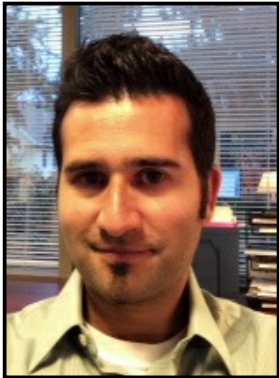


EHRN Interviews:



Nima Nikkhou, Ph.D.

Learning & Organizational Development



Nima Nikkhou is Manager of Learning & Organization Development at Warner Bros. In this capacity, Nima manages and oversees WB's various corporate learning and development programs targeted for all employees and management levels across the company. Nima also oversees the company's performance management process and talent review and succession management processes. He is also responsible for the company-wide employee opinion survey.

EHRN: Tell us how you began your career and how it evolved into where you are now at Warner Bros. in the Organizational Development department? How large is your team and how large of a population do you support?

I'm fortunate enough to have had the opportunity to attend school and received a degree in what I do. I did a few internships in graduate school and one of those led to full-time employment. Interestingly enough, my boss at the time I was interning is my current boss...so I've definitely relied on my network to stay connected and to transition to Warner Bros. My current team consists of three other full-time employees and we collectively support our larger global employee population of about 9,000.

EHRN: How do you define organizational development? How can O&D interventions best be applied at the individual, group and organizational levels? And what is the best method for delivery? Classroom? e-Learning? What are your thoughts on e-Learning?

Organization development is a very large field that encompasses everything from training and coaching to performance management and succession planning, and everything in between. To me, OD is any intervention that supports and enhances a person's or a group's effectiveness in an organizational setting. To be effective, there should be some level of customization with each intervention. In terms of delivery, this is highly dependent on the desired outcome and the needs of the person/group. In some cases, an appropriate intervention might involve one-on-one coaching with one individual, whereas in other cases, it might make sense to facilitate a training or offsite for a group of employees to solve a specific business issue or gap.

I think it's best to have a variety of tools to utilize, based on the situation and needs of a client. We utilize a combination of classroom and e-learning methods to deliver content to our employees and this blend has been crucial to reaching a wider population. There are certain employees that get a lot of value from networking and connecting in real-time and thus prefer classroom training. On the other hand, we have an increasing number of employees who are technically savvy and prefer to learn at their own pace, and prefer to access our e-learning modules.

EHRN: Best-in-class training programs link training goals with company goals. Typically, the process starts with defining success? Working backward, where does one go from here to have the greatest impact? How does O&D take their analysis through the entire organization and which company stakeholders should be most involved in this process?

Ideally, all OD interventions should be aligned with the larger company goals. At the end of the day, we are not here to make people "feel good," but the value that we add as OD professionals is to always link back everything to bottom-line business goals and results. In my experience, this is part science and part art. Best practices dictate that messaging and communication come from top leadership. While for large initiatives this is often possible and welcomed, we don't have the luxury of engaging our busy executives on every OD initiative. Therefore, the more vetting that is done with other key stakeholders, the better likelihood of buy-in, support, and adoption. One key stakeholder for us is our HR business partners. Since HR typically has a better day-to-day read on various business groups, they provide a wealth of information and context that ultimately benefits how an initiative or OD intervention might be implemented so that it resonates with the business.

EHRN: Some basic metrics for measuring program success are courses started and courses completed. Other metrics are trend lines, assessments and surveys. Metrics are one common way of proving the success or failure of the program. How does one know they are training on the right topics? What statistics or stats are the true key performance indicators?

This can be a hard nut to crack because of the dynamic nature of an organization. While metrics may be an objective way to measure completion or success of training, it can be more challenging to quantify success with other interventions. Again, the purpose of OD is to help enable and engage employees to be the best they can be to deliver business results. So ultimately, all interventions should be tied back to some business goals and their success should be judged based on if the desired business results were met. This could be anything from a classroom training that helped build a new skill that was needed to deliver business results, an individual coaching session that enabled an executive to obtain feedback about their leadership style (and subsequent behavior change), or even facilitating a strategic off-site with a particular business unit that enabled the team to articulate their business priorities. All of the above are examples of business challenges that are salient for a given person/group and that will have different measures of success, based on the situation.

EHRN: How does O&D make sure that what people learn from training programs can be applied to their jobs? How do we make the training stick? And what should the follow-up look like?

For training to be most effective, there should be some level of customization to the audience. While training topics are similar, knowing something about your audience can make the content much more impactful. We work with a variety of populations at the studio and I can speak from experience that the delivery of content to someone in a corporate role looks a little different than if that content were being delivered to someone who works in the creative space. Facilitating a dialogue and making the content come alive by using real and relevant examples often helps employees apply the learning/content to their respective jobs. Another key component of effective training is that it should be delivered “just in time.” This means that a training topic is delivered when there is a critical need for that information, as this is when information is best absorbed and applied. While there isn’t always the time or appetite for follow-up, ideally there are instances where the content can be revisited and refreshed, to ensure the key learning objectives are still being applied. This could be as simple as a conversation with the leader of a particular group to gauge behavior change and learning, and any necessary coaching for the leader to continue to enforce the key objectives.

EHRN: What advice would give up-and-comers who may want to get involved with O&D? Robin Williams book “The Non-Designers Design Book” is a good basic book for learning about instructional design. Can you recommend other resources for O&D?

Being a good OD practitioner involves a commitment to lifelong learning. Since every client interaction and intervention is different, there is no one “right” way. This requires obtaining a wide breadth of knowledge and experience to draw upon. I learn something new every day by reading, doing, and talking with my colleagues. There are numerous resources for learning more about OD. A few resources I would recommend are: American Society for Training & Development (www.astd.org), Society for Industrial Organizational Psychology (www.siop.org), and Organization Development Network (www.odnetwork.org).

Nima Nikkhou, Ph.D.

Prior to Warner Bros., Nima worked as a Sr. Consultant of Leadership Development at Bank of America’s home loans division. In this role, Nima supported operational executives and their teams in the Default, Non-Default, and Call Center business units. His role included helping executives transition from Countrywide to Bank of America and facilitated strategic organization design to better align the organizational structure of the executives he supported. He also provided leadership development consultation as well as one-on-one coaching to his client groups.

Prior to joining Bank of America, Nima served in various roles at Health Net Inc. for six years. Initially brought onboard to help establish a new functional area dedicated to talent management and executive development, Nima spent the subsequent 12 months researching, benchmarking, and launching succession planning efforts as well as executive coaching and development processes. He also helped implement tools and processes designed to enhance Health Net’s selection and onboarding of senior executives.

Nima eventually oversaw the centralized Leadership & Organization Development function. In this capacity, he managed all of the company's leadership development programs as well as learning targeted for all other levels. He also led effort to standardize and automate Health Net's goal-setting and performance review processes and oversaw the company's learning management system and governance thereof.

Before joining Health Net, Nima worked as a Human Resource Consultant for Southern California Edison. In this capacity, he helped to improve the selection process for various technical and non-technical positions throughout the company by enhancing performance tests, assessment centers, and partnered with hiring managers to create effective and position-specific interviewing protocols.

Education Ph.D., Organizational Psychology, Alliant International University
M.S., Organizational Psychology, Alliant International University
B.A., Psychology, University of California Los Angeles (UCLA)