

GUIDEBOOK

Reducing training costs



Tribal Habits

Step 1 – Look for easy ways to eliminate costs

Oh no. You need to reduce training costs.

Perhaps this isn't the first time your CFO has viewed training as an expense and has decided that training needs less budget. It certainly won't be the last time either. As organisations ride the economic cycle, the training budget tends to move with it.

If you already run a lean and mean training budget, then well done! You may find, though, that your previous good management will not always stop that CFO from asking you to reduce training costs further.

In any case, whether you have already maximised your training budget or you realise that you have a long way to go, here are ten practical steps that you can take to reduce training costs.

1 - Eliminate training which is not adding value

This first tip will tie into our last tip (demonstrate return). If we want to reduce training costs and improve training ROI, then your training spend needs to be laser-focused.

So first things first – any training which isn't aligned to strategic goals and can demonstrate clear value should be the first to be removed. We are not saying that such training is not worthwhile, but when the training budget is under pressure, then choices must be made.

You may need to protect compliance training and other training directly linked to strategic goals – perhaps sales to drive revenue, or service to retain customers, or processes to improve efficiency and reduce mistakes. As such, training on assertiveness skills or business ethics may just have to wait for a while.

2 - Fewer workshops, more online training

When it comes to managing the balance between training quality and training cost, online learning can be the most significant factor. Online training is a scalable method of making training activities, content and assessments available to many employees in any location.

They can access knowledge and training most relevant to them, in an engaging format, whenever they need it most and in multiple sessions which suit their availability.

Online training modules can be updated quickly and easily. Online training can be automated for delivery with minimal effort from a training administrator. This means less time and lower costs for each 'unit of training content delivered'.

Transforming your workshops into online training is also significantly easier than ever before – the time and effort are modest, and the return on your investment is significant. Essentially moving all your workshop training which only teaches theory, facts, processes or knowledge into online learning can dramatically reduce training costs.

3 - Fewer workshops, more virtual training

Next, move workshops online with webinars. Webinars significantly lower the average training cost per employee by removing the need for a venue, travel, and catering.

Webinars can replicate small group interactions from workshops too. Modern webinar platforms even offer breakout facilities, allowing you to split groups of 20-30 employees into small teams of 3-5 employees to replicate small team tasks from a workshop.

Meanwhile, your webinar facilitator can address multiple employees at once (keeping one of the big efficiency advantages of workshops). Better yet, if an employee can't make a webinar, it's no big deal as learners can watch the recording when they get the time.

Finally, it is easy to take a four-hour workshop and transform it into three 60 minute webinars. From an effectiveness point of view, shorter and more frequent training is always better than longer, one-off events. So not only do you reduce training costs, but you also improve training outcomes.

4 - Replace in-house workshops with public workshops

If you must use workshops from external suppliers, consider switching to public workshops rather than private in-house workshops. This is particularly useful when you have just a small number of employees to be trained.

Also, consider that the employees who attend the public workshops can return and share that knowledge internally. Ask them to contextualise the training for the organisation and capture that information to share internally (see the next two points about this).

5 - Less external consultants, more internal expertise

Learning and development consultants are expensive. While they can do a great job, it comes at a cost, particularly as they are removed from your organisation. That distance adds time and complexity to their actions. They also tend to want to produce high-quality training resources, sometimes with complex animations, custom images and other time-consuming additions.

It's alarming how many organisations turn to external consultants, which come with expensive costs while ignoring all the free consultants who know your organisation best – your employees. You can probably already identify employees with expertise, proven skills and valuable knowledge. All you need to do is empower them to share their expertise and give them the tools to do so.

Empowerment needs time and focus. It may be as simple as a KPI which requires team leaders to create two hours of online training every six months. The tools can come from a learning creation platform, which allows anyone to create online training as quickly as building PowerPoint slides. Alternatively, ratchet up your lunch-and-learns (while recording them for online distribution).

While you may still need learning experts to assist, tapping into your internal experts can substitute a lot of costs and further reduce training costs per employee.

