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FOUNDATIONS OF A CORPORATE UNIVERSITY

By

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Abstract

Workplace learning can take many forms in an organization – on-the-job training, informal learning or formal course accreditation. There is a trend in workplace learning to move all training department functions within an organization under the umbrella of a corporate university. Corporate universities are not a new phenomenon but many more organizations are moving to this model for workplace learning. Therefore, there are several examples of ‘successful’ corporate universities. Organizations that are investigating this option have a lot of resources for establishing a corporate university for their organization. This paper analyses three instances of corporate universities – GE’s Crotonville, Farmers Group of Insurance’s University of Farmers, and Caterpillar Inc.’s Caterpillar University – and compares the motivation, process and goals of each institute. The analysis examines how each determines what is the foundation of a successful corporate university. The learnings from this review are compared to the approach that a Canadian company has taken in developing a corporate university that will be launched in fall 2013. Finally, a model for building a corporate university is presented for other organizations that have decided to take this approach to learning and development in their organization.

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Introduction

There are three common arguments for building a corporate university. First, a corporate university can help further institutional and inter-generational learning. In doing so, it provides a mechanism for formalized knowledge capture and sharing. Second, a well-designed corporate university with measurable success can contribute to the brand value of an organization over time. Third, corporate universities are a proven mechanism for leadership development which supports the growth of the organization and the development or evolution of its culture.

Corporate universities exist in differing levels of complexity. Some organizations merely brand the training function as a corporate university where as others provide a full-fledged accreditation program to replace traditional universities. Assessing three strong corporate universities – GE’s Crotonville, Farmers Group of Insurance’s University of Farmers and Caterpillar Inc.’s Caterpillar University – provides insight into the motivation, process and goals of a successful corporate university. This paper will then test these learnings against the approach that another organization has taken in building a corporate university that will be launched in the fall 2013. Finally, the paper will propose a model for building a successful corporate university which pulls together best practices, learnings and experiences from all four cases.

The first step is to examine workplace learning because a corporate university is a form of and forum for workplace learning. There are many disciplines that contribute to the evolution of workplace learning as Hagar (1999) explained:

Workplace learning being a typical interdisciplinary topic that can be viewed, and has been viewed, from the perspective of a variety of disciplines and fields such as sociology, cognitive psychology, policy

studies, management theory, adult education, economics, learning theory and industrial psychology. (p. 65)

In addition to the disciplines identified by Hagar, workplace learning is also informed by business, human resources, marketing (specifically recruitment marketing) and communications studies. Combine the topic of workplace learning with an investigation into corporate universities and the result is a complex problem that requires integration of several areas of knowledge to be adequately investigated.

What is workplace learning?

Organizations invest millions of dollars each year in workplace learning because “a well-educated, skilled workforce is increasingly seen as key to success in today’s global knowledge-based economy” (Goldenberg, 2007, p.1). Workplace learning addresses critical concerns including the gap in competencies and the time it takes for employees to bridge that gap between unskilled and skilled. As Goldenberg (2007) noted, “Today, skills and labour shortages (are) becoming much more widespread, especially in regions experiencing high economic growth (e.g. Alberta), and are a matter of growing concern for management and labour alike, in both the private and public sector” (p. 5).

The concept of learning in the workplace has changed significantly in the last two decades. Learning used to be something we did in an effort to get a job. Now, learning is what we do to be successful once we have a job. The evolution is noted by Boud and Garrick (1999) “‘Work’ and ‘learning’ are concepts which used to belong in separate categories. Work was about producing or doing things to earn a living. Learning was about education; it occurred in life before work” (p. 1-2). Workplace learning, as defined by Bratton, Helms Mills, Pyrch and Sawchuk (2004), “has become an established metaphor for capturing formal, nonformal, self-directed collective and even tacit informal learning activities” (p. 2).

