

JOHN TALBOT



Training in Organisations

A Cost-Benefit Analysis

CHALLENGE

EVALUATION

RESPONSE

to learn to achieve to measure

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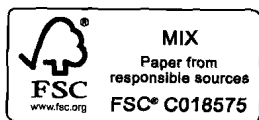
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Preface – A Word About the Trainer

In the twenty-first century the word 'trainer' may well evoke the concept of a personal coach to help with athletic type exercises, and in the plural, the footgear worn to indulge in them. It is not a title used so often these days when 'HR' specialists and various consultants appear on the organisation charts, and yet it covers a multitude of activities and implies the need for quite sophisticated skills. At first glance, there is a feeling that 'presentation skills' are sufficient, and many a novice is sent on a course so entitled, in order to become more professional. Unfortunately, the content is often based on designing more and better electronic visuals, which require a darkened room and a well-behaved audience!

So what are the real skills a trainer needs? First of all, they begin long before any contact is made with the learner:

Diagnosis

What is the person or persons not doing that you want them to do? Or what do you want them to stop doing?

Were they once able to do it in a satisfactory manner? If so, what has changed in the environment? Or do they need more practice? Training may not be the answer.

Setting Behavioural Objectives

The skill is in not being seduced into using words like 'understand,' 'appreciate,' 'have better knowledge of,' or accepting some manager's insistence that they need to change their attitude to something or other. None of these can be

measured; objectives must be observable and measurable in order that the learning experience may be evaluated.

Planning and Design

Decisions need to be made when a physical skill is to be learned, that is, how to involve realistic practice while ensuring learners are not allowed to handle potentially dangerous situations before they are ready. The ever-present 'health and safety' issues apply.

An appropriate division of time between demonstration and practice, and a sense of how much to 'feed' the learner before indigestion occurs, is learned from experience and obtaining feedback often enough during the process.

Design of a 'course' for a group of people is similar, and just a bit more complicated. How do we involve everyone in a participative experience without losing 'slower' learners and boring others? Simple...help them to learn with and from each other by designing small group activities to discuss specific topics and report back to the plenary group.

There are pitfalls however:

- DON'T give each group the same topic or questions, it then becomes a competition.
- DON'T have the 'right' answers already prepared, what an insult!
- DO plan to check up on each group after about two minutes to ensure they have understood the task, and then give a time check five minutes before the deadline.
- DO try and have all groups in one large room for easier monitoring, and to raise the energy level.

Relationship Building

Do not underestimate the value of 'getting to know you'. Time spent doing this will save time later and establish an atmosphere of mutual respect in an

adult fashion. Engaging with the learner, one to one and in groups, is a skill to be developed, perhaps by modelling those you have watched do it well in the past. A technique in groups (again divided into smaller units) is to pose such questions as ‘Who are we?’ ‘Why are we here?’ which may even get a laugh – which suggests yet another critical skill...

Demonstrating a Sense of Humour

To demonstrate a sense of humour you do not have to be a stand-up comic, but express warmth and a sense that we can’t be serious all the time and maybe the task at hand is not (unless it is, of course) a matter of life and death!

Presentation Skills

Powerpoint is all very well, but it doesn’t help you to engage and encourages leaving ‘any questions?’ to the end. It may either be forgotten by then or, unanswered when it occurred, be a distraction for the intervening time. Often, flipchart notes can outline your plan and be informal enough to be amended by the trainer or the learner. Another advantage of flipchart notes is that they require no electrical support and, if your training location has no easels, there is a giant ‘Post-It’ version which can be safely stuck on any surface without removing plaster or paint.

Finally, you are your own visual aid: appropriate dress is usually more formal than that of your participants. It tells them you’re taking them seriously and have taken time with your appearance. Also, moving about the room makes you more accessible and real.

How Do we Acquire these Skills?

Maybe there is an appropriate course available. Check whether its objectives are observable and measurable. Or, maybe an ‘apprenticeship’ can be arranged, watching and learning from others who are recognised professional practitioners. Good luck!

