

# A matrix for success

Identifying learning and development skills for individual employees is key to improving the commercial awareness of a publishing team, says **Helen May**

When I first came into publishing, as a learning and development manager, I was struck by the complex inter-relationships between functions – how the efficacy of each team was dependant on that of many others. When I started conducting the training needs analysis, I began to understand the difficulty of identifying and addressing these needs.

We all know the world of publishing is changing – and changing fast. Technology is transforming what we publish and how we sell it, and the globalisation of all our processes is progressing at a startling pace. More and more companies are realising the need to implement an effective learning and development plan to address these changes. But the very nature of publishing, with so many cross-functions, can turn this process into a minefield. Each employee, each function, needs a combination of specific technical skills, the ability to manage a series of complicated relationships, the ability to influence colleagues, over whom they often have no authority, and a high level of commercial awareness... to name but a few. Where to start? How do managers even begin to identify where the problems lie, and how to address them, in a learning and development plan?

At Nelson Croom, we have developed a tool to help companies to see the bigger picture. It helps them to concentrate their resources for developing their people in the areas with the greatest potential for improving business performance. We started with a list of the various functions in publishing and then started to think about general areas of development they might need.

The first two rows of our matrix focus on the skills and competencies required in each functional area. A sales person, for example, will start out needing some basic sales skills: questioning, listening, presenting. You want to be confident of these before you let them loose. It is much later in their development that they will need to master key account management skills or terms negotiations. A marketing person, on the other hand, will pretty quickly be expected to be able to write effective copy. As they become more experienced they will start to engage with marketing planning activities, requiring a whole new set of skills.

Rows three and four focus on personal and interpersonal skills. Performance management is more widely understood than it used to be in publishing, but in many organisations there are still 'big wins' to be



We work with many publishing companies to develop the commercial awareness of their more experienced people, but there is still a big win in getting new people to see the bigger picture as early as possible.

Using the matrix, we soon discovered the enormous interdependencies at play. Many areas of development are applicable to every function – and all too often issues can arise in areas where it may not be obvious that there is a specific need. Addressing the selling skills of a sales force is likely to lead to an improvement in its effectiveness. But

had from managing people to get their efforts aligned and to help them improve their effectiveness. At the more personal level, we frequently come across people whose careers are limited by their own behaviour at work and the way they interact with other people. This isn't necessary. A whole range of skills can be learnt – negotiating, networking, time management, working in teams, effective communication and problem solving – to name but a few. For too long, publishers have taken the attitude that you pick these things up as you go along, with the result that the professionalism in the industry lags behind what is acceptable elsewhere.

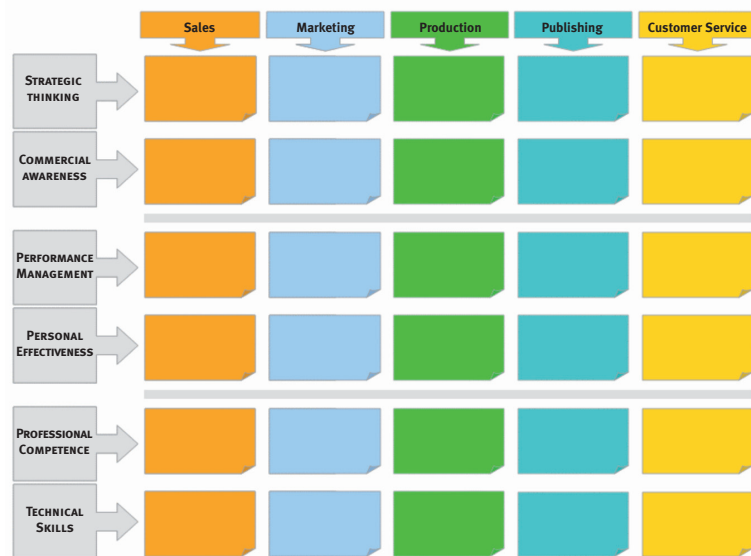
At the top of the diagram, rows five and six address the need for individuals to develop an understanding of the business. This sounds higher level, and can be, but we strongly believe that it should be addressed right from the time people first enter the industry. Our Introduction to Publishing course aims to build a basic understanding of the business of publishing and is designed and used by several major publishers as a key part of their induction programme.

there are other less obvious issues that may need to be addressed. How effective is the sales support from the marketing team? We are working on projects for Hodder and Wiley to help the marketing people to give the sales people what they really need to be effective. Another example is production – it goes without saying that there's a certain amount of technical skills that a production team needs in order to function effectively, but issues with productivity could be linked to communication problems between functions. This would suggest the need to concentrate learning and development efforts on the interpersonal skills of the team.

Our next step, of course, was to think through the possible learning and development solutions that could go in each square – how could one improve the commercial awareness of a publishing team? What personal effectiveness needs might there be in a production team? How could the sales function be improved by developing strategic skills? Taking both a vertical view of a functional area and its needs, and a horizontal view of the way an issue flows across an organisation, has helped us to develop solutions that work in a flexible and dynamic way.

So, before you dive into deciding what the answer is, spend one moment thinking about the bigger picture. What is happening to the business? Development initiatives may be driven by external pressure or internal initiatives, but they should always support the strategy of the organisation, and that means understanding their impact, both horizontally and vertically, within the organisation.

*Helen May is Business Development Manager at Nelson Croom. The Nelson Croom Publishing Portfolio is a unique new service providing a complete learning and development solution for every publishing professional. [www.publishingportfolio.co.uk](http://www.publishingportfolio.co.uk)*



The Nelson Croom matrix and, below, Helen May