The investment in workplace learning contributes to an organization’s success because employees, and their skill sets, are the heart of an organization. As Mills, Helms Mills, Forshaw and Bratton (2007) explained, “the behaviour of people in an organization contributes to the ability of that organization to achieve its ends ... and a number of factors affect people’s behaviour at work and, in turn, the ability of the organization to be successful” (p. 22-23). One of those factors is the culture or personality of an

organization. That culture, while embodied by employees, is fostered and directed by the managers and leaders because:

An organization's culture – norms of behaviour, values and beliefs – is forged from the role models that leaders provide, the myths and stories leaders tell, what the organization measures and rewards, the criteria used for hiring and promoting people, and the organization's historical norms of behaviour and values. (Lubit, 2002, p. 134)

Therefore, workplace learning should be inextricably linked to the leadership in the organization. The relationship is cyclical because leaders are responsible for building a learning culture in their organization as good leaders “create a climate for learning...to promote learning and nurture a growth mindset (and) to create a climate of inquiry and openness, of patience, and of encouragement” (Kouzes & Posner, 2012, p. 203).

Additionally, effective leaders need to be part of that learning culture to develop their own skills that will allow them to foster this environment. It is necessary for this learning loop – developing effective leaders who will then foster a learning culture – to be continually supported. At the heart of this learning loop is communication as outlined by Bleak and Fulmer (2009):

Astute line executives use leadership development as a powerful tool to create, translate, and communicate strategy. Carefully crafted leadership and learning strategies can assist in providing help to leaders in their architect, translator, and implanter roles. This is done by effectively communicating the reasons for and implications of corporate strategy in learning programs to managers who will

need to translate the strategy for employees through the organization so they understand their role in making it happen. (p. 2)

Producing leaders who can: (i) accurately communicate the organization's business strategy to their team, (ii) interpret how their team can contribute to that strategy and, (iii) encourage their team members to take advantage of workplace learning opportunities, will help the organization reach its goals.

What is a corporate university?

Corporate universities are not a new concept. Indeed, GE's Crotonville institute was started in 1953 and McDonald's Hamburger University was launched in 1962. Both are successful "because they focused so exclusively and aggressively on the human resource needs of their own companies and industries" (Guthrie, 2013, p. 2). Another reason corporate universities have endured is because, like all business entities, these institutes have also evolved as the business strategy and, therefore, needs of their organizations have evolved. A sign of this evolution is that now "companies tend to configure themselves as producers of knowledge, which generate enduring value and profit rather than as producers of goods and services. Human resources are active protagonists in this process and become the main source of competitive advantage" (Castellani, 2008, p. 178).

A good corporate university is usually more than the re-creation of an organization's training department as "training departments tend to be reactionary, fragmented, and decentralized" (Morrison & Meister, 2000, para. 3). More clearly linked to the business strategy of the organization, a corporate university is "an organization's strategic hub for educating employees, customers, and suppliers. Corporate universities link an organization's strategies to the learning goals of its audiences" (Morrison & Meister, 2000, para. 2). Using Fresina's taxonomy (as cited in Prince & Beaver, 2001, p. 19), reinforcing and perpetuating behaviour, managing change, and driving and shaping the organization are the three distinct roles corporate universities can perform.

Corporate universities take on various forms. For example, "corporate universities can range from a training department looking to brand its offerings to divisions of

companies that offer accredited degree programs” (Franzee, 2002, p. 1). There is one common thread that separates corporate universities from other forms of workplace learning, as Franzee (2002) noted, “the primary difference is that corporate universities are designed to align with the strategic initiatives of the corporation, while training departments tend to be more centered on offering open-enrollment classes that are in high demand” (p. 1). Another consistent feature of corporate universities is the link to the organization’s culture. Corporate universities are used to both build and foster the company culture. Indeed, the links to the corporate culture are undeniable. As Morrison & Meister (2000) explained, “a corporate university also shapes corporate culture by fostering leadership, creative thinking, and problem-solving” (para. 3).

There are many strong proponents of the corporate university model because the benefits of the investment can be very clear to an organization:

A lot can be accomplished in an organization through the powerful model of a corporate university. Better alignment with the company’s goals and initiatives, buy-in throughout the organization to emphasize learning and the utilization of a powerful brand concept to promote ongoing development are all possible.

