

Training Best Practices: CASCADE TRAINING



Introduction

Cascade training is a way of efficiently training many people, especially in large programs or organizations. A group of master trainers are trained on a topic, then they train smaller groups on the same topic, and so on, until all necessary staff have been trained. Transfer of learning depends on well-planned trainings; competent, supportive and prepared trainers; and feedback mechanisms that allow for performance monitoring and corrections. When done well, cascade training can be an efficient and cost-effective way of reaching and training staff. However, when done poorly it will be a waste of time and resources and will be ineffective. This document is intended to help you decide if cascade training is appropriate, and if so, to help you plan effective cascade trainings.

When it comes to training down the line, the Coaching and Mentoring Best Practices guide can be a valuable and effective resource. It offers strategies for supportive oversight, especially for supervisors who might not have training or mentoring experience. It also offers proven training activities and evaluation methods.

Challenges of Cascade Training

The quality of cascade training is often diluted by the time the training reaches the lowest level of the workforce. Unfortunately, this is often the level where training must have the greatest impact on performance. Following some best practices can help minimize the risk to quality and efficiency.

A recent WHO review of lessons learned on cascade training found that cascade training is improved by:

- **Reducing the number of training levels.** Ideally, have a first level of master trainers who train second-level trainers who then train the target audience of the course. The more levels of cascade training, the more risk that key content will get diluted.
- Conducting well-planned trainings that are **practical, participatory, and appropriate for adults.**
- Using skilled trainers who know how to incorporate adult learning principles and are **knowledgeable on the subject matter.**
- Including **monitoring, supervision, and follow-up** during the training cycle to monitor trainers' performance, as well as after the training, to ensure improved performance among trainees.

When Cascade Training Is a Good Approach

Not all subject matter can be taught through cascade training. However, cascade training can work well under these circumstances:

- Content is not significantly beyond the target audience's current competency.
- The target audience is geographically dispersed.
- There are sufficient master trainers to cover the geographic area.
- Content is fairly straightforward, such as new policies or technical skills.
- The content can be taught in 2-3 days. (e.g. 4 weeks' of content are difficult to teach in cascade training).
- Trainers can be supported via relief from their regular duties and via technical assistance by more experienced trainers.

And When It Is Not

Without the necessary infrastructure for some kinds of learning cascade training will be unnecessary or ineffective. Consider these three conditions:

- The content requires substantial feedback between the expert and the learner, such as soft-skills or highly complex technical skills. In these cases, consider alternate training methods such as mentor programs.
- The content is informational or awareness training, such as an updated policy. In this case consider distance-based training such as text messages, teleconferences, or updated job guidelines.
- There is no infrastructure to support the trainers as they deliver training to lower levels. In this case, consider alternate methods such as mentor programs.

Planning a Cascade Training Program

Planning and designing high-quality cascade training follows the same practices of designing any performance-based training for adults.



1. Analyze the need

includes representatives of the target audience, the training department, and subject matter experts. Conduct a training needs assessment in order to understand the required levels of training and technical competency. Do not rely solely on subject matter expertise, as training expertise is just as important—possibly more so. Identify the objectives for the ultimate target audience as well as learning objectives for the cadre of trainers.

2. Design and develop the training

PLAN AROUND THE NUMBER OF TRAINERS AND TRAINEES

- **Make sure there are enough master and second-level trainers.** Engaged and highly skilled master and second-level trainers are essential for the success of cascade training. Master trainers should be committed to providing the training and also taking part in all phases of the cascade training project. Second-level trainers are the link between the master trainer and the ultimate target audience.

Carefully plan out the number of master trainers and the number of second-level trainers in relation to overall number of workers to be trained. Plan the number of days for the training, how many trainings are needed, and the overall project length to reach your target population. For example, you might have 20 master trainers with each master trainer giving one training session to 20 second-

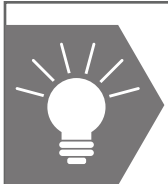
level trainers, resulting in 400 qualified second-level trainers. These second-level trainers can in turn lead one training session each, ultimately training 8,000 staff (the target learners). In larger countries, this can be a challenge and can require a high number of trainings per trainer. In that case, a regional approach may be more practical.

- **Minimize the number of cascades.** Ideally, the second-level trainers should be training the ultimate target audience -- the people implementing the new task or practice. This helps to maintain the quality of the training as too many cascades dilutes training quality. If the training cascades down to three or more levels before reaching the target audience, then the master trainers should be involved in the training-of-trainers at each level.

