Training Best Practices:
TRAINING NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Introduction

Is training the best solution for workplace challenges? How can you know? This Best Practices document provides guidance for determining what people do well, and what they do poorly. Even a simple training needs assessment will identify the current state (and why it is unacceptable) and the desired state, which will lead to effective and targeted interventions that might or might not include training.

Evaluate the Current State: "What is new or not working?"

Frequently a training program is implemented by the request of a manager or other decision-makers. If you are asked to develop a training course, a good first question is "What is broken (or what is new) that makes you think training is needed?" Use this to begin a conversation with the requestor.

You can dig further into the current state by asking managers and other stakeholders the following questions:

1. As specifically as possible, what is the current performance problem?
2. Which job title(s)/departments/units does this affect?
3. What are they currently doing?
4. What obstacles are there in performing the task?
5. What is the consequence for doing it wrong/incorrectly?
6. What is the impact of doing the tasks correctly?

You can also collect information by:

1. Observing an untrained health worker conducting a task. Then observe a competent/experienced performer conducting the same task. What is different?

2. Conduct a focus group discussion with representatives of the target audience. There is a tendency to only get the feedback from supervisors or those funding the training, but you may get a different perspective if you interview prospective learners. Be sure to include both experienced and new workers. Ask them directly what prevents them from achieving their goals.

3. Review sample reports and other products that the health worker produces.

Define the Desired State

One of the greatest mistakes in workplace training is to conduct training that is theoretical and expects the worker to make the jump to practical application. Avoid this by defining specific, detailed questions to ask managers and other stakeholders:

1. What organizational objective does this new behavior support? Be as specific as possible!

2. As specifically as possible, what is the desired performance?

3. What observable behaviors do you expect to see when a trainee returns to the workplace?

4. What motivation would a worker have for changing their behavior?

5. What support (mentoring/coaching, encouragement, recognition, resources) could be provided to a worker to support the desired behavior?

Use the results of this conversation, as well as your observations of the differences between untrained workers and accomplished performers, to identify the knowledge, skill, and attitude gaps.

The Performance Management Best Practices document also offers excellent rationale for asking questions about how to reach a "desired state." Asking the right questions about why gaps exist is an effective way to begin improvement workplace performance.

> **TIP:** If stakeholders suggest topics during the needs assessment, ask them how—specifically—the worker would use it in their job. Push back if they say, "It is just good to know" or "They should be aware." Ask, "Why?"

Identify the Kind of Gap That Is Impeding Performance

Merely by walking through these questions, you will clarify where the actual needs are. This is crucial information that will allow you to address the issues at hand, which will lead to greater efficiency and more optimal outcomes than any generalized training on its own.

| What kind of gap is it?	
Learner focused issue	
1. Knowledge	What information does the learner need to be successful?
	Which tasks require this information?
	What format(s) would be best for providing learners the information when they need it?

2. Skills	What will the learners need to practice to develop the needed proficiency?
	Where are the opportunities to practice?
3. Motivation / Attitude	What is the learner's attitude toward the change?
	Will they be resistant?
	What is their motivation to change?
4. Habits	Are any of the required behaviors habits?
	Are there existing habits that must be unlearned?
Not a training issue but could impact the effectiveness of training	
5. Environment	What in the environment is preventing the learner from being successful?
	What is needed to support their performance?
	Do the learners' managers support the new behavior?
	Are the required tasks part of health workers' terms of reference?
6. Communication	Are the desired performance goals being clearly communicated?
	Is there a clear link between the desired performance and the organization's objectives?

From Design For How People Learn, J Dirksen, New Riders publishers, 2016.

Moving Forward

When the time comes for designing your training solution, be sure to consider gaps of environment or communication. For example, how might you engage managers so that they are supportive of a desired performance? If you ask for their opinions and feedback, gaps between you and them, and between them and their workforce, will begin to close as they buy in. And if they are free to relate ideas during a project's lifecycle, those gaps will narrow further.
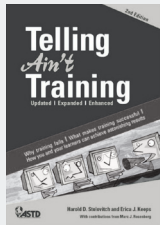
Annex 1: Resources
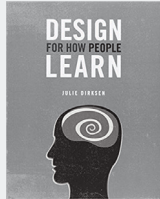
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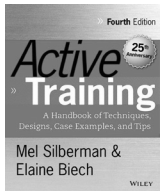
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