Customers and shareholders also benefit from corporate universities, as training professionals focus more intently on multiple paradigms of successful learning. (Franzee, 2001, p. 5)

Corporate university case one – Crotonville (GE)

Crotonville is the standard for corporate universities. The GE institute is not only a physical location in Crotonville, New York but one of the strongest corporate learning brands in the world. Crotonville focuses on creating a “new breed of leader” (Tichy, 1989, p. 99) for the organization in an effort to support the evolution of the company’s culture. Launched in the early-1950s, Crotonville has evolved as the business has evolved and is “an area of enormous strength in the way the company identifies and builds leaders” (Knowledge @ Wharton, 2010, para. 1). Not only does Crotonville support the evolution of the company’s culture by developing leaders, as Tichy (1989) explained, “(Crotonville) was a vision that embodied much more than a development agenda; it was a centerpiece in the transformation agenda for GE and its culture” (p. 100).

In focusing on leadership development, GE is looking to:

1. Transform the organization; that is, creatively destroy and remake an organization around new visions, supported by revamping the social architecture of the organization.
2. Develop global products and services strategies. As GE more aggressively looks to world markets, it is faced with development world-class products and services at world-class cost.
3. Develop strategic alliances. To deliver on global strategies, more and varied alliances are emerging. (Tichy, 1989, p. 99)

In the mid-1980s, Crotonville set a new course using the *Tichy Development Model*, a strategic framework that “provided the concept and rationale for shifting much of the curriculum and emphasis at Crotonville” (Tichy, 1989, p. 101). This model was

created by Noel Tichy, an academic from the University of Michigan, transplanted into GE's corporate university environment. This framework created a roadmap for changing Crotonville into then-CEO Jack Welch's vision and "played a key role in both transforming GE and developing a new pipeline for human resources for the future" (Tichy, 1989, p. 104). Tichy's development framework "conceptualizes development along two dimensions. Along the top of the matrix the focus is on depth of development experiences ... The other dimension refers to the target of the development experiences" (Tichy, 1989, p. 101). The focus moved from outputs to outcomes as, "the measure of success shifts from participants' evaluation of how good they felt about the learning experience to how the experience impacted on their organization and their leadership behavior over time" (Tichy, 1998, p. 102). This mirrors how many organizations operate with a focus on measuring outcomes and return on investment.

Today, the mandate at Crotonville can be summed up to "inspire, connect and develop" (Knowledge, 2010, para. 3) while focusing on leadership, skills and business. GE now focuses on more than just leadership development but that is still the foundation of Crotonville.

Corporate university case two – University of Farmers (Farmers Insurance Group)

The University of Farmers is an award-winning corporate university serving the insurance agents associated with Farmers Insurance Group of Companies in the United States. Launched in 1996, University of Farmers is receiving attention outside of the business and learning circles because it has been part of the organization's marketing campaign since 2010. The campaign features recognizable actor J.K. Simmons and "reveals a simple truth. A well-educated insurance agent will get you the best insurance policy for your needs and more than likely save you money in the process" (The Inspiration Room, 2010, para.1).

The University of Farmers has a clear mandate:

To "drive results in support of our operational goals by developing Farmers as a world class value based learning organization". To ensure results, the University of Farmers aligns their target measurements with specific business challenges, and partners with IT to gather the data necessary to track results at both the individual and company levels. (Corporate University Exchange, 2012, para. 2)

Moving from training that was ad hoc and siloed, the University of Farmers became a valuable corporate asset (Dobrucki, 2012, p. 2). It is now a successful corporate university, characterized as a "strategic advantage for the company". In an effort to support the company, the University of Farmers mission is closely aligned with the corporate mission. In order to show value, it must quantify its success against measurable benchmarks such as contributing to the organization's goals and objectives, improving

quality, securing funding and deciding to keep, change or discontinue training programs (Dobrucki, 2012, p. 3).

The University of Farmers uses the *Kirkpatrick Model* to develop not only new curricula but also the framework of the university. As Dobrucki (2012) shared, “We started with a key curriculum that was tied to a very significant organizational objective and started measuring that one key curriculum using the *Kirkpatrick Model* – levels one to four – and then started building more curricula and measuring it and building and growing ...” (p. 5). The *Kirkpatrick Model* was created by Dr. Don Kirkpatrick in 1954 as a Ph.D. dissertation and is now an industry standard in training and development (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2013a, para. 1). The basic model consists of four levels:

Level 1: Reaction – To what degree participants react favorably to the training.

