

AG Edwards - Learning and IT Transformation

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When A.G. Edwards & Sons Inc. began a period of IT transformation—developing the new technological capabilities required for the company to grow and prosper in the coming years—the company realized that reskilling its IT workforce would be a key ingredient to overall success. Because of the scope of the work and the strategic importance of the overall initiative, executives decided that augmenting their existing training staff would help them reach their goals faster, and the company signed an agreement with Accenture Learning to provide learning services.

A.G. Edwards has nearly 7,000 financial consultants in more than 700 offices nationwide and in Europe, supported by 1,250 IT professionals. A.G. Edwards University—the company's internal training group based in the St. Louis headquarters—provides high-quality training to the firm's branch and home office personnel. The company realized, however, that it needed training resources with specialized technology knowledge to support the IT organization. With that in mind, the IT division created a smaller training group to serve its employees. "When I was tapped to lead this group, we had a real need within IT to provide training so that our people could support our IT transformation initiative. We had a group of dedicated training professionals in the IT group, but we did not feel we could adequately meet the needs required by the IT transformation," said Judy Pennington, vice president of IT strategy and development.

Realizing this, A.G. Edwards looked for some specialized help. "Training is not a core competency for our IT division. We don't look at training as one of the services we are going to provide personally," Pennington said. "Because we are not a training organization, it was important to provide state-of-the-art training resources at a cost structure that was based on our demand for training. While we need basic services all the time, over the next three to five years there may be some periods when we have more needs than at other periods." By working with Accenture Learning as a service provider, A.G. Edwards can adjust its learning needs up or down based on business demand.

"In deciding to look externally for learning services, we began with competency modeling," Pennington said. "We redid all of our job descriptions and created job families, reducing the number of distinct job titles from over 300 to 23. Then we used our architecture direction to define the skills we will need in the future. These skill domains were then mapped to each job family."

"We asked Accenture to help us perform an analysis of our training capacity because we wanted to gain a better understanding of our workforce training needs now and into the future," Pennington said. The company also wanted the analysis to factor in the new technology tools that would be needed for things like knowledge sharing and talent management. "We knew we wanted a training solution supported by the tools needed to share knowledge easily. So we looked at solutions that would help our IT personnel support our business needs, but also give them the training they needed to meet our needs in the future and help with career development."

Accenture Learning now hosts a learning management system to track registration, while offering access to a wide selection of standardized Web-based training modules and the development support needed to create course content. The arrangement means that A.G. Edwards maintains control over learning strategy and alignment, and identifies the curricula and courses needed to meet the needs of the division. The firm then works with Accenture Learning to develop the content and delivery.

A.G. Edwards' relationship with Accenture Learning is progressing well to date. Although a formal metrics program is not yet in place, Pennington said that progress definitely has been made. Because the team is focused on delivering hard business results, Pennington feels that in the

long run the investment will prove advantageous. "We believe that we will have decreased time to competency for new hires, and that our existing people will also develop required new skills more quickly, as well," she said.

When building a collaborative relationship to deliver learning, trust and communication play a major role, Pennington said. "Trust is built first of all by both sides meeting their commitments on deliverables," she added. "For this kind of relationship to work positively, it has to be a win-win."

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