6 - Less purchased training, more created training

Similarly, while it can be tempting to buy external training content, it is expensive. Sending employees to an external workshop is often very inefficient. In essence, you are paying for the marketing costs of that workshop, room hire, printed (and often forgotten) workbooks, travel time, food and more.

Externally created online training can be cheaper but still carries a hefty cost – especially if the content is generic and already exists in your organisation. Now, some external online training content may need to be purchased if you lack the internal skills to create it. Compliance training is a great example of this, where you need to be sure the content is approved and meets standards. Equally, highly specialised training – safety training is a good example – might also be best done by a professional.

However, any external training on universal modules like sales, management or service can usually be created internally by your experts. With the bonus that the content will be 100% relevant to your organisation.

7 - Switch to actual or active use online training plans

If your online learning platform supports active (actual) user plans, switching to those plans can also dramatically reduce training costs.

Many online learning platforms have total user plans. This means your monthly or annual subscriptions are based on the total number of users in the platform. This is fine if the majority of your users are accessing your platform every month. For many organisations, however, this just isn't the case.

Often training is seasonal. Compliance training may occur in just a few months each year, while soft skills training is often focussed outside of busy periods. If you combine this with holiday periods, the usage in your learning portal is often well less than 100% of your employees.

It may be worth running a monthly usage report for your learning platform and determining what per cent of your users log in each month on average. For many organisations, this number is 40-60%. This means your learning platform efficiency may be just 50% (you are paying for 50% of usage which you don't need).

Some online learning platforms utilise an active (or actual) user plan. These plans are based on the number of active users per month. An active user is typically defined as a user who logs into your learning platform during a calendar month. If a user does not log in, they are not counted. If your organisation has, say, 200 employees but you realise that only 100 of them log in each month, then you can use a 100 active user per month plan to reduce costs.

Most active user plans also allow monthly overruns for spikes in usage, and you are just charged for the incremental excess users for that month. Moving to an active user plan might reduce training costs for your online learning portal by 30-60%. That's no small number.

8 - Eliminate expenses not directly related to training

Let's think about all the costs we incur in training activities which are not directly related to training outcomes. Then let's see how many we can eliminate.

- Venue. Use internal rooms or move to virtual rooms (webinars).
- Food. Simply do not supply. Ask participants to organise their own food (they do so every day on-the-job, so why do they need you to organise food for training?).
- Workbooks. Don't print them. Provide a PDF version instead and ask learners to print and bring to the workshop or use electronically. Adjust your training activities to use things other than workbooks. Most training workbooks end up buried in the bottom of drawers anyway.
- Travel. Switch to online or virtual training to eliminate travel expenses (for both participants but also facilitators).

9 - Re-use internal knowledge assets for training

Recycling saves money, and it can work to reduce training costs too.

If you have an internal expert running a lunch-and-learn or any sort of internal workshop, you should record it. Then upload that video into your learning platform for re-use in the future. With just a small amount of work, it is easy to take a 60-minute video and transform it into a 60-minute online training module with 6-7 video extracts, summaries of key information and online assessments.

If you have teams which are creating process guidelines for standard operating procedures, ask them to do so in a way which can be repurposed into online training. This usually just means providing enough detail that the SOP guidelines can be understood on a stand-alone basis. It's easy to take your SOPs and create an online learning library.

10 - Work hard to demonstrate return

While we are looking at reducing training costs, another strategy to fight training budget cuts is to better illustrate the returns. Higher returns help maintain higher investments.

Ensure that as many of your training activities as possible are tracking on-the-job outcomes and can demonstrate the value of new behaviours or skills. Let's be honest – tracking training outcomes, particularly to a Kirkpatrick Level 4 standard, is tricky. But it's not impossible.

Qualitative data (Kirkpatrick Level 3 standard) is often easier to obtain and just as powerful. Employees who can discuss a reduction in mistakes or improvement in efficiency, sales teams who can share stories or new clients or improved margins, or managers who can identify retained staff or reductions in absenteeism are all valuable in proving training ROI.

