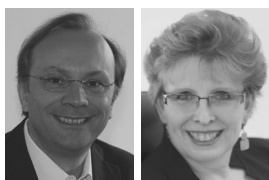


Arkadin develops employee talent through e-learning

Christophe Mulin and Hilary Reen



Christophe Mulin is Executive Vice President – Human Resources based at Arkadin – Global Audio and Web Conferencing, Paris, France. Hilary Reen is Global Learning and Development Manager based at Arkadin, London, UK.

Abstract

Purpose – *The aim of this paper is to explore e-learning within the context of global talent management. The number of companies using remote learning solutions to develop talent and skills has witnessed an upsurge in recent years. Thanks to Web 2.0 and other types of technology, legacy learning or “traditional distance learning” offers have undergone a major transformation. E-learning has become an indispensable tool, especially for globally dispersed companies wishing to respond to modern day recruitment and leadership challenges.*

Design/methodology/approach – *This paper uses the experiences of Arkadin, a global provider of integrated audio and web conferencing services, as a case study.*

Findings – *Arkadin’s initial experience with e-learning solutions from provider CrossKnowledge has proved to be so efficient and effective that after the successful launch of the first two learning academies, Arkadin plans to launch another five this year. The academies are distance training solutions that combine e-learning with other offerings such as mentoring and face-to-face training. Each academy is designed to ensure training responds to specific corporate requirements and is delivered just-in-time.*

Originality/value – *This ambitious venture has enabled Arkadin to create an equal skills base and ensure that the people responsible for running the operation abroad understand corporate strategy and requirements in order to develop staff locally. This is a useful case study for learning and HR professionals operating within a global operation.*

Keywords *Training, E-learning, Recruitment*

Paper type *Case study*

E-learning has become a particularly useful solution for companies wishing to overcome the training challenges posed by geographically separate offices, as it facilitates the continuous requirement of bringing employees “up to speed”, regardless of their location. Founded in early 2001, Arkadin, a global provider of integrated audio and web conferencing services, has operating centers in over 22 countries worldwide comprising over 600 employees and supports over 9,000 active customers. As the vast majority of Arkadin’s employees can be classified as Generation Y, in terms of learning they require variety and favor interactive and accessible learning solutions based around technology that combines video, quizzes, animations, slides, etc. Therefore, the company found that the e-learning methodology from CrossKnowledge, a provider of distance learning solutions, is very appropriate for the learning styles it encompasses. The pedagogical nature of the CrossKnowledge “Faculty,” composed of both business experts and academics, is extremely relevant, but it is the methodology that has proved to be particularly appropriate for learners at Arkadin.

Supporting global growth

Arkadin’s core services, ArkadinAnytime, ArkadinAnywhere and ArkadinEvent, connect people virtually anywhere around the world, facilitating easy and cost-effective information sharing and discussion. Businesses and organizations of all shapes and sizes and across all

market sectors, particularly those with geographically dispersed user bases, employ Arkadin's services to help facilitate an increase in communications. Headquartered in Paris, Arkadin has operating centers throughout Asia, Europe and North America.

The company is continually expanding its global presence based on its customers' requirements. One of its main missions is to provide reliable, cost-efficient, state-of-the-art and customizable audio and web conferencing solutions to help customers proactively improve employee efficiency/productivity and reduce business travel requirements, while respecting corporate social responsibility. In order for Arkadin to continue its international growth, in 2008 it decided it needed to:

- successfully recruit approximately one hundred people per annum;
- integrate the new co-workers quickly and easily;
- create development plans to help various departments retain talent; and
- standardize training offers.

Developing talent and skills

The company's training focus for 2009 has centered on its ability to continue developing talent and skills. A combination of factors, such as the start up of new globally dispersed offices, considerable growth in the sales and customer support functions to support revenue growth, and key strategic projects in the product and marketing functions, meant that the ability to both retain key skilled individuals and to develop others internally, maximizing on their specific product knowledge while giving them the opportunity to develop project and people management skills, were two of the initiatives that were put in place to support these plans. This decision was taken at a strategic level as the HR response to a range of high level reports, including customer feedback surveys, market intelligence and recommendations by the leading industry research analysts, and as a result of some high churn rates internally within the traditional functions of sales and customer service.

