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¶106 Alternatives to training

Many problems may first seem to need training as a solution, but this may not be so. The following approaches could be equally as effective under some circumstances and possibly cost less.

1. *Changes in recruitment.* Perhaps you should try harder to recruit experienced employees? Or aim for employees with a different type of qualification or background? Should you recruit technical people and train them in sales or recruit sales people and provide them with technical information? Are employees overqualified? This can happen where university trained employees are employed to do repetitive jobs with few opportunities for decision-making. In that case, poor performance may be more related to poor motivation than lack of specific skills.
2. *Movement of staff.* Are you avoiding promotion or demotion which would bring into play expertise already in the organisation? It would be good to look at the comparative costs of these alternatives, both in money and morale.
3. *Salary review.* Are you thinking of training as an alternative to part of a salary increase? Careful inquiry into employee attitudes to this would be wise.

4. *Counselling.* Some problems of employee performance can stem from personality conflicts, personal problems or misunderstandings about the goals of the organisation. An informal discussion with the employee concerned which gave him the opportunity to talk without feeling he was being judged or criticised could reveal aspects of his performance which the supervisor may not pick up just from observation.
5. *New equipment.* If your organisation's performance does not seem to measure up to that of the competition it may be that they have new equipment. A cost/benefit comparison between training and new technology could be well worth while.
6. *Job redesign.* Where operators seem to be having trouble with a process it could be a good opportunity to have a fresh look at the way they go about it. Is it really a housekeeping problem? Has the operator too much variety of task or too little? Is he confused or bored? He may be too close to the problem to recognise what it is. On the other hand he may know. Have you asked the operator?

Other possible causes of problems, which may be best handled by strategies other than or in combination with training, may include employee attitudes or personal problems (such as health), working conditions, technology and organisation structure.

Chapter 2

Assessing Training Needs and Setting Objectives

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¶201 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the preliminary stages of training and development in an organisation. Once it is diagnosed that training is the partial or whole solution to the problem, actual training needs can be established. This chapter analyses types of needs, a sequence of steps to analyse needs, research methods and establishment of objectives.

¶202 The starting point

The first stage of the training process is diagnosis of a problem. The problem will usually be a discrepancy between current actual job or unit performance and desired acceptable performance. The cause of the discrepancy could be a number of factors and training may not necessarily be the appropriate solution, as discussed at ¶106.

If training is the most suitable strategy for remedying the situation, its aim will be *curative*, that is to restore or improve job performance to a satisfactory level. On the other hand, there may be anticipation that a performance discrepancy could develop, such as one caused by introduction of new technology, in which case the aim of training would be *preventive*, that is to enable employees to cope with the changes, so that performance remained satisfactory and discrepancies did not develop.

It is a good idea to analyse the situation in *behavioural terms* — that is, what employees are expected to actually do or achieve. This concept is sometimes also referred to as performance standards (see example at ¶213).

¶203 Establishing training needs

Once the diagnosis is made and training selected as the means of overcoming the problem, the actual needs of a training programme can be determined. Methods and techniques for analysing needs are discussed in the remainder of this chapter. Using the behavioural objectives (i.e. performance standards) compared to the current situation, it should be possible to determine whether it is possible and economically feasible to provide the training required.

¶204 Types of training needs

Training needs can generally be classified as either *individual* or *group* needs.

Individual needs may relate to orientation (induction) training, initial (basic) training, remedial training (to correct perceived faults — this situation is an alternative to recruiting new staff), refresher training (such as in company policy, safety, fire drill) or personal development.

Group needs, on the other hand, refer to the need for a number of employees to change their behaviour collectively. Examples include team-building exercises designed to increase group cohesion or group co-ordination.

Group needs are often identified through surveys, questionnaires and interviews. Most of the information about individual needs tends to come from job analysis and performance appraisals, or analysis of critical incidents.

A further distinction should be drawn between current training needs and future needs. This distinction is outlined in the next paragraph.

¶205 Proactive v. reactive training needs

Reactive training refers to the identification of existing weaknesses and reacting to remedy them. These weaknesses take the form of barriers which prevent the achievement of set objectives, and can be identified by various symptoms.

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There are many combinations of symptoms, primarily because organisations are so complex. Because of the interdependence of various factors in a system (for example, skill level versus aspirations versus state of health), a change in any element of a system to overcome a problem may cause undesired changes in other areas. It is probably fair to say that often that which starts out purely as a training exercise leads to other activities which may result in change occurring in the organisation.

Proactive training, on the other hand, may be seen as preparation of employees to handle future change, and is therefore related to development, although the latter refers to general, rather than specific skills relating to a particular job. Such change may have causes such as technology, legislation, product changes, financial factors, political issues, etc.

Reactive and proactive training needs sometimes occur together, in which case it is necessary to determine different time frames for action. Changes can be made either to the objectives themselves or to factors affecting achievement of those objectives.

¶206 Types of needs analysis

There are various techniques which can be used singly or in combination to analyse training needs:

- formal or informal interviews of both employees and managers/supervisors, frequently in conjunction with performance appraisal or test reports, but also as consultation when change at the workplace is planned;
- observation of employees on the job, such as through the use of work study methods;
- formation of advisory committees, for example to prepare for workplace changes or a group of “experts” analysing the workplace;
- formal research techniques (see ¶208-¶209);
- conducting a needs survey (see ¶210);
- assessment centres — a means of using simulation techniques to identify present shortcomings in employee job performance and assess the employees’ future potential (and, related to this, development needs);
- analysis of critical incidents, accidents or breakdowns.