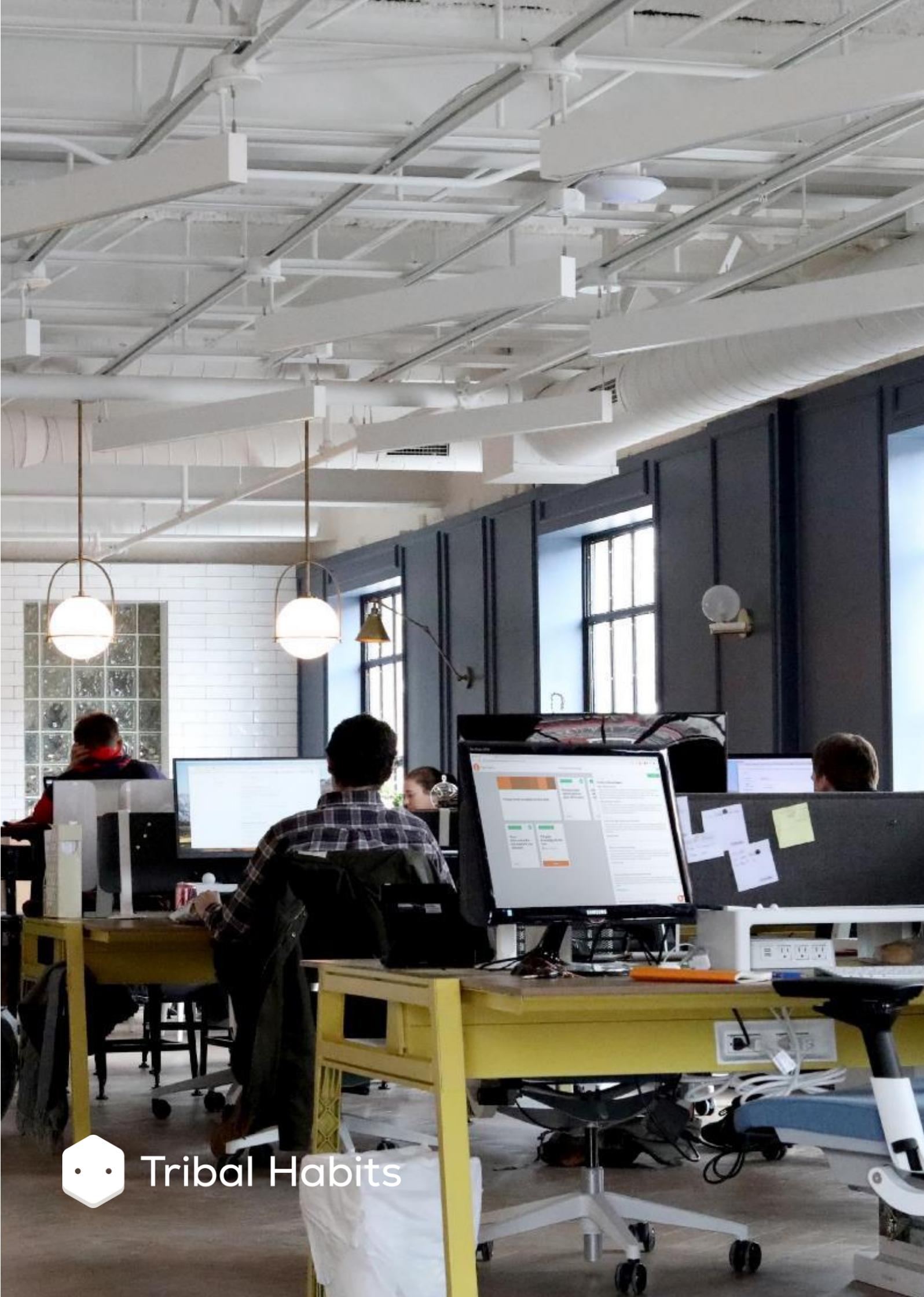
The problem is that most training measurement stops as participants leave the training. Instead, you need to build in on-the-job activities, reporting and tracking (something with modules in Tribal Habits can do for you with the Activities feature).

The bottom line

Efforts to reduce training costs are always a process fraught with danger for the organisation. It is all too easy to cut training and then later wonder why mistakes increase, sales reduce and morale decreases.