In order to achieve this effectively, Arkadin decided to create a variety of training academies. It wanted to ensure training is designed according to specific corporate requirements and delivered JIT. Two of these academies were launched during 2009 and the rest will follow in 2010. After considerable research, Arkadin decided to adopt the Charles Jennings model of learning as its delivery strategy as it is in keeping with both the entrepreneurial ethos within Arkadin and the reality of training opportunity. Accordingly, in 2009, Arkadin planned to focus 20 percent of its overall training time on feedback/coaching and 10 percent on formal learning such as specific e-learning and instructor-led training (ILT). The remaining 70 percent of training focus is on work-based learning through assignments, delegated projects, secondments, etc. It wished to implement its strategy through a competent managerial taskforce – managers are the vectors of Arkadin's strategy, they sustain growth and they are the operational keys to successful talent management.

Focusing on management development

The company was looking for a solution capable of helping it achieve its international growth. As members of staff are geographically dispersed and there is a significant turnover, Arkadin wanted to ensure that everybody receives the same training and the same quality of training on processes such as management, leadership and personal development.

The identified challenges associated with its global growth were translated into the following operational objectives:

- Train managers and staff responsible for recruitment in how to efficiently conduct the recruitment process, ensuring they are able to recruit on a large scale and efficiently integrate new entrants.
- Provide training specifically targeted at team leaders helping them to effectively deal with the challenges they typically face on a daily basis.

- Strengthen the induction training to ensure there is a standard level of quality and content delivered to all new entrants, anywhere at any time.
- Create a new development training program to retain talent, offering career progression and an incentive to progress.
- Design an academy for country managers that would deal with the typical challenges they may face on a daily basis, leveraging experience already gained in other international markets.
- Reinforce the skills of the sales force in order to enable it to reach its growth objectives and to reinforce its position as a fantastic “selling machine”.
- Potentially create training targeted at the strategic end of management, focusing on values and social responsibility.

Choosing the right solution

To achieve Arkadin’s business plan it was essential to find a company with whom it could collaborate in terms of training and internal marketing. Arkadin is constantly growing and continuously developing and therefore, as a result, the training solutions that are already in place no longer address overall requirements. Previous training solutions were very ad hoc and reactive. Globally, there was little consistency in the training solutions chosen, methodologies and standards of training provision were erratic and as a result the outcomes of training investment, in terms of improved efficiency and effectiveness, could not be compared between locations or regions and were not consistent on a global basis. As the organization provides opportunities for talented individuals to develop their careers through global mobility, this was being potentially hampered by a lack of planned regular and relevant development.

It was necessary to change the structure of the way in which training was being delivered and look for an e-learning organization that had flexibility, a hosted learning management system (LMS) and a support service. This latter requirement stems from the fact that Arkadin’s IT department is very focused on client services and so it needed a supplier that would host the LMS and all of the back-up, in addition to possessing the ability to look into any technical issues that might arise.

As a global organization with 12 major languages spoken across 22 countries, the company required a supplier that was able to offer different languages. Arkadin’s values as an organization are absolutely fundamental and therefore it also sought a supplier with a similar value set as its own – working together, respect, entrepreneurial spirit and enjoyment.

Matching organizational needs and learner styles

Arkadin selected CrossKnowledge as its distance learning solution supplier as it met these requirements. Moreover, as it is a global company, it understands the issues Arkadin faces as a global organization. It offers local UK support and Arkadin’s London-based global learning and development (L&D) manager, Hilary Reen, who manages the whole L&D

“Businesses and organizations of all shapes and sizes and across all market sectors, particularly those with geographically dispersed user bases, employ Arkadin’s services to help facilitate an increase in communications. Headquartered in Paris, Arkadin has operating centers throughout Asia, Europe and North America.”

strategy, works very closely with the UK CrossKnowledge account manager who is also based in London.