Level 2: Learning – To what degree participants acquire the intended knowledge, skills, attitudes, confidence and commitment based on their participation in a training event. Level 3: Behavior – To what degree participants apply what they learned during training when they are back on the job. Level 4 - Results: To what degree targeted outcomes occur as a result of the training event and subsequent reinforcement. (Kirkpatrick, 2013a, para. 3)

The model has since been adapted as the *New World Kirkpatrick Model* and includes a Level 1 focus on engagement and relevance; a Level 2 focus on confidence and commitment; a Level 3 focus on require drivers; and a Level 4 focus on leading indicators (Kirkpatrick, 2013b, para. 2).

University of Farmers has based itself on the *Kirkpatrick Model* but has also made it its own by “turning it on its head” (Dobrucki, 2012, p.5). By focusing on Level 4: Results while developing curricula, the University of Farmers ensures the curricula can be evaluated and, therefore, measured because “effective measurement begins in the design phase” (Dobrucki, 2012, p. 5).

Corporate university case three – Caterpillar University (Caterpillar Inc.)

Caterpillar University has its work cut out for it. Serving a large multifaceted company, the corporate university was launched in the midst of a recession in 2001. Known for manufacturing construction and mining equipment and different types of engines, Caterpillar also has financial, remanufacturing and rail services. As Vance (2004, p. 8) noted, Caterpillar University’s mission is to “improve the performance of Caterpillar employees, dealers, suppliers and customers” and in doing so “be recognized as one of the best continual learning organizations in the world.”

Caterpillar University is doing this by being as multifaceted as the organization it serves. For example, in what is a unique element of Caterpillar University, it is open to everyone. In an effort to support customers – as clearly stated in their mandate – Caterpillar University provides service, safety and operator training through e-Learning courses online. Caterpillar University is educating external audiences in their role with the organization by helping “customers get the knowledge they need to make smart choices about today’s purchase, educate their operators and better understand service options down the role” (Caterpillar, 2011, para. 1).

The focus at Caterpillar University is “managing ... intellectual capital and development” (Vance, 2004, p. 10). To do this, Caterpillar University works with their many audiences to directly support all facets of Caterpillar’s business. This is also one of the challenges for the corporate university – meeting the many needs of a complex organization. As Vance (2004) stated, they are “working across the enterprise to ensure the investment in learning is linked to Caterpillar’s strategy and provides maximum value” (p. 9).

To support the multifaceted businesses of the company, Caterpillar University focuses on seven key strategy initiatives and sets them up much like faculty in a traditional university. The key initiatives are: The College of Leadership, Colleges of Business and Business Processes, College of Marketing and Distribution, College of Technology, College of 6 Sigma as well as Performance Improvement and Technology-Enabled Learning (Vance, 2004, pp. 17-20). Additionally, Caterpillar University is an organization unto itself. With a board of governors, advisory board for each college, learning managers and global teams. Each part of the organization is infused with people from Caterpillar's various enterprises because "at Caterpillar, alignment is achieved by receiving input from the executive office, business units and process owners of the critical success factors" (Bleak & Fulmer, 2009, p. 6).

In 2002, a year after they launched, Caterpillar University needed to "show value proposition for learning" (Vance, 2004, p. 25). They measure their progress against the Enterprise Learning Plan every month and year-end forecast which is updated monthly (Vance, 2012, p. 24). Caterpillar University committed itself to showing the organization its return on investment by becoming a true continual learning organization.

Comparing case studies

The three cases showcase a number of similarities that could be indicative of a framework for success. In investigating the motivation, goals and process of these three corporate universities, three themes become apparent – mandate, measurement and culture.