J. Anne McQuade

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Chapters 9–15 are based on the original work of C.D. Ellis with whom the original publication *Analysis and Costing of Company Training* was developed.

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Scope of Training

For many years, training has been seen as an extension to the educational process within business and administration. This has been reflected even in the titles of managers working in the field with the result that attitudes within business have been strongly conditioned to accept a traditional teaching approach. Companies appointed 'education officers' who were inevitably concerned mainly with the use of relevant courses at technical colleges. Training is thought about in terms of courses. Even outside assessors asked for training records rather than evidence of learning and improvement. The learning process was seen as something which almost unavoidably took place outside the business. Emphasis in discussion was on means of arranging release for study and, even in areas which were totally outside the scope of further education, first thoughts were to arrange suitable training 'off-the-job'.

This educational bias is still found, both within industries and the civil service. Publications dealing with the training of various categories of workers are frequently little more than an examination of the educational background required. There are still suggestions that the effectiveness of training in key areas, such as that of engineering apprentices or commercial trainees, depends on the facilities provided for day release on expensive courses.

This growth of educational awareness within industry is, of course, entirely desirable, but it must be recognised as only a first step towards the establishment of effective training throughout industry, commerce and administration. Unless a broader view of training is adopted, there is some danger in any new training development getting off to a false start and being thought of as only very marginal value by line managers. It is important that training energy is not dissipated or training efforts misconstrued at this vital period of the country's economic challenges. Stimulated by the activities of government initiatives and human resource managers, most managers now recognise that training is vital, but if too much effort is channelled into apparently academic and unproductive

areas, this enthusiasm could easily evaporate, with tragic results in terms of productivity and adaptation to change.

The key requirements for trainers in the immediate future will be the ability to use their educational skills to influence fundamentally the development of learning within industry in both the long and short term. Effective learning is now more than ever an essential element in the management of human resources and in the use and adaptation of material development. Learning problems within industry must be clearly analysed and their implications for training made clear. In many ways this requires new educational skills, very different from the classroom techniques of the past. In spite of generally derogatory references to 'sitting next to Nellie', much crucial learning must take place in the job situation and techniques must be found to control and manage it. Except in certain cases of lack of knowledge, opting for off-the-job training will not necessarily provide adequate solutions.

The necessary change of emphasis is a reflection of the fact that training, as it is now understood, is expected to contribute to a much wider range of organisational problems than previously. It is, therefore, important to draw a clear distinction between the more traditional problems and the problems of the future. This will illustrate the greater integration required of any training operation as well as the wide range of skills needed by the trainer.

Traditional Problems

Training has normally been expected to contribute to four main types of problem; lack of knowledge, preparation for promotion, adjustment to new organisational structures, and unsatisfactory performance.

LACK OF KNOWLEDGE

This is the classic situation and will always be of very great importance. It is the area where traditional teaching methods may still be highly effective and where training away from the job can be most easily organised. The process of direct transfer of knowledge will be steadily improved as new techniques are developed. Programmed learning will make an increasing contribution alongside other tutorial, IT and classroom techniques.

Despite its continuing importance, however, it must not be allowed to influence unduly the total approach to training which must consider other problems at the same time.

PREPARATION FOR PROMOTION

Training in this area is again of longstanding importance although sometimes referred to by other names, such as management development. Part of the problem here may well be lack of knowledge, but it has been clearly recognised in this area for sometime that job experience and career patterning is essential. However, no ideal formula has been found for approaching the situation and some of the traditional concepts, such as systems of job rotation, may need to be changed.

ADJUSTMENT TO NEW ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES

The explanation of organisation change is a growing part of any training manager's job. It is important, but basically a fairly straightforward exercise in communication. Limitations in this area have very often been related to the lack of any early integration of training thinking with the reorganisation process itself. This has led to effective efforts being somewhat frustrated by their greater concern with explaining the results of change than with influencing the process of change. Structural changes in organisation have frequently been considered separately from changes required in individuals. The aim must be to bring these projects together. For instance, if decision levels are changed, those concerned have to be equipped to make decisions at new levels.