That doesn't mean the training budget should be immune from scrutiny. Like all functions, it needs to work hard to maximise its outcomes. The ideas in this article should inspire you to find the gains while minimising the pain.

If you need further help, Tribal Habits can assist. We offer active user plans and have low per-user costs. Tribal Habits can also help you to tap into internal experts, create more internal training, eliminate expensive external content and re-use internal knowledge assets. Reach out to us today for a no obligations demo and see how we can help you achieve more positive training outcomes, while we reduce training costs.



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Step 2 – Consider the ‘costs of doing nothing’

Perhaps the situation is more serious than you initially thought. Not only is your training budget under threat – its possible training is being cut entirely. When training is viewed as an expense, then it will be viewed as something which can be cut without consequence.

But there is a cost of not providing employee training. A cost which may far exceed any short-term monetary savings.

In this article, let's review several key costs of not providing employee training at all, to help you strengthen your arguments. While you may see tangible costs of providing training, there are often far larger tangible and intangible costs of doing nothing when it comes to employee training.

Employee training boost employee engagement

There are many studies which directly link employee training with employee engagement and many studies which directly link employee engagement with improved organisational outcomes.

If you want employees who are...

- Happier
- Willing to go the extra mile
- Innovative
- Loyal

...then providing them with training opportunities is a crucial ingredient.

Failure may lead to employee turnover. Even worse, employees who highly value training opportunities tend to be better employees – the ones who want to improve. And it's those high-quality employees who leave as a result of reduced training – leaving you with an overall lower quality workforce.

Training employees is less costly than hiring new employees

Then you have the issue of replacing those employees. Recruitment costs average 20-40% of salaries. Having to replace disengaged staff who leave is expensive.

Equally, it is typically far cheaper to train up underperforming existing employees than to recruit new employees to replace them (who will require training anyway to learn your organisation's processes).

In addition, there is no guarantee that a new employee will be any better! You may discover months later that you are no further along, except you have incurred expenses in recruitment costs and time delays.

Trained employees are more productive

Training is knowledge.

It's really as simple as that. Consider the untrained employee compared to a similarly skilled, but trained employee. The untrained employee is...

- Less efficient
- Less productive
- Less knowledgeable (be it product knowledge, technical knowledge or process knowledge)
- Less able help stakeholders (team members, direct reports, customers/clients)
- May be unsafe (causing risk to themselves and others)

As you may have heard before: "While you may worry about investing in training only for employees to leave, you should be more worried about not providing employee training and those employees stay!".

A lack of training harms your reputation

Word gets around. When your organisation views training as a 'nice to have', not a 'must-have', that reputation starts to spread.

Recruitment of talented workers – people who naturally value self-development – can be much harder when your organisation's reputation towards training is poor. It's hard to position your organisation to those talented workers when you can't demonstrate recent training activity (or, even worse, when they hear from existing employees about a lack of training opportunities).

Your competitors can even use this information against you in certain industries. Competitors may actively promote the investment in their own employees, keeping them upskilled, compliant and up-to-date, and promote this as a strength over organisations who don't measure up with training.

A failure to provide training creates compliance risks

Not providing employee training doesn't just harm individual employees; it also creates risks for your entire organisation.

Mistakes and errors made by your employees can result in lawsuits, fines and possibly charges of criminal negligence. Legislation and regulations can also create a burden on organisations to provide compliance training to employees as a requirement of operation – whistleblowing, anti-money laundering and privacy laws are often required elements of training.

If your organisation has a health and safety incident – harassment, trips, stress, injuries – and employees have received no training to help prevent that incident, your organisation may well have failed in its duty of care to employees. That's going to hurt in any workplace investigation.

A lack of training leads to a lack of change

OK, so there is one situation where not providing employee training might make sense: Your organisation is perfect. When there is no room for improvement, then perhaps training has run its course.

Is that your organisation?

Listen to your management meetings. Does your management team seem 100% happy with EVERY aspect of the organisation's performance? Does every employee operate at a best practice standard? Have all errors been eliminated in your workforce performance?