All three corporate universities studied have clear mandates: at Crotonville – to create strong leaders; at Farmers – to support operational goals; and at Caterpillar – to improve performance. These mandates reflect the economic and business environments in which each university was launched. When examining these corporate universities, it is clear that, although only Crotonville identifies leadership development as its purpose, leadership development is at the crux of each mandate. While the stated mandates for the University of Farmers and Caterpillar University are to support business strategy, the underlying efforts focus on leadership development in an effort to support the learning strategy. For example:

...when Jim Owens became CEO of Caterpillar in 2004, one of his early decisions was to empower the Leadership College of Caterpillar University to create a “Leadership Quest” program for the firm’s high potentials. The program built on an earlier initiative that created the firm’s ‘leadership framework’ or competency model and was intended, according to Owens, to “give our next generation of leaders an infusion of ‘yellow blood’”. (Bleak & Fulmer, 2009, p. 5)

In the current economic climate, proving return on investment is integral to securing commitment to significant initiatives such as a corporate university. This may explain why newer corporate universities’ mandates state direct support of business

strategy as opposed to how they will support business strategy as Crotonville's focus on leadership development does. As Bleak and Fulmer (2009) explained, "leadership and learning play a critical role in enabling organizational growth and transformation – and ultimately strategic success" (p. 1). It begs the question: What is the business of a corporate university? Are corporate universities primarily concerned with training and developing business leaders? Alternatively, should corporate universities support an organization's business strategy through training and development, one aspect of which is leadership development?

Measurement is one area that each corporate university differed – how they measure success or identify return on investment to the organization. Crotonville has less emphasis on measurement and more focus on the curricula being developed. As Peters noted:

I am thrilled and privileged to work in an environment where the leadership team innately believes that learning, the effort, the time, the money and the resources we put into learning have an inherent payback. So I can spend my time developing curricula and content on how we inspire, connect, and develop leaders instead of figuring out whether we are getting the payback. (Knowledge, 2010, para. 22)

University of Farmers and Caterpillar University do not have that luxury. Indeed, the framework of University of Farmers is providing a proof-point by building results-oriented curricula which is easy to label as either a success or failure. Their development model approach not only defines how they develop learning but how they define success. Alternatively, it is surprising that when Caterpillar University launched in midst of a

recession they did not consider measurement more proactively. They now have many tools in place for their look-back approach but it appears to be a laborious process.

Corporate universities should provide clearly demonstrable value for an organization. There must be a clear line of sight between the investment in a corporate university and the benefit to the organization. That line of sight comes into focus through clear, constant measurement of corporate university outcomes. As Bleak and Fulmer (2009) explained:

(This) is a trend that continues to gain momentum, especially in an increasingly competitive environment where any investment or outlay is carefully considered and monitored for a return. In fact, 52 percent of learning and development professionals planned to use systematic measurement/evaluation to measure the impact of their efforts (Bolt, 2004). (p. 4)

The similarities between Crotonville, University of Farmers and Caterpillar University continue with an investigation into the role of corporate cultures in corporate universities. All three state that culture plays an important role in the university meeting its mandate. But it does not happen overnight:

Learning at work can no longer be described as a discrete activity for some, nor as an activity that occurs only at occasional moments in one's career. Rather in the productive workplace, learning is considered to be part of everyday work.

Workplace learning can be understood as a cultural practice constructed by contemporary discursive practices of work ... These changes involved the development of a corporate culture through the development of mission and vision statements, an identification of workers with corporate aims and the

conceptualization of an organization as on site of ongoing learning. (Solomon, 1999, p. 122)

A corporate university must be viewed by leaders in the organization as having inherent value – the preferred and best way to develop employees in a manner that will mean the organization reaches its business goals. This becomes circular because a learning organization is required to foster learning but learning is necessary to develop leaders who will cultivate that learning organization. The benefits of leaders fostering a learning culture is outlined by Ulrich and Smallwood (2003, p. 17):

Leaders who build learning organizations encourage creativity and innovation of ideas within an organization unit, and then build disciplined processes for sharing those ideas across organization units. Learning capacity is an intangible value when organizations have the ability to move ideas across vertical, horizontal, external and global boundaries.

