

I HAVE A HEADACHE – GIVE ME A STICKING PLASTER!

- *Have you ever wondered why it is that training is so often the first budget to be cut when competition in business is causing a company to experience hard times?*
- *If an Olympic athlete anticipates harder-than-usual competition for the coveted gold medal, would you recommend that they begin their preparation by cutting out training?*

Crazy as it may seem when considered in a logical, reasoned way, it is a fact that in many organisations, training is seen as the obvious point to start when cuts have to be made.

In this feature, Paul Hazell, Director, PITHON Limited examines some of the reasons why this is and explains how appropriate training for training teams can help reverse this phenomenon. Two key factors are identified, which Paul calls the “What” factor and the “Impact” factor to ensure that training hits the right spot. These two factors are represented by the acronym “NEW WAY”

What do People in Your Organisation get out of Training?

People rarely deliberately make business decisions that they know will hinder the progress of the organisation they work for. We must therefore assume that when they choose to cut training first, they do so because they perceive that training is the cut that is least likely to have an adverse impact on profit and growth. What does that tell you about how they see the training function in that organisation?

Compare this kind of perception of training with that of one client company who recently tracked for 2 months the 10 participants they put through a Negotiating Effectively programme. At the end of the two months they had identified almost Euros250,000 of increased bottom line directly attributable to the application by the participants of the techniques learned on the course. Would they be likely to cut out negotiation skills training if they perceived that business was becoming more competitive?

To obtain some understanding as to why these apparently illogical decisions to cut training are made, we need to look a little closer at the nature of the training being delivered in these companies.

Does Your Training Give You What You WANT?...or What You NEED?

When we look closer at the training being delivered in many companies, a picture emerges of training that has not been focussed effectively on the needs of the business. The trainers in these businesses however often believe that their training is focussed on real needs – usually because someone in the business line asked for it. However **wanting** a training event is not the same thing as **needing** it!

It is a little like a patient with a headache going to their doctor and asking for an aspirin – no good doctor will automatically give out aspirin until after they have first examined the patient and discussed their symptoms. The aspirin might bring short term, temporary relief from the headache but it will not cure the underlying cause!

So it is with training. The requests for training made by managers