tertiary sector. Trades are also celebrating training excellence. For examples an Auckland bar took out the Supreme Award in the hospitality industry for demonstrating how training provides competitive advantage². And FITEC, who have the government-defined role of overseeing training in the forestry and woodworking industry have just announced the winners in their regional finals, hailing the contribution of training in areas from safety to innovation³.

Awards ceremonies are nothing new of course. There is along tradition of recognising the wealth of training initiatives and acknowledging consistent quality of training. However, what I am noticing is the strong swing away from the evaluation of the training program and those who deliver it (the input) towards the measurement of the contribution that the training has made (the output).

It is no longer enough to design a wonderful learning system, or measure how many courses have been delivered. Celebration now centres on how learning interventions increase the personal skills of individuals in preparation for life, a job or career. Or how the organisation has benefited in terms of reduced costs, a better safety record, increased sales, product innovation or some other measure it values.

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At the forefront of the charge to re-focus our thoughts on what excellence in training really means, the New Zealand Association of Training and Development (NZATD) has completely revamped its own awards categories and launched a campaign to seek out excellence in training through its new look NZATD Education Trust Awards. Gone is the focus on specific skills like facilitation or learning media like computer based training. Now, aspiring winners must demonstrate their contribution to business performance, community development, personal growth or any other measure that recognises that training only has meaning in terms of the learning and its contribution to achievement or resolving whatever prompted the call for training⁴.

For years learning professionals have endeavoured to measure their training interventions across a number of levels, such as the frameworks of Donald Kirkpatrick or Jack Phillips. This has usually been prompted by business managers seeking accountability. It is good to see our public awards for training are also recognising the importance and value of this approach.

References

- 1 Victorious, Victoria University of Wellington – Spring 2009 edition.
- 2 [www.hsi.co.nz/2009_EITaward winners](http://www.hsi.co.nz/2009_EITaward_winners)
- 3 www.scoop.co.nz/stories/BU0908/S00107.htm
- 4 www.nzatd.org.nz

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