Arkadin was particularly impressed by the fact that CrossKnowledge modules are developed in conjunction with both business experts and educational experts, which provides a real content balance. A total of 65 percent of Arkadin employees are either in sales or customer service and therefore frequently find themselves face-to-face with clients. They are also incredibly busy and what they require in terms of training is something that is delivered in a practical and pragmatic manner. They need to be able to look at a module and learn something that they can actually put into practice immediately. Consequently, it was very important that the e-learning modules chosen were not too set in theory and were easy to implement immediately.

One of the major benefits of e-learning is that it is 24/7 and it is flexible – people can watch or listen to a particular module when they need to and wherever they may be. When a particular person watches something regardless of their location, it is probably because they want to learn something that they can use in the immediate future. The CrossKnowledge Campus contains nearly 350 modules, so if users have a meeting coming up, or are organizing a team project, looking for a promotion, or simply have to do something for the first time, particularly as a new manager or a team leader, they can access that specific module, put it into their own particular context and use it immediately. It is the accessible and interactive methodology that has proved to be extremely appropriate for the kinds of learners at Arkadin – notably generation X and Y.

Combining training methods

Working in collaboration with CrossKnowledge, Arkadin decided to create a campus and up to seven different academies. In the campus, learners are able to consult all available CrossKnowledge sessions in English and French, including CrossKnowledge Essentials and CrossKnowledge Action Tips, allowing for JIT learning. The academies are distance training solutions that combine e-learning with other learning offerings such as mentoring, face-to-face training or other types of training activities.

With Arkadin's turnover, it was essential to implement a strategy that would help retain existing talent, by offering career progression and a clear development plan for members of staff. As recruitment is a key factor at the company, it was of the utmost importance that managers in the various countries had the support required at hand, allowing them to progress within their roles and help grow the business. Therefore, the Recruiter Academy was created to train people on how to successfully run the recruitment process, ensure the right people are recruited for the right jobs and ensure that managers can recruit on a large scale and effectively integrate new entrants. A talent development academy was also implemented.

Achieving global consistency

In order to filter the overall company strategy down through the organization and ensure there is a consistent competency standard for a specific level of management, a Team Leader Academy is also being created. It is intended to help team leaders tackle the challenges they face on a daily basis. As one of Arkadin's main objectives is to grow internationally, there is an increasing need for training country managers. It is important to ensure an equal skills base and an understanding of the corporate requirements for those responsible for running the operation abroad on how to cascade the corporate strategy and develop staff locally. Consequently, country managers will soon be able to receive the relevant training tools to follow up and develop staff members and the business locally via a Managers Academy. As Arkadin now has substantial experience in opening new international offices, it intends to leverage this experience and know-how, facilitating this process for new country managers.

“Managers that are quite new to management and recruitment have not only taken on board the processes, but are also keen to push those processes out to other colleagues.”

It will soon also be implementing an Induction Academy to ensure that a consistent onboarding and familiarization experience is available to all new employees as and when required. This new academy will make it possible to induct and provide corporate orientation to all new entrants on an individual basis as they join the company, rather than wait until there are a certain number of new entrants to begin training. Arkadin is a company with a large sales force of various levels of seniorities and therefore a proper sales development path is required to ensure that staff members at the same level have the same skill set. As well as guaranteeing a clear training path, the Sales Academy helps to outline what is required by the sales people to move up to the next level. Arkadin also plans to create a seventh academy around values and sustainability, targeted at the strategic end of management.

Overcoming the challenges

One of the main challenges that Arkadin faced was the different skill levels of its learners. Therefore, it decided to use self assessments that prescribe personalized training paths, ensuring that each learner only studies subjects where they need further training, rather than focusing on areas where they already have a satisfactory skill level. For all the academies, learners have access to support for technical issues via the CrossKnowledge hotline, and also for questions relating to the modules via the mentoring service offered by CrossKnowledge.