LOW INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCE

This is frequently related to lack of knowledge, but by no means always so. Training must always make an effective contribution to improving skills, knowledge and attitudes related to individual competence. In many cases this is a question of retraining often of mature adults, with all the problems that this involves. Much useful development has taken place in this area recently, but here also, perhaps rather too much attention has been paid to traditional teaching approaches rather than to the total adjustment of individuals to situations which have developed beyond their competence.

Training contributions in these areas will always be important, but many companies have devised reasonably effective means of meeting requirements of this type and training managers should find it relatively easy to obtain information which will help to provide solutions in their own situations. The important thing is that these traditional areas may not be the priority areas for new developments or the priority areas in terms of cost and pay-off. For instance, lack of individual competence may still be widespread and important, but not necessarily the cause of major organisational difficulty. It is more disturbing that the necessary degree of competence often appears to be present but is poorly used. Similarly, training designed to attack the problems behind structural change may be more important than training concerned purely with adjustment to a new organisation.

The training manager of the future will need to make a much more thorough analysis of the fundamental organisational problems facing the business if there is to be real success in making contributions to productivity and profitability. The provision of new routine training answers to traditional problems will not be sufficient. The requirement is for a much more extensive diagnostic skill which looks behind the learning processes of individuals and of groups and assesses the impact of this on the business's need for growth and adjustment.

New Problems

Although many of the techniques will be the same, training should now be expected to contribute to much broader problems concerned with both organisational effectiveness and individual effectiveness.

INTEGRATION OF MANAGEMENT EFFORT

Many managerial practices and organisational structures have not been particularly conducive to the effective use of human resources and the best integration of effort. Learning in this area has been relatively slow. It requires fundamental changes in attitudes and approach and is a very worthy target for training activity. Integrated development can be stimulated by the use of recognised standards such as ISO 2001:2008 and Investors in People. Individuals and the organisation are developed at the same time. Team development is

encouraged as well as individual learning. Challenges are met successfully, developing a culture that can respond to future challenges.¹

CLARIFICATION OF INDIVIDUAL GOALS AND THEIR LINK WITH MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

This is again an organisational problem, but one which is really concerned with consolidating learning and directing development of the whole group.

DEVELOPMENT OF NEW THINKING

Training which emphasises the teaching of accepted knowledge tends to overlook the equally important need to check the spread of ideas and practices that are likely to stifle new thinking and attitudes. Training should challenge accepted thinking and attack the conditioning of the past which acts as a major brake on growth and the use of resources. The training techniques are those referred to in the jargon as 'unfreezing' processes. This term does, in fact, give a vivid impression of what is required to swing an organisation in a new direction.

Redirection of training effort of this kind is primarily related to a search for techniques which influence fundamental problems of management and organisation. It requires not only a change in direction but also a change in scale. The more general objectives require a more wholesale approach. Everyone becomes involved. The emphasis is on training the business rather than training individuals within it.

Thinking of this kind completely alters the starting point for training managers. They are no longer teachers in industry. They are managers contributing a special skill to the diagnosis of basic business and organisational problems. They use educational techniques, but the real skill is in translating them into business practices. The scope of training becomes much broader and its management much more akin to that of other areas of industrial development.

