

Information Overload

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Welcome:

Undertaking personal and professional development is crucial in today's knowledge driven society. However it can be a rather ad-hoc process, and can be user driven, based on perceived requirements. In order to ensure that an organisation does not respond to individual training requirements as they are presented, a more formal structure is required. This involves undertaking a Training Needs Analysis. Critically it ensures that money is spent on essential training and development that will help drive the business forward to meet its objectives. However, it can also help highlight occasions where training might not be appropriate but requires alternative action. The February edition of Information Overload takes a look at why a Training Needs Analysis should be conducted.

We would like to thank you in advance for forwarding this edition onto friends, colleagues and other interested readers. Please note that all back issues of this edition, as well as our registrant resources edition can be read and/or downloaded from our web site – <http://www.iea.com.au> should any of the topics be of interest and use.

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In this Issue we will be looking at:

- Are there gaps in your knowledge base? The importance of training needs analysis.
- What are the reasons for carrying out a Training Needs Analysis?
- Associated Training
- Learning styles
- A Thought to ponder.

Are there gaps in your knowledge base? The importance of a training needs analysis

"We trained hard, but every time we formed up teams we would be reorganized. I was to learn that we meet any new situation by reorganising. And a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusion of progress while producing confusion, inefficiency and demoralization."

Petronius Arbiter, 210 bc

Training needs exist where there is a gap between the knowledge, skills and attributes required by an organisation and those already possessed by employees. Employers can either train to fill the current or future needs of the organisation, or recruit and buy-in specific

skills, knowledge and experience. As with all things there are benefits and disadvantages to both strategies.

1. What is the culture of the organisation like? Will current staff be willing to undertake yet another round of change and the associated training that is required?
2. Are skilled personnel readily available in the marketplace? Do you have enough work for the "new" person(s) to do if you retain your current employees?
3. Training takes time, patience and money – the question is do you have time to train to get the organisation up to speed in the marketplace?

What are the reasons for carrying out a Training Needs Analysis?

There are many reasons why a training needs analysis should be undertaken, including:

- **Introduction of new technology:** Whilst training on the new system will be required it may also highlight associated training needs. For example, moving from a largely paper based office environment (are there any of those anymore?) to an electronic environment, will mean users will need training on the new system as well as the associated systems, for example Word processing and Email.
- **Change in Job Descriptions (New Duties):** As our duties change, so does our need for new / additional training.
- **To improve productivity and safety issues:** by teaching people new skills and processes.
- **To improve product lines or fill gaps in the market:** Businesses that do not build or adapt to the ever changing needs of the market place will rarely stay in business over the long term.

Training and development needs can be identified at different levels:

- Organisational
- Departmental
- Occupational

Organisational level:

TNA at an organisational level concentrates on focusing needs against business strategy and goals. In many ways, this level is the most important because it starts with an assessment of the organisation's strategic direction. One important decision is whether training will be the appropriate means by which specific organisational objectives are going to be achieved, or whether some other form of intervention would be more appropriate.

Departmental level:

Bespoke solutions for specific departments or teams need to be assessed. There may be unique technological or product development required. Line manager views should be sought to identify these needs and a SWOT analysis can be scaled to assess these needs.

Occupational level:

Occupational levels are closely associated with individual needs. Line management can identify issues to be tackled that are associated with those specific jobs or occupations.

Individual needs can then be linked to the competence of individual employees within their roles. Methods for analysing the needs of individuals include:

- Review of job descriptions against current and future needs of the organisation.
- Appraisal and performance review
- Self-assessment or self-appraisal
- Subordinate appraisal
- Peer appraisal
- Assessment centres
- Client/customer feedback
- Competency assessments
- Reviews against occupational standards including National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs)

However when conducting the Training Needs Analysis, it is important to establish if the shortfall in Skills, Knowledge and Aptitude are a training issue and not an organisational or personal issue? What do I mean by organisational or personal issue?

- Organisational issues include a fault in current processes. It is not a training requirement, rather an attitude adjustment that needs to be made.
- Personal - may include issues such as a clash of personalities. The person(s) is capable of doing the work however; they may not want to do it.

Associated Training:

Implementation of new software as well as changes to duties and job descriptions may highlight associated training requirements. Implementation of Electronic Document and Records Management Systems Software may see a need for additional training in applications such as the Microsoft Office Suite of Products. As well as some form of records management training, such as recognising which documents need to be registered onto the system and how it should be done.

As no two people think exactly the same it is essential to train users in the importance of using the right keywords so that these documents can be retrieved as, and when, they are required. An organisation is in constant flux, with new people coming on board, staff retiring, taking annual leave, moving onwards to new positions, it is essential that replacements and contractors know the organisation's language, so the associated on the job training should complement and enhance the more formal training being conducted.

All of which takes time.

But the final point I would like to make on training needs analysis, is that you only train in the identified gaps. Do not train for the sake of training. Think about the Return on Investment (ROI) for the individual as well as the organisation.

Learning styles:

As you know, people learn in different ways. Matching your training to your employees' learning preferences can help you speed up their learning and reduce your training costs.

Talk to your employees to identify their preferred learning methods and include this in a **personal development plan**. A personal development plan is a tool employees can use to define their training goals and identify steps to achieve these. It is worthwhile including information on the training resources available to meet these goals and the benefits the employee expects to get from training. Discuss with each employee short and long-term objectives to include in the plan, or you can hire a consultant to do this for you.

Once you understand how your employees learn, you can tailor your training methods to fit their learning style. For example, if one of your employees learns through observation and questioning, job shadowing would be an effective way for that person to learn.

For the purposes of training at work, people's preferred learning methods can be broadly divided into the following:

- Visual (learn by seeing)
- Auditory (learn by hearing)
- Reading/writing (learn by processing text) (This category is not always listed.)
- Kinesthetic learning or practical (learn by doing).

A Thought to Ponder:

"Laziness may appear attractive, but work gives satisfaction"

Anne Frank, 1929-1945
Dutch schoolgirl diarist

Your comments and suggestions on the subject of this newsletter are most welcome. Or if you would like to see other issues covered in future editions, please email me at training@iea.com.au. Please feel free to pass on this newsletter to your colleagues' friends and associates. To subscribe they should send an e-mail to training@iea.com.au with "subscribe newsletter" in the subject line.

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