KEEP ADULT TRAINING PRINCIPLES IN MIND

Similar to design, developing a cascade training course should follow general best practices of developing training for adult learners. In particular:

- **Use blended training and standardized materials.** Use a blend of approaches that include face-to-face training and other methods. For the most important or critical content, use videos or standardized materials to ensure the same content is consistently delivered, no matter where the training is conducted. For example, assign videos that teach how to monitor the quality of coverage data, then use class time to practice checking the quality of a data set.
- **Be participatory.** Because cascade training is often a top-down approach, it is crucial that cascade training be participatory and interactive so that trainees are engaged and can actively learn.



TIP: It is especially important for TOTs to be interactive, since you must ensure the new trainers are comfortable with the subject matter as well as delivering the training. Incorporate role-plays, discussions, and practice teaching throughout the TOT.

- **Develop feedback, evaluation, and monitoring forms.** There should be a feedback and evaluation mechanism for each day of the training, including evaluation of technical content, relevance of the materials, quality of training/facilitation, and learner engagement. There should also be a process and forms for master trainers to observe second-level trainers and give feedback.
- **Prepare instructor guides and support materials.** This includes answer keys for exercises, suggested agendas, and instructions on how to facilitate the instruction (e.g. a detailed schedule that maps out time requirements for lectures, exercises, discussions for each lesson.)
- **Share all materials with trainers prior to the training.** Make sure that trainers have copies of all training modules, resource documents and feedback and evaluation forms so that they are completely familiar with all materials.

3. Implement training

As with the previous phases of training design, implementing cascade training should follow the general best practices for classroom or online delivery.

ROLES OF MASTER TRAINER AND SECOND-LEVEL TRAINERS

Master trainers

- Master trainers are trained by training/adult education specialists, technical experts, and members of the training committee. Master trainers' training should be practical, provide sessions on facilitation and use of training materials, and provide an opportunity to practice facilitation and doing training exercises.
- Master trainers will supervise second-level trainers and should plan to be present in the first few sessions conducted by the second-level trainers in order to provide constructive feedback and ensure that the subject matter is accurately conveyed to trainees.
- Master trainers should be encouraged to provide feedback and recommendations to the training committee on content, methodology, and choice of second-level trainers.

Second-level trainers

- Second-level trainers are trained by the master trainers and, at the end of their training, second-level trainers must be knowledgeable in the subject matter and in training methodologies for adults.
- Training for second-level trainers must be practical and allow for sufficient time to practice modules and training exercises and also to receive feedback from the master trainers.
- Second-level trainers should openly discuss any issues they face during their trainings as they conduct their initial training sessions.
- Second-level trainers should be able to create an environment that enables willing, motivated, and active learners.
- Second-level trainers must be organized, positive, keep to time, and actively seek feedback from master trainers and learners.
- Second-level trainers might need to customize the training depending on local needs. They must work with the master trainers to determine when and how a training can be customized.
- Note: The success of cascade training depends on the second-level trainers' actions.

CONDUCTING THE TOT WORKSHOP

- **Distribute all training materials and instructor guides** on the first day of the session.
- **Conduct daily review sessions** to go over not only questions about technical content but how/why you taught the way you did. Include tips such as "if you're pressed for time, here's an exercise you can skip,

but don't ever skip this one".

- **Video the trainers as they teach their lessons**, then provide the video for their own review.
- **Ensure that a mentoring plan is in place before implementation.** Be ready for the TOT workshop by making sure that experienced trainers will be available to answer questions and provide support.
- **Prepare a resources list.** Because technical experts may not be familiar with training adults, prepare a short list of easily accessible resources, such as Internet sites, that can help the trainers with their new roles.
- **Plan to evaluate.** Be ready to inform the new trainers of the methods that will be used to evaluate their performance, as well as the methods they can use to evaluate their own learners.
- **Make a plan for recognition of achievement.** This is especially important if the trainers are undertaking training in addition to their regular responsibilities. Include a plan to appreciate their efforts and recognize achievement. Develop objective criteria so that the recognition process is equitable and perceived as fair.

