



Selecting the Right Training Format

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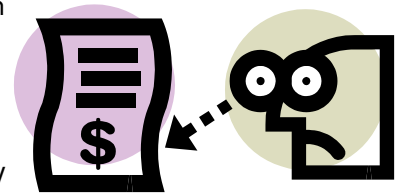
Introduction

Greetings and welcome back. Today I want to share my ideas about how to select the right training format. Many companies now realize that survival in this ever-changing business environment means making continuous learning a business priority. Unfortunately there is little in the way to guide most of us on how to choose learning programs or appropriate formats of delivery.

Once again, my research resulted in little published material on this topic. So for those of you that wonder what training delivery format is best, I will share some of my ideas with you.

Why?

Let's begin at the beginning. Why do we want train employees? Well, I think it is a mistake to offer training to employees as a "benefit". Too often I am surprised to find that even large companies supply a training "menu" to the staff and ask them to choose the training programs that they would like to enroll in – at company cost! That's good for helping to bolster morale and create a positive "*we care about you*" corporate culture. But, what affect on the bottom line can the company expect from this approach to training and development?

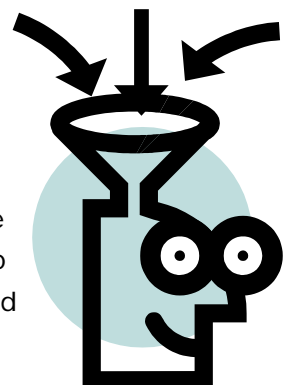


Don't get me wrong. I am all for using certain developmental programs as rewards for good performance. But I think most of our training initiatives need to be directed at core competencies that will help us reach business goals.

It all begins with the business plan. The business goals need to be clear so that we can determine the core competencies required to achieve the targets. Business goals are either tactical (shorter term – operational), or strategic (longer term – as in succession management). Training activities should be geared toward strengthening the team in the core competencies required to reach the business goals.

What?

Ok then. So if we agree on WHY we should have training programs. The next question is "what training should we focus on?" Training should help us become more "competent". To keep things simple, let's look at 3 broad categories of training:

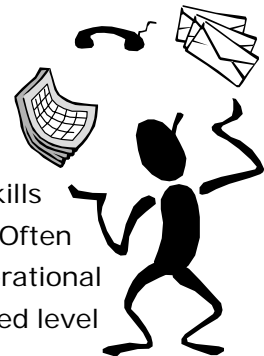




1) Just-in-Time (JIT): the first category is “JIT” training, and like it sounds, it is usually identified by line supervisors during operational monitoring of performance. JIT needs should be attended to quickly. For example, perhaps if unsafe work habits were observed by a supervisor, then safety training would fit into this category. Just-in-Time training is delivered as soon as the need is recognized so that employees can perform to the required minimum standard in high priority functions. Often this type of training is delivered on-the-job by more senior and experienced workers helping the less experienced staff

2) Operational: the second category is “Operational” training. Operational training also deals with improving in core competency areas, but the need is not as urgent as JIT training. Operational training needs are often identified during the annual performance evaluation process. Based on their ability to meet competency requirements listed in their job description, an employee is “measured” to determine how well they can meet the requirement.

A competency is simply a broad category of related skills. For example: if the competency is “business communication” it can be broken down into related skills components such as: Email, telephoning, meetings, reports, presentations, interviews and negotiations. These are all skills that fit into the competency category of business communications. Often employees may be stronger in certain skills than others. Therefore operational training needs only to address the skills areas that are below the required level of competency.



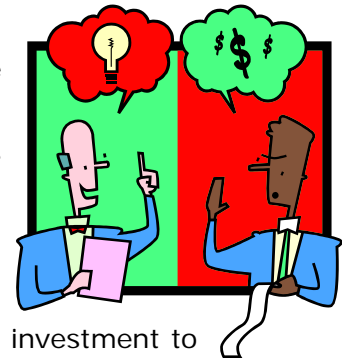
3) Developmental: finally there is developmental training. It is still aimed at core competencies, but more for those competencies that will be required to meet strategic goals (those in the future). A good example of the core competencies that many multinational companies consider for developmental training relate to “succession management”. The goal of many foreign companies is to turn the management from expats over to locals. There is often a lot of developmental competency building required by local managers before they are ready to assume senior management positions in multinational companies.

How?

Now that we have covered WHY and WHAT, let’s talk about HOW. Right off, we will deal with the “cost” question. I know from experience that too often training is selected based primarily on “cost”. Unfortunately, with training, like anything else, you usually get what you pay for. I empathize with training managers that face a large problem of meeting big training needs with small budgets – but this is why we really need to prioritize and get the biggest bang for our buck.



I also know that many senior managers (particularly those that have come up from technical ranks) see training as a big cost to business. To them I pose this question: If you think that the cost of training is expensive, consider the cost to your business of NOT training. Perhaps that will be the topic of my next article – the cost of NOT training.



Training needs to be treated as an investment in our business - an investment to help us reach our business goals more effectively and efficiently.

So, assuming that we recognize our training priorities should be based on the identified skills gaps in core competencies, then how do you know what type of training delivery to select? Therefore I present to you the following table for your reference. It is not a complete “take all or nothing” deal, but it might help you as a guideline in assessing the training format options for your consideration in addition to “cost”.

Knowledge and Experience of Learners	Type of Training Requirement		
	Just in Time	Operational	Developmental
None	On the Job	Public course, On the Job, Elearning	Customized in-house
Little	On the Job	Public course, On the Job, Elearning	Customized in-house
Some	On the Job, Customized in-house	Customized in-house	Customized in-house
Much	Customized in-house, Coaching	Self-learning, Coaching	Coaching
Expert	Coaching	Self-learning, Coaching	Coaching

In selecting training format, consider staff (learner) factors such as:

- existing knowledge, experience, qualifications and certification requirements
- relative maturity (age and emotional quotient)
- career development plans and commitment to self-development
- ability to provide in-house coaching and mentoring (on-the-job) training



Conclusion

Perhaps this is oversimplified, but once you realize how learning outcomes relate to the existing knowledge and experience of adult learners, you start to rethink about the value of training programs. Adult learners have “prior learning” and program design must take this into account or you can waste much of your training budget.

Consider carefully the type of training you look for and realize that “cheaper” public training may not be suitable for experienced and knowledgeable staff. If the training does not meet their needs then it is probably not good value for your business.

Perhaps a good question for your training provider is to ask them what the benefits are in the format they offer. If “price” is the first thing they mention, then maybe ask them about training effectiveness and see what they have to say.

Until next time, good business to you.



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