

# DELIVERING WIDER OUTCOMES WITH LIMITED BUDGETS

*Innovative Perspectives from the State  
Government Level*

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH

**Adele Cook**

Chief Learning Officer

Arizona Department of Economic Security



CORPORATE LEARNING WEEK 2020 Q&A SERIES

# ABOUT ADELE



Adele Cook has 20+ years of L&D experience in a variety of industries.

After a year of working as a receptionist for a technology company, she became a trainer when she pitched her boss to eliminate outside resources (and costs).

In 2001, she moved to the public sector working for Maricopa County Attorney's office where she continued to do software training but also helped create databases, build an LMS and a career development application.

In 2005, Adele was recruited by the Arizona Department of Economic Security as a manager of a small team of instructors who did basic policy classes for 11,000 people through nine different programs—each one with their own training department.

When her boss left, she became an administrator and began “taking over the world” as she now gathered more functions under her i.e. delivery and design, recognition and tuition assistance.

She found it wasn't efficient to be decentralized and created a federated model—where the corporate part she was responsible for (training managers of divisions who reported to her) set quality standard of processes.

After nine years with DES, Adele took a small hiatus to work as a State Training Lead for the Arizona Department of Administration, General Accounting Office, responsible for the development, delivery, support and evaluation of learning programs related to Arizona's financial, inventory, facilities management and travel systems being delivered to employees across all State of Arizona agencies.

She returned to DES about two years later as Chief Learning Officer and has been there for the past three years.

Since being back, she's been working hard on continuous and faster improvement, increasing employee engagement scores by 300% (during the first year alone), boosting the quality of instruction by 10% from an average 4.2 to 4.6 out of 5 and decreasing the time it takes to deliver new courses by 75%, among many other things.

## **Q: AT THE ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC SECURITY, WHO ARE YOUR CUSTOMERS AND HOW DO YOU CREATE PARTNERSHIPS WITHIN L&D AND PUBLIC-SECTOR BUSINESSES TO PROVIDE TRAINING TO THOSE CUSTOMERS?**

**A:** Our primary customers are executive leaders for the different divisions—they set the strategy and tell us what they need their people to do well. Then we have the people that come through the class (consumers) that get the training needed to do their jobs well.

In government, your risk and your costs are different—not that we’re trying to get the best training for the least amount of money, but we try to avoid cost in terms of outcome as we don’t have an influx of resources. So one of the most important things in delivering a course is getting it right from the get-go.

My current three-year strategy is to do a project called “Collaborative Course Fulfillment” where the course development process bakes in places for subject matter experts and the business to collaborate with designers and instructors to deliver a course.

To make sure our resources are being directed where we can do the most good, we do an intake process that aligns with the state Lean Management System and requires that our business partner identifies upfront what the business objectives for the training are going to be and why we should put this particular course together.

Sometimes the reason for a course is due to a problem or it’s a counter-measure to a problem—i.e. the quality of work in a certain area might not be what it needs to be, so we come in and do training on a particular topic as a way to drive improvement in that quality.

Sometimes it might not be a problem but there’s still a business outcome. For example, with new hire training, the “problem” is that you hired someone who doesn’t know how to do that job and you want them to be able to do it as accurately and fast as possible.

We have our business partners in the agency identify if the position is “job-ready” and what does “job-ready” look like (will it take three months or six months, etc.)? Then we help them with the journey to get there through a combination of formal training, a buddy system, mentoring, workshops and on-the-job training.



## Q: HOW DO YOU MEASURE ROI TO SHARE WITH STAKEHOLDERS?

A: We've used the Phillip Return On Investment Methodology but we've never made it all the way through to the ROI part.

The reasons why are because (1) most of what we're doing is training that has to be done anyway (for compliance), so we're not expending money that hasn't already been appropriated for this purpose.

And (2) in building a new-hire training program, our business partners haven't traditionally thought through what the value is of a newly trained person, so we fake it a little bit as we don't have much other data to work with.

For example, in our largest division, they have the most complex learning journey and the largest numbers of hires with about 100 people a month, starting three to four cohorts of 25 people (in a 12 week program) every two weeks.

In terms of if we're meeting business outcomes, we're taking what our usual quality and timeliness

measures are, looking at who went through a cohort and checking their accuracy and timeliness.

What we've noticed is that the single defining variable as to who does well and who does not is whether or not they have the correct support from their supervisor. On average, those that do, exceed the timelines and quality of experienced staff.

But overall, our process starts with Savvy Start with our subject matter experts. We're clear about what we want to accomplish, then we go into design and prototype and have the customer and content expert check and make sure it's the right approach; then we go in to build and do multiple iterations.

We then get the SMEs to sit with us or have weekly meetings to keep things moving forward. We're also doing a table read to make sure the customer is satisfied, pilots and additional continuous improvement. Then we check and adjust. It's an intensive process but it's collaborative with customers and experts in the field.

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## Q: DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR OTHER LEARNING LEADERS WORKING WITH A SMALL BUDGET?



**A:** First and foremost, you want to tie your training to a business outcome and then categorize that business outcome according to the biggest bang for your buck.

Figure out what is the behavior that's going to move that business outcome, bring in the knowledge needed and train to that behavior so when your employees go back to their job, they're doing exactly what they're supposed to do to make that business outcome happen. It's how you minimize risk, help with engagement and save costs.

In terms of having a small team/not having a lot of resources—coming up with a triage or a criteria/prioritization is critical. When we were really small, if training was required by policy/statute law etc. that was top priority. If risk was involved—we'd do that second. Then get down to the nice to haves (we never got to those).

Having a small team is also where you can create stretch assignments for adjuncts. We created two certifications for instructional designers and instructors. These prepared anyone who could write to write content or deliver content that was good enough to move the needle. Then we would use small teams to do oversight and coaching.

It was a stretch assignment for SMEs and a great way to get things done. One drawback to keep in mind, when doing another job, speed to market is slower unless they're dedicated to that project.



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