When you fail to train, your organisation accepts the status quo. Very little – perhaps nothing – will change. Employees will keep doing what they are doing. You have resigned your organisation to its current standard.

If your organisation wants a different outcome, it needs different inputs. Changes in employee behaviours are critical to organisational improvement. And change doesn't happen without training.



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Step 3 – Move to a low-cost learning platform

Onto step 3. At this point you should have sharpened your training budget and, if necessary, drawn a line in the sand to ensure that your organisation hasn't already made a move to online learning, you might be uncertain about the costs associated with such a move. In this article, we'll examine all the potential online learning costs as well as ways to eliminate or minimise them.

As we review the various costs in online learning, we'll need to consider two parts of the process.

- Online learning platform costs. These are the costs in providing a platform to host and distribute online learning. It should be noted that many online learning platforms also provide other benefits, from the administration of instructor-led training to acting as a video-hosting environment.
- Online learning content costs. An online learning platform cannot function on its own – it also needs online learning content. These costs may include access to ready-made online learning libraries as well as the cost of developing new, customised, online learning content.

Set-up costs

Set-up costs are a one-off online learning cost to establish your cloud-based learning platform.

Setting up a domain for a new organisation in a modern online learning platform should require just minutes of effort. There are no provisioning costs in establishing a new organisation in cloud-based infrastructure.

As a result, at Tribal Habits, we believe set-up costs for online learning platforms should be free.

That being said, some older learning platforms can require considerable effort to provision a new organisation portal while some online learning vendors use set-up costs as a way to improve margins (particularly as a way to coerce organisations into longer contracts to 'spread set-up costs over many years'). Set-up costs for these learning platforms can range from \$500-\$25,000 or more.

Implementation costs

Implementation costs are a one-off online learning cost involved in establishing the initial settings and processes in your learning platform.

These costs are typically human-capital costs. They involve one-off initial implementation activities, such as defining custom fields in user profiles, setting up initial categories, activating single-sign-on protocols and establishing branding on the platform.

For most modern online learning platforms, these activities should be simple and straight-forward. Organisations should be able to quickly establish these settings themselves during a standard implementation process, while platform providers may help with decisions around some of these settings during an initial training process for new platform admins.

As a result, at Tribal Habits, we believe implementation costs for online learning platforms should be free. The effort is minimal and should be absorbed by both our customer success staff during the free initial admin training we provide.

However, many complicated online learning platforms may require an implementation fee. This may include costs for upfront training of staff, help from the platform provider in setting up parts of the platform or 'consulting' services which are required to otherwise use the platform. Implementation costs for these learning platforms can range from \$500-50,000 or more.

Package costs

Package costs are on-going online learning costs associated with the features of your learning platform. Package costs are the first component in determining your on-going usage subscription.

Some online learning platforms have one package – you receive all features, all the time. Indeed, this may make sense for some platforms which have a defined (limited) feature set.

Alternatively, some online learning platforms allow you to select only the features you need. For platforms with more extensive feature sets, that can help make your online learning costs more efficient.

At Tribal Habits, you can select from several different packages depending on the particular features your organisation requires. Many other modern online learning platforms offer similar package structures. It is certainly worth investigating which packages your organisation definitely requires.

Plan costs

Plan costs are on-going online learning costs associated with the volume of activity in your learning platform. Essentially, plan costs are the second component in your on-going subscription – they are the 'multiplier' of your package costs. The most common plan cost is 'per user per month' charge.

In a simplified case, let's say your package costs are \$10 per user for the features you have selected. Your plan costs will then adjust the \$10 per user amount up or down. For example, larger organisations may receive a discounted per-user rate for high volumes – it may reduce the per-user cost to, say \$7.50 per user, for the same set of features.

A more important distinction in the plan cost is how a user is counted.

- Stored users. Many online learning platforms use 'stored' users (or total users). They count every user in your portal regardless of whether that user is active in the portal (logging in to use the portal). This method is simple but can be very inefficient if your users are not using your portal every month.
- Active users. Some online learning platforms use 'active' users (or actual users). In this case, only users who log into the portal are counted. This method most closely aligns the value you receive from the online portal with the costs you are paying. If users are not using the portal, your costs should fall. Active user plans are typically 30-60% cheaper.

