

Right skill just the ticket on the corporate ladder

Recruiters are noticing a large increase in the number of executives wanting to climb the corporate ranks listing newly acquired micro-credentials on their CVs.

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The potential to climb the corporate ladder prompted Melbourne's Dominic Bates to sign up for a series of micro-credentials last year.

Covering topics like creativity and innovation, leading change, performance management, personal effectiveness and effective negotiation, they've been a game-changer for him.



One has to be personally committed while learning, says Dominic Bates, of Belong. **Photo: Alise Black**

Soon after completing the final course, he was offered the role of head of data and decisioning at broadband provider Belong. The promotion has elevated him into the executive team.

Bates maintained his full-time hours while completing the work. “Management protected a couple of afternoons a week for me on days I needed to attend the course, and there was still a lot of work outside of that. But you have to be personally committed,” he says.

In a rapidly changing world of emerging technologies and new challenges, it made sense to skill up on a needs-basis through short courses. And while the promotion wasn’t guaranteed, the chance to climb the corporate ladder is openly discussed in the workplace, he says.

“I’ve always been someone who has wanted to continue developing my skills, so I’ll be on the lookout for the next short course pretty shortly, I imagine.”

He’s not alone. For a small cost and an affordable time commitment, these bite-sized management learning modules enable executives to acquire add-on qualifications for career progression, which is often supported by their employees.

Increasingly, organisations like Belong are building their own pathways for employees to step through a series of micro-credentials to score a promotion. Belong partnered with University of Melbourne to create a bespoke program that includes eight micro-certifications, each of which can be completed in four weeks.

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— Simon Ives, Glencore

And plenty of organisations are doing the same, offering the chance to gain new skills on the company clock.

HR executive Simon Ives completed his MBA nearly five years ago, but that hasn’t stopped him from signing up for other short educational opportunities.

The global head of HXM (human experience management) transformation for commodity trading and mining company Glencore is adamant that micro-credentials are an excellent tool for upskilling and maintaining industry currency after graduating from a formal education program.

Ives encourages others to complete micro-credentials, and practises what he preaches.

Ahead of peers

He aims to obtain at least one micro-credential each year as part of his personal professional development plan. “These are always a topic of discussion during performance reviews or internal promotions,” Ives says.

He obtained a micro-credential in Optimising Influence in Negotiation, which helped him push ahead of peers in leading enterprise agreement negotiations.

With that course under his belt, he signed up for a micro-credential in Business Process Design for Strategic Management, which made him the ideal candidate for leading global business transformation within the organisation.

“During a recruitment process or a performance review, these courses illustrate that you’re current in the industry, that you’ve actively obtained skills complementary to the needs of the business, and that you’re committed to continuous learning,” Ives says.

“These micro-education opportunities provide learning in a specific niche area that perhaps isn’t covered by an entire formal learning program, and can be obtained discreetly without the need to complete all of the ancillary formal learning program components,” Ives says.

COVID a catalyst for change

However, he advises against micro-credentials for those without formal qualifications in the area they are interested in working in.

These small snippets of learning can’t replace formal qualifications. “They’re an add-on. Once you’ve obtained a relevant formal qualification, then micro credentials offer learning in niche areas that do put you ahead of your peers,” he says.

The pandemic has been the catalyst for change for many executives, who have been tempted to explore new career avenues or to change careers, MJD Executive managing director Martin Dineen says.

He’s noticed a growing number of micro-credentials being added to CVs and LinkedIn profiles. MJD Executive recruits for some of Australia’s most influential CEOs and top-level executives across a range of industry sectors.

“Organisations are also of course battling the ongoing talent shortage, which is prompting a radical rethink on the corporate necessity to recruit talent, particularly over the past two years,” Dineen says.



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“These micro-courses can be a great tool from a retention perspective, and are a bonus for a senior executive to have if they’re wanting to take on a new role in the business, and there’s a huge amount of benefit of completing these.

“They can be a good way to explore a particular discipline and maybe consider a career change. It’s a good way to get a taste for a particular career, rather than invest in four years of study only to realise it’s not a job they would necessarily like,” he says.

These courses are also a great add-on bonus that organisations can offer their people, which may well be the ticket that convinces them to stay. The countless short courses offered by LinkedIn over the past couple of years have been invaluable for many, he says.

Covering the cost

Who should pay for the cost of the course depends on whether it was offered by the organisation, or a request from an employee, Dineen says.

However, if the organisation directly benefits from the employee gaining extra skills, they should definitely cover the costs.

“A lot of businesses will use these courses as a retention tool and have a clause in their contract that if they leave within 12 or 18 months of completing it, that they will need to pay it back,” he says.

And if the employee leaves after completing the course, organisations should merrily send them on their way.

“I love it when I see people go as far as they can in their career with me, and then move onto another role, knowing I was able to contribute to that growth,” Dineen says.