Indeed, Crotonville was used as a tool to revitalize GE's culture in the 1980s. Susan Peters, Crotonville's Chief Learning Officer, says it is now part of the GE culture (Knowledge, 2010, para. 1) because “we have an umbrella approach that we call GE Global Learning. We break it up into three buckets. The first is leadership. The second is skills, which is driven by function – finance skills, marketing skills, etc. The third bucket is business” (Knowledge, 2010, para. 3). University of Farmers has taken its learning culture to external audiences through a robust marketing and advertising campaign – portraying the entire organization through the lens of their corporate university by

“focusing on in-depth training agents receive at the actual University of Farmers in Agoura Hills, California” (The Inspiration Room 2010, para. 1). And Caterpillar clearly showed their cultural stance on learning when they launched Caterpillar University in the uncertain economic times.

Ulrich and Smallwood (2003) noted that “some organizations seem to have the ability to learn better than others, creating intangible value in the process” (p. 147). That ability to learn can foster a learning culture that is fuelled, as indicated by all of our case studies, by a robust corporate university.

Building a corporate university

A Canadian company is launching a corporate university in fall 2013. Like University of Farmers, this company is trying to bring together all the learning, development, training and mentoring opportunities currently available throughout the company on a largely ad hoc basis. The business drivers for this corporate university are (Anonymous, 2013, p. 1): increased attraction and retention, decreased time to competency, increased knowledge capture and sharing, increased quality of learning experience, and increased consistency and effectiveness in learning operations. The key driver for this corporate university is “attracting and retaining the increasing number of employees required to execute on our business strategy” (Anonymous, 2013, p. 1). These drivers formed the basis for a strong business case for building a corporate university.

The vision for this corporate university is a Crotonville-esque environment but without the bricks and mortar. The corporate university has been built around a virtual presence supported by some face-to-face learning opportunities. Like Caterpillar University, the desired result is an industry-leading learning institution. This is a lofty but achievable goal – as evidenced by the cases – provided a few key elements are in place. To realize this vision, the organization must clearly identify how moving all of the organization’s workplace learning under a corporate university umbrella will help the organization reach its business goals. Specifically, it must demonstrate how centralization will help attract and retain the necessary people. This is a key element as Castellani (2008, p. 178) identified, “In the evolution of the psychological contract between the employee and the company, a constant training therefore tends to be worth more than the safety guaranteed by a collective labour agreement.”

When investigating the viability of a corporate university, the organization used several case studies, including Crotonville and the University of Farmers, to justify the development of a corporate university. However, the organization would have also benefited from using those cases as a blueprint for how to build its own corporate university. For example, like the corporate universities studied, the organization has established a strong leadership development program but, unlike those studied; the corporate university does not have leadership development as part of or in support of its mandate. In fact, the leadership development program is not slated to be part of the corporate university that launches in the fall 2013. This may prove to be as miscalculation because strong leadership development and strong leaders are an important way to bridge the gap between learning and the organization's business strategy. As Bleak and Fulmer (2009, p. 11) summarized:

Leadership development and learning can play a critical role in helping move a company from its current reality to its ... desired future destination. Part of closing the gap between these two places is developing leaders who are flexible, collaborative, able to learn and adapt to changing circumstances, and willing to continue their learning journey to becoming better strategic thinkers and doers.

Because the leadership development piece works in two ways – as a foundation for the offerings in a corporate university, but also in the fostering of a learning organization – there may be other missed opportunities for this organization. While there is support from some executives for the development of a corporate university, there has been no targeted effort to engage other leaders in the organization to date. Taking a more

global approach, the corporate university is trying to develop foundational learning curricula at the same time as launching the corporate university. This will make the corporate university more accessible to the entire staff, but the opportunity to engage leaders, grow leaders and, as a result, build a learning culture may be missed.

Another challenge for the organization is their approach to measurement. At this point, there is no mention of measuring the benefits to the organization or evaluating the user experience. Unfortunately, the organization is following Caterpillar's lead and allowing metrics and measurement to be something that is conducted in hind-sight. The organization is following an "if you build it they will come" mentality by launching a portal for staff to access some of the university's learning and development opportunities before solidifying the governance and infrastructure for the institute itself. This approach may put the corporate university at risk for perceived or, even real, failure as Frazee (2002) cautioned, "...creating a corporate university brand without determining how you will measure and achieve results is not in the best interest of your company" (p. 3). Measurement is further complicated because the success of the corporate university is being measured by output instead of outcomes. By focusing on the milestones to deliver on the launch of the corporate university and the key tool, a web-based portal, the organization has not clearly identified the university's role in helping the organization reach its stated business goals. This is important as Ketter (2011) noted, "Learning departments must be run like a business. This concept is nothing new. But learning departments that fail to align to corporate objectives and strategies and lack disciplined execution can't gain credibility to deliver bottom-line results to their organizations" (p. 1).