At Tribal Habits, we use an active user pricing model. You only pay for users who are actively gaining value from your learning portal. This is a very efficient cost model. Organisations with, say, 300 employees may only need a 150 active user plan – this would allow 150 different users to log in each month.

If you have more users in a month than your plan, you are simply charged for the additional users for that single month (at the same per-user rate).

Storage costs

Storage costs are on-going costs associated with the amount of content stored in your online learning portal.

This is often a hidden and unexpected cost, typically associated with older online learning platforms. Organisations may find that a certain amount of storage is initially free on these platforms. However, as usage grows and more content is added to the platform, a storage fee can suddenly be charged.

For modern cloud-based learning platforms, the cost of storage is extremely low. As a result, at Tribal Habits, we have no storage fees at all.

Support costs

Support costs are on-going online learning costs associated with receiving support for your online learning platform.

For most online learning platforms, there are no additional support costs – support is included in your package and/or plan costs.

However, some online learning platforms charge extra for certain levels of service. For example, they may provide email support (which can take 2-3 days to respond) for all packages, but more responsive live chat support may be an additional on-going cost (typically a per cent of your overall subscription cost).

At Tribal Habits, we offer the same level of support for all packages with no additional fees.

Content costs

Now for the single biggest hidden cost in online learning platforms – content.

Almost all online learning platforms are designed only to host online learning content. That means you need to find your online learning modules somewhere else...at an additional cost. Some of these online learning platforms will claim to have the ability for you to create online learning modules, but the tools are simple. They are often nothing more than some basic text, a few images and simple quizzes.

The sources for online learning modules really come down to two options.

- Ready-made online training modules. These modules provide training on common topics. Some online learning platforms now include access to libraries of online training modules – perhaps has an additional package subscription. If not, then you may need to track down ready-made external training and integrate that into your online learning platform (at a cost, and with some effort).
- Online training creation software. Alternatively, you can use dedicated online training creation software (eLearning Authoring tools) like Storyline or Captivate. These tools are expensive (\$500-2,000 per creator per year) and have steep learning curves. If you would like 4-5 of your staff to be able to create training, you need to factor into your costings.

At Tribal Habits, we have libraries with 100s of ready-made training which are included in your subscription. Unlike other learning platforms, these ready-made training modules appear in your organisation's branding and can be edited by you!

In addition, Tribal Habits has integrated online training creation features. In fact, Tribal Habits was designed as an online training creation platform from the ground up. The ability to create fully interactive online training is included in your packages.

Summary of online learning costs

Cost	Tribal Habits	Traditional LMS
Set-up costs One-off upfront costs to provision your online learning platform.	\$0	Varies \$0 to \$25,000+
Implementation costs One-off upfront costs for assistance provided to you during initial implementation.	\$0	Varies \$0 to \$50,000+
Package costs Your choice of feature packages - may increase or decrease overall costs.	Varies	Varies
Plan costs The type of plan (stored or active) plus any possible discounts.	Active user model Size discounts NFP discounts	Varies, often Stored Size discounts NFP discounts
Storage costs Costs for storage of files, data, videos, documents or images in your portal.	\$0	Varies \$0 to \$100+/GB
Support costs Costs for on-going support (or for access to responsive support).	\$0	Varies \$0 to more expensive plans required
Content costs The #1 hidden cost - accessing branded and editable libraries and creating your own training!	\$0	Varies Library costs extra Separate creator costs

Case Study: SMEC and saving \$400,000

Challenge	Approach	Outcome
To ensure optimal performance, SMEC needs to attract, develop and retain Australia's best graduate talent. Delivering on this was expending significant time and financial resources across the business.	To overcome geographic constraints and to optimise its training budget, SMEC implemented Tribal Habits to supplement and enhance its face-to-face training sessions.	Tribal Habits allowed SMEC to achieve its three goals of attracting, developing and retaining Australia's best graduates. SMEC's achievements in this space saw the business awarded two 2019 LearnX awards.