Innovation and communication are key factors in such a fast growing and changing company. The Arkadin Learning and Development and Talent Management strategies were launched at the annual Global Management Meeting by Christophe Mulin and Hilary Reen. Communication and the launch of the academies were undertaken by Hilary Reen using a range of communication tools such as web conferencing, webcasts, survey software, etc. Company produced videos and webcasts were used to market the new training internally and create awareness of its availability. Arkadin also worked closely with CrossKnowledge to produce a shared promotional video on the benefits of the CrossKnowledge products and services. These worked as information tools, but also helped create a “buzz” around training and the investment Arkadin was making in its employees.

Another communications initiative included internal poster campaigns, but this was later re-evaluated due to conscious efforts to operate as a “green company.” Training tips of the week/month were also created, focusing on specific subjects and linking them to available modules. Examples include “Improve your efficiency” and “Visit your Arkadin Campus and see how you can enhance your time management skills.” These tips are generally released by email or as a part of internal newsletters, linked to other internal campaigns or simply as standalone training tips.

Winning organizational support

The HR community and the designated project leaders were provided with implementation support including steering committees, project meetings and, where necessary, CrossKnowledge academy training. Besides access to reporting, it was agreed to implement performance measurement to demonstrate the effectiveness of the projects, to assess value creation and ultimately to determine the relevance of the investment. What became quickly apparent is that all Arkadin employees now have access to the same training, facilitating the continuous requirement of bringing various employees up to speed,

and overcoming any geographical training challenges as the training is delivered online and is in line with company strategy.

At present, two academies are fully deployed, while others will be launched this year. Quantitative results can be quite difficult to establish, especially where learning is concerned and particularly in the early stages. At this stage, evidence is of a soft or qualitative nature and comes from the individuals themselves who are providing positive personalized feedback about improvements in their skill sets that they themselves are noticing. This is supported by their managers through the performance review mechanism.

In terms of success, it would be worth mentioning the Recruiter Academy, which is working with its second intake of delegates. Managers are requesting places and people who say they have spoken to colleagues who have completed the academy are able to see what they have learnt. They in turn wish to make their own recruitment process much more efficient and effective and therefore request a place on the next intake. It is a very strong indication of success when employees themselves request a place on a particular learning program. Many individuals who have gone through the Recruiter Academy have now become coaches and mentors for the second intake. In each case, managers that are quite new to management and recruitment have not only taken on board the processes, but are also keen to push those processes out to other colleagues. They are now helping to support their colleagues through the next round of the academy.

Therefore, in addition to the planned internal communication and marketing strategy of the Arkadin Academy program, colleague referrals and personal development goals are starting to create a ripple effect around the global organization, which represents a key factor of success so far.

About the authors

Christophe Mulin is Executive Vice President, HR at Arkadin and is based in the Paris head office. He joined Arkadin in September 2007 after spending more than 25 years in the manufacturing industry in HR positions of increasing responsibility. He served as vice president, HR of Switch Products, a division of ITT Industries, from 1997 to 2005 and HR director of Motors & Actuators, a branch of Valeo, from 2005 to 2007. He is a graduate of Institut d'Etudes Politiques, Paris. Christophe Mulin is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: c.mulin@arkadin.com

Hilary Reen is the Global Learning and Development Manager at Arkadin and is based in the London office. She joined Arkadin in November 2004 after spending more than 25 years in HR and L&D management roles predominantly in the retail and services sectors, (but including two plus years with the NHS). Prior to Arkadin, she served as an HR manager for the Mears Group PLC, and prior to that she was group HR manager for Gold Group International. She is a member of the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development.

To purchase reprints of this article please e-mail: reprints@emeraldinsight.com
Or visit our web site for further details: www.emeraldinsight.com/reprints