1 Arnold Toynbee. *A Study of History*:

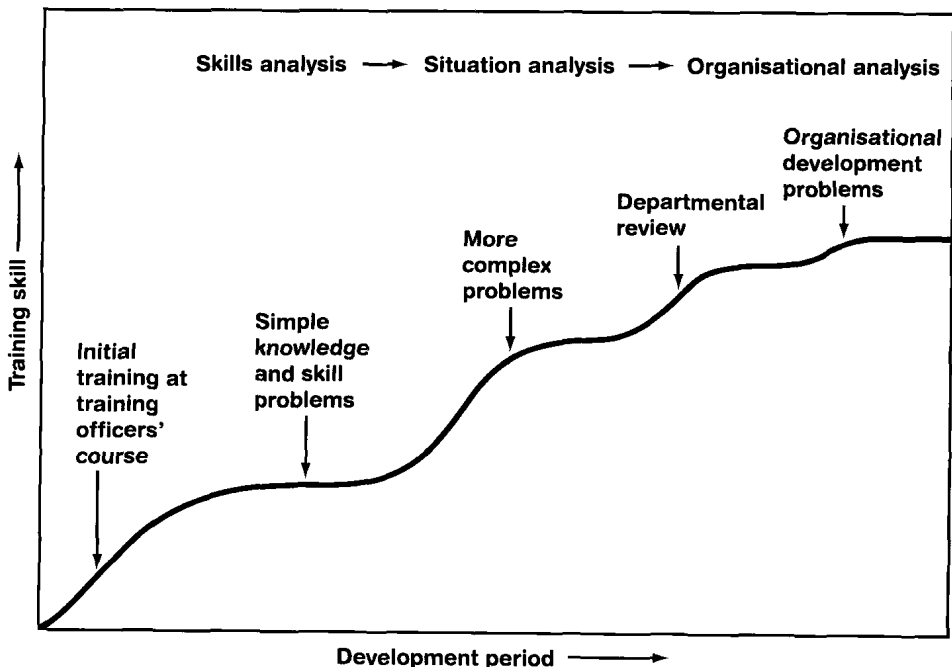
Growth (that is, development) occurs when the response to a particular challenge is not only successful in itself but provokes a further challenge which is not only successful in itself but provokes a further challenge which again meets with a successful response.

This approach is an Action Learning approach.

Role of the Trainer

It is often argued that training must start at the top and it may well be that many training problems can be traced to bad management. It is often possible for the outside training consultant to start at the top and may usually have sufficient status for recommendations to be accepted. The internal trainer, however, cannot and should not emulate the outside consultants who can determine their own point of entry into the organisation. The trainer has a position in the organisation already established – usually somewhere in the middle. The approach must be from this position. The skill must be to build a basis for action. A trainer must have a learning and integration process as shown in Figure 1.1. Initially, the identification and interpretation of problems may be at or below the trainer's level. This will demonstrate skill in the area in such a way and on such problems that the operation will naturally and rapidly expand from the base focal point to the broader policy and organisation problems which are in the top management area. Further crucial developments in training may stem from the top but the approach will in fact be a 'realistic' one tackling problems at all levels. From this point onwards the trainer should have little worry about the level of training or the credibility of his position in the hierarchy. The problems will dictate the levels of operation.

Figure 1.1 Developing the trainer



Because of this it is very clear that the trainer's first approach to the identification of problems is crucial. Breadth and depth of thinking at this early stage may well determine their own future and the level and nature of the function's contribution for some time to come.

This will enable the company to benefit from a total approach to training not by looking immediately for 'top-level' problems and top-level connection, but by tackling clearly definable training problems well and following them through – to the top.

The responsibilities of the trainer are most succinctly described by means of a job description. Two such job descriptions are given in Appendix 1 to this chapter and define the duties of trainers at two levels. The position of training supervisor (engineering) provides for the translation of the work of the technical development training manager into the company situation.

Appendix 1a: Job Description – Training Manager

TECHNICAL DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

The technical development training manager is responsible for the development and maintenance of a training organisation which will meet the internal requirements of the department and anticipate and ensure provision for the technical training requirements arising from development projects. The job will provide the foundation and focus for technical training developments throughout the company. Particular duties are detailed below.

TRAINING FOR DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

- Appraisal of the training implications of development projects.
- Systematic integration of training arrangements within the projects facilitating effective translation from the development to operational stage.

This will involve:

- Identification and analysis of skills, knowledge and attitudes required at all levels.