SMEC is a specialist engineering, management and development consultancy, headquartered in Australia while operating out of more than 40 countries. The organisation is a member of the Surbana Jurong Group, an Asia-based urban and infrastructure consulting powerhouse. From building hydroelectric plants to sports stadiums, SMEC leads the way in delivering advanced engineering and management advisory across the world.

A Graduate Focus

To continue to deliver ground-breaking infrastructure projects and to thrive as a business, SMEC ANZ understands it must attract and develop Australia's top talent. One of the most critical talent groups for the organisation is graduates. In Australia alone, SMEC's workforce includes 160 to 200 graduates at any one time.

Polishing diamonds

SMEC had a long track record of attracting graduate talent to its business but had identified (as most businesses do) that there was a significant learning curve required to translate the technical knowledge obtained through university and other tertiary institutions into tangible skills that can be used on the job.

Feedback from previous graduates about the training and induction process had been positive, but a number of employees noted that while training was interesting and educational, it didn't always translate directly into skills they could leverage to improve their performance on the job.

The tyranny of distance

Another challenge the SMEC learning and development team faced when it came to inducting and developing graduate talent, was the dispersed nature of its workforce. SMEC's Australian operations are spread across 20 different sites, all of which house graduates. This vast geographic spread presented two key challenges when it came to training and upskilling staff.

The first was that staff in more remote locations didn't always receive the same quantity of training as those in major offices did. Secondly, the business noted that to deliver the consistent training required it must either commit to costly face-to-face sessions with people flying in from different locations across the country or manage the duplication of effort that arose from delivering the same training across multiple locations.

This reliance on face-to-face training also meant that graduate development pathways were very time-sensitive. If someone missed a session or joined the group outside of major graduate intakes, it could be many months before they were able to attend the next round of training, which would impact their performance on the job.

From Good to Great

Despite what was considered to be a good graduate program, SMEC saw opportunities to improve the way it was training and developing its next generation of talent. Seizing on these opportunities, the CEO identified building a more robust and scalable graduate development program as the number one priority for the SMEC learning and development team.

A program of work was devised to achieve three primary objectives

1. Attract and retain the best graduate talent
2. Expose graduates to multiple disciplines of engineering so they can deliver to a high standard for SMEC clients and to the community
3. Develop graduates' soft skills beyond academic learning

The approach

The learning and development team went through a rigorous process to determine how to best meet these objectives. Interviews were carried out with current and past graduates, managers and training providers to develop an approach that would best suit the business.

At the end of this process, it was determined that a blended approach (leveraging both online and face-to-face training) would be the most effective way to deliver on the business's objectives. This approach meant the organisation could maintain a cultural connection between graduates through face-to-face sessions, but supplement and enhance these sessions in a cost-effective and timely manner by enabling graduates to do online training in their own time.

It became apparent immediately that a technology platform would be needed to support this new, blended approach to graduate induction. Until this point, all company training had been delivered face-to-face so no training platform existed in the business.

The organisation knew that to achieve its goals, the platform would need to support customised training content. This capability was seen as critical for the team as it was understood that generic 'off the shelf' training would not deliver the specific skills that graduates require to succeed within SMEC's unique environment.

The team at SMEC were faced with a decision. Commit to a full Learning Management System (LMS) roll out and accept that they would need to pay an external third party for the custom creation of their learning content or implement Tribal Habits and allow its own employees to easily create interactive engaging training themselves. After analysing the associated costs and scalability of each option, the decision became very clear.

Tribal Habits came in more than \$400,000 cheaper than the next best alternative and the fact that Tribal Habits allowed SMEC staff to easily create their own training modules meant the solution was infinitely more scalable than paying for external training content creation each time a new need arose.

The Head of Learning and Development at SMEC said the following about the decision to go with the Tribal Habits platform

"Tribal Habits was unique in the market as it allowed us to rapidly capture and transfer organisational knowledge via text, imagery, video and interactive elements. It captured and shared insights and tips from participants, meaning the knowledge captured in each module actually increases as users complete topics.

It set and tracked on-the-job activities, as well as notifying Managers of the learning their graduates were completing. The platform provided ready-made expert content on relevant business and self-development topics, in SMEC branding, while allowing for the rapid creation of completely custom and interaction training."

Up and running in no time.

The team at SMEC were able to carry out the technical implementation of Tribal Habits in two weeks and had a fully functional graduate learning platform with custom content in place within six weeks. This is roughly half the amount of time it would have taken to implement a traditional LMS system.

As discussed earlier, the graduate development project was established to achieve three distinct goals. Here is a summary of how the team tracked against each of them.

Objective 1: Attract and retain the best graduate talent.

Feedback from the manager of the graduate program has been overwhelmingly positive. Speaking how the program has helped attract graduate talent, she said;

“The grad program has been an invaluable attraction tool for our intake. Today’s graduates want to know that their personal and professional development is important to the company they join and with the structured training the program offers, it is clear that SMEC is committed to developing our next generation of engineers.”

SMEC has been able to exhibit a significant reduction in graduate turnover since the program started, as the figures below exemplify.

- Year: Graduate turnover rate
- 2017: 17%
- 2018: 12.5%
- 2019: 10.3%

Over the life of the program, graduate turnover has dropped from being 2% above the organisational average in 2017 to 0.6% below the organisational average in 2019. These figures are remarkable given that younger workforce members tend to be more transient than their older, more senior colleagues.

In the 2019 engagement survey mentioned above, 79% of ANZ employees aged 18-24 agreed or strongly agreed they would not hesitate to recommend SMEC to a friend seeking employment.

Objective 2: Expose graduates to multiple disciplines of engineering so they can deliver to a high standard for SMEC clients and to the community.

Through its self-created learning experiences, SMEC was able to expose its graduate cohort to the full array of engineering disciplines the business engaged in. This provided graduates not only with a broader knowledge base of the company’s operations but also provided granular detail into how their role fits into the wider business.

These learning experiences were created by subject matter experts within the business and were positioned to specifically address the challenges and opportunities that SMEC faced as an organisation. Feedback from graduates suggests that this highly focussed approach has provided valuable insights into how the business operates and has enabled graduates to get up to speed as quickly as possible.

Objective 3: Develop graduates’ soft skills beyond academic learning

As well as role-specific technical training, SMEC identified that it needed to develop the professional skills of its graduate team. To achieve this, SMEC developed several professional development pathways. These learning workflows provided graduates with a structured approach to skills that would help them succeed in a professional environment like managing emails, how to be run productive meetings and effective communications.

The combination of technical skill development, understanding how the broader business functions and soft skill development means that SMEC is approaching graduate development from a holistic point of view, ensuring all graduates have every opportunity to succeed.

Evaluations for both the face-to-face and online components of the graduate training program show that around 95% of participants find them relevant and valuable. In addition to the survey data indicating improved effectiveness on the job, anecdotal feedback from managers shows tangible improvements in performance.

An organisation-wide engagement survey was conducted in April 2019. Results from the survey revealed that 85% of ANZ employees aged 18-24 (likely to be in the graduate development program) agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the support the organisation provides for learning and education.

Onwards and upwards

Management feedback on the new graduate training program has been extremely positive, with the project being deemed a categorical success. In 2019 the SMEC management team committed to the continuation of the program stating that:

- The content and delivery were of high-quality.
- The program was delivered as scoped and to budget.
- They had received positive feedback from participants.

Speaking on the impact of the program, SMEC's state manager for QLD and NT stated;

"I'm very pleased to see the impact the graduate development program is having on our business outcomes. Not only has the program created an edge for SMEC as an employer of choice, but it is also providing the Graduates with genuine opportunities to become rounded professionals."

Based on the positive outcomes delivered, the CEO of SMEC & CEO International Surbana Jurong Group advocated for the program to be expanded beyond ANZ and a modified version is currently being deployed in the Africa Division. A sister company is also in the process of joining the program from July 2019, largely based on the feedback from participants and management.

The project has not only garnered internal praise. SMEC Australia's Graduate Development Program has been recognised as a leader in the industry, winning gold for Best Learning & Development Project (Induction/Onboarding) and silver for Best Learning Model (Blended) at the LearnX Live Awards 2019.