CONDUCTING THE TEACHBACKS

Follow these steps:

1. **Introduce the teachback process and the lesson sign-up sheet.** Have participants sign up early in the workshop, so that they will have as much preparation time as possible.
2. **Once you have all participants signed up, prepare a teachback schedule.** Add 5 minutes to the lesson time. For example for 20 minute lessons, schedule the lessons in 25 minute increments.
3. **Ensure there is at least one master trainer in the room** to observe and give feedback.
4. **Determine if feedback is written or verbal.** An advantage to written feedback is that the teachback more closely simulate an actual class environment. Having master trainers critique after each teachback allows all participants to learn from each experience but it also breaks the 'bubble' of the simulated class environment – and, of course, will add to class time.
5. **Set ground rules for the other participants.** During the teachback, they are to behave like "typical" learners. That means that during the practice lesson their questions should be as learners and not to give feedback about the trainers' abilities. Advise them that their questions should be realistic and pertinent to the subject matter (e.g., the purpose is NOT to trip up the new trainer).
6. **Provide some type of mechanism for the participants to give feedback to their colleagues.** This could be the same form that the master trainers use.
7. **Ensure a positive and encouraging environment.** When giving feedback use "I liked..." for positive feedback and "I wish..." for corrective feedback.
8. **For larger class sizes, consider having multiple teachback sessions running**, with a master trainer and participants in break out rooms. This saves class time and ensures a more intimate and supportive atmosphere.

4. Monitor and evaluate

The role of master and second-level trainers does not stop after giving the training to next level; they must play a continuous role in monitoring the performance of trainees. Some recommendations for monitoring and supervision for master and second-level trainers are:

- **Conduct frequent site visits** as part of monitoring of the cascade training program. Remember, new behaviors are being shaped, and that requires regular monitoring to reinforce new habits. Visits give mentors an opportunity to meet with trainees in their job settings, observe performance, and meet with supervisors and peers. Engage supervisors in the training process so that they can support the trainers.
- **Analyse the trainers' observations and findings**, then document with a report that includes:
 - How well the training content matched the original program
 - Training approaches that were used and whether or not they were consistent with the intent of the course
 - Strengths of the trainers and areas for improvement
 - Factors that appeared to contribute to an effective training or inhibited effective training
 - The effectiveness of transfer of learning
 - Feedback from supervisors on the training
 - Recommendations on how to correct areas in the training or in overall performance
- **Share the analysis** with the training committee, stakeholders, and supervisors.

EVALUATION

As always, keep in mind that all performance management must be ongoing and cyclical. The first step in maintaining the gains of training is quantifying what the training has accomplished.

- Develop at least two types of evaluation forms. One form is to evaluate the TOT. The second is for the new trainers to use when they train their learners.
- Allow the learner to self-assess, either narratively or using a standardized feedback sheet.
- Allow learners to privately evaluate the training session. Their anonymous feedback can be especially helpful.

You will find a number of ideas about how best to evaluate training and its ongoing effects (after the training) in the Evaluation Best Practices guide, along with suggestions about what to evaluate and what to do with evaluation results.

Annex 1: Resources

Explore these resources for more information about cascade training.

The transfer of content knowledge in a cascade model of professional development

Brownhill, S. (2016). *Teacher Development*, 21 175-191.

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Enhancing Cascade Training: A Strategy and Guide for Health Care Managers (Draft)

World Health Organization. 2015.

Literature review to assess the evidence base for the Train-the-Trainer Model for the CDC Sustainability Management Development Program

Fonseka, Jamila. Centers for Disease Control. July 2009.

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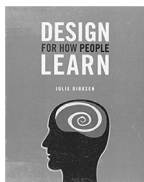
Karalis, Thanassis. *Journal of Education and Social Policy*. Vol 3, No. 2. June 2016.

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“Cascade Model for Teacher Training in Nepal”

Susuki, Takako. *Studies in Languages and Cultures*, No.27. January 2008.

Abstract at <https://kyushu-u.pure.elsevier.com/en/publications/the-effectiveness-of-the-cascade-model-for-in-service-teacher-tra>



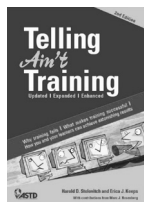
Design for How People Learn

Dirksen, Julie. New Riders Publishers, 2016.



Active Training

Silberman, Mel, Biech, Elaine. 4th ed. Wiley, 2015.



Telling Ain't Training

Stolovitch, Harold D., Keeps, Erica J. American Society for Training and Development; May, 2002.

<https://www.learningsolutionsmag.com/articles/934/were-lost-but-were-making-good-time-performance-support-to-the-rescue>

INTERNET SITES

[Association for Talent Development](#)

[Living for Tomorrow Guidelines for Training of Trainers: A Curriculum](#)

[Training Magazine](#)