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A Training Course Primer

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A Training Course Primer

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The basic components of human resources training and development are program management, curriculum design and development, and platform skills. This paper highlights the fundamentals required to design and manage an effective training course. The three significant parts of a training course are: needs analysis (or needs assessment), the training course, and the evaluation of the training. Let's begin with an explanation of training needs analysis (assessment).

McGehee and Thayer (1960) stated training needs analysis be done at three levels: organization analysis, person analysis, and task analysis. They acknowledged motivation issues should be dealt with differently than training issues. Organization analysis requires assessment of the organizational training needs for specific knowledge (K), skills (S), and abilities (A). Person analysis determines who needs the training. Task analysis focuses on assessing the training needs based on the KSAs determined at the organizational level. A cost-benefit analysis should be included in training needs analysis. Once the training needs assessment is completed, the design of course curriculum begins. SMEs, or Subject Matter Experts, are usually used to best determine the content of the KSAs needing coverage in the training course.

Training is best received by trainees when it is relevant and uses an active "hands-on" experiential approach whenever possible. "Hands-on" allow trainees to use all their senses to learn. Adults have many different learning styles; the "hands-on" approach immerses the trainee into a learning experience more likely to connect with the trainees' learning needs. During training, it is best when active training techniques are changed about every twenty (20) minutes because of the attention span of the average trainee.

Adults are more receptive to active experiential training methods that involve them rather than lectures, which is passive learning. With adults it is important to explain “why” the training is useful and “how” it is relevant to both the employee and organization. The content of the course (KSAs) needs to be validated and developed into reliable, valid tests that are used as pre-tests and post-tests for the specific training course.

Theoretically, the Solomon Four Design (1949) which includes selecting participants at random and placing them into four groups: Group I (Control I) receives a pre-test and post-test but no training, Group II (Treatment/Training I) receives a pre-test and post-test and the training, Group III (Control II) receives a post-test only and no training, and Group IV (Treatment/Training II) receives a post-test only and the training is the most rigorous and complete research design that significantly reduces confounds. However, many times the Solomon Four Design is impractical in the real world. For instance, could we really have a control group that received no safety training in the workplace? Regardless, the Solomon Four Design should be strived for whenever possible and practical. And, training evaluation should always be done!

Donald L. Kirkpatrick (ASTD Handbook, Author of Evaluation Chapter, 1996) cites four levels of training evaluation: reaction, learning, behavior, and results. Reaction evaluation is done immediately following the training and measures how much the trainees liked the training. Trainees might indeed like the training and have learned little. The next step is the evaluation of their learning done immediately after the training, which is done with a valid, reliable pre-test and post-test to demonstrate the learning of all the trainees and each individual trainee. Trainees may have a positive reaction and demonstrate learning, but their job behavior may not have changed due to many factors.

The evaluation of trainees' behavior after training must be determined in their work unit. Given trainees' behavior did change, did the evaluation of the needed results also improve? For example, safety is a major problem due to a high accident incident rate. Did the trainees react favorably to the safety training, did trainees demonstrate learning based on validated pre-test and post-test, did the trainees' behavior change on the job, and finally, most importantly, did the accident incident rate decline? A fifth level, ROI is suggested, as an addition to Kirkpatrick's four. Whenever possible, it is good practice to include all five in the evaluation of training.

Successful training and development programs require insightful management and solid curriculum design and development specialists. HRD management is responsible for the training needs assessment (three levels), the course content (KSAs) and delivery, and the evaluation of the course (five levels). Curriculum design and development creates valid course content (KSAs) and decides on the best course delivery techniques. Then, excellent platform skills breathe life into the course content and delivery. When this is completed it is time to pilot the course with a full dress rehearsal. Select the first "trainees" wisely and be ready to use their feedback to make adjustments to the unforeseen. Then, it is time to roll out the training course on a large scale. Always pilot the course; never put out anything that is "half-baked" and not ready. Also, do no training unless the CEO backs it 100%.

In summary, do a proper needs analysis (three levels), design the training course's curriculum and delivery, and do a thorough evaluation (five levels). Get SMEs to verify the correct KSAs. Sometimes the first trainers are one of the SMEs. Secure top management's support and do pilot the course. Continuously monitor trainees' feedback.