The organization would benefit from following Crotonville and the University of Farmers lead by defining the overall development strategy for the organization, choosing a development model to support the strategy, and building the corporate university accordingly.

Conclusion

The three arguments in favour of building a corporate university – furthering institutional and inter-generational learning; contributing to the brand value of an organization; and establishing strong leadership – stand up after the review of Crotonville, University of Farmers and Caterpillar University. There are three key learnings from the case studies that further those arguments. The first is that leadership development is a necessary part of building a corporate university. Not only does leadership development need to be a curricula priority but it must be cultivated in order to garner the necessary buy-in to build a successful corporate university. The link between leadership development and a successful model for a corporate university is clear as “research has shown that when leadership development is seen as a strategic objective, in and of itself, and when this development is tied closely to the strategy and needs of the business, excellent organizational results follow” (Bleak & Fulmer, 2009, p. 2). Credibility both internally and externally is the reason this is necessary. In order for the corporate university to have credibility to employees, leaders must be consulted, participate and become ambassadors of the institute. Additionally, leadership development must be reflected externally to showcase the value of a corporate university to external audiences. This fosters the thinking that:

Investors recognize intangible value in organizations with a learning reputation because these organizations not only create new ideas, they share those ideas throughout the enterprise, building knowledge networks where technology and communities of practice transfer experience from one setting to another. (Ulrich & Smallwood, 2003, p. 147)

Second, it is important to determine how the success of the corporate university will be measured before the structure and infrastructure of a corporate university is built.

Caterpillar University, while deemed successful, worked backward to provide proof points for their success. Crotonville has decades of success to reflect on and can use that as a baseline as they continue to evolve and grow. And University of Farmers has built measurement into minutia of everything they do which allows them to easily provide metrics and still focus on delivering learning opportunities to the organization. Third, a corporate university can help build a learning organization. As Frazee (2002) noted, “Becoming a corporate university can strengthen the focus on learning and challenge corporate executives to think about how learning can affect their organization” (p. 1) but a learning organization needs a learning culture, cultivated by leadership, in order to thrive.

Taking an interdisciplinary approach to this research provides a clearer understanding of how workplace learning has evolved and the role that corporate universities play in that evolution. As Hagar noted, there are several disciplines that feed into these topics and the cases highlight several of them including leadership, learning theory, management theory, marketing and communications. An integrated approach provides a more fulsome perspective on this complex topic. As Mansilla explained, “a form of inquiry that integrates knowledge and modes of thinking from two or more disciplines ... or establishes fields of study ... to produce a cognitive or practical advancement ... that would have been unlikely through disciplinary means” (as cited in Strober, 2011, p. 15). Understanding the foundation of a corporate university must be informed by the aforementioned disciplines to provide a complete picture.

Figure 1 outlines how to pull these learnings together in an effort to build a successful corporate university. As Crotonville, the University of Farmers, Caterpillar University, and even the other organization's corporate university can attest to, a corporate university must support the organization's business strategy. An organization's strategy, priorities and stated goals and the deliverables of the corporate university must be clearly aligned. The piece in-between that can help translate the business strategy into corporate university deliverables is a robust leadership development strategy such as the one used by Crotonville. Then, a new corporate university can only benefit from embracing a learning model such as the *Kirkpatrick Model* used by the University of Farmers. A learning model will provide a concrete roadmap for how learning and development opportunities are created and measured on behalf of the organization. The leadership development strategy and learning model are important first steps because leaders can then interpret the business strategy for their team, determine how their team will function in support of the business strategy, and encourage team members to attend the corporate university to help foster the learning culture of the organization. The result: every member of every team is led by every leader to support the business strategy and reach the business goals.

Building on the cases, the investigation into the other organization's corporate university and the findings outlined above, this model provides a clear roadmap for the successful development and implementation of a corporate university.

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Figure 1