

Training is an Investment

Training is defined as any organizationally planned effort to change the behaviour or attitudes of employees so that they can perform to acceptable standards on the job. Training and development can increase organizational effectiveness by helping to raise many employees' performance capabilities beyond merely acceptable levels, thus impacting the bottom line. Training can be even be marketed as an employee benefit and a recruiting and retention tool.

Training and or learning can be developed internally or outsourced through an external provider such as training organization or post secondary institution. Many factors should be considered in making the decision to customize a learning solution or to buy a pre-packaged program or to outsource the learning by partnering with a training consultant or organization. Factors may include time for development; expertise; training content; costs; trainee characteristics; volume of trainees; organizational culture; need for just in time training; need for customized learning solutions etc. If external or prepackaged programs are selected, one must be careful that the goals are consistent with training objectives and culture of the organization. Some organizations rely on several options dependent upon learning needs.

Regardless, all training should incorporate the principles of adult learning. Furthermore, all training and development programs should ideally follow the process of needs assessment; design of training including learning objectives; delivery or facilitation and evaluation. A formal needs analysis results in the identification of specific performance weaknesses or opportunities for improving effectiveness. Needs assessment techniques may include some of the following: observation, questionnaires, key consultation, print media, interviews, group discussion, tests, records and reports and even work samples. One must be careful to diagnose if training is the right solution for a problem. Often management identifies a performance deficiency and requests training. Secondly employees are taught skills they already know and sometimes an existing popular training program is purchased and used regardless if it satisfied an identified training or development need. Training should not be the only solution considered to solve business problems as other alternatives may remedy better results.

The second process for training and development (t & d) is referred to as instructional design. Based on the information obtained from the needs assessment, the learning objectives (what behaviours will be achieved) can be developed as a framework for the training itself. Learning objectives should be both measurable and observable and directly relate to performance on the job. To design the content of their training programs, instructional designers can utilize a variety of methods. Learning can be acquired through lectures; seminars, conferences; role play; case studies; on the job training; coaching; video sessions; experiential games; internships and job rotation; videotapes; e- learning and blended methods. When choosing a training method, consideration should be given to feedback, reinforcement, practice opportunities, motivation, transfer of learning, accommodation of individual learning styles and costs. There are many training methods available and the advantages and disadvantages of each should be considered carefully.

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Delivery of training can take many formats. Depending upon factors such as costs; trainee's geographical location; expertise in house and training facility availability, training may be delivered in workshop format with a face-to-face instructor; through e-learning methodologies or distance learning techniques; through self-directed learning opportunities (reading and workbooks) or through a combination of methods (known as blended learning).

Training is an investment and thus should be evaluated within organizational contexts. Training can be measured as a return on investment (ROI) or by using Donald Kirkpatrick's model of evaluation. The latter suggests training can be evaluated on several levels including reaction of the learners; knowledge of learning and skills; transfer of learning and behaviour back on the job and results or impact on organizational effectiveness. This is critical to the process of linking training to previously defined organizational strategies.

To improve learning within the organization and to supplement training, organizations sometimes provide other non-formal activities such as self development; coaching, mentoring, performance aids, electronic performance support, and organization development interventions aimed at system wide change. Training initiatives should result from strategic planning, and should always be integrated within an organizational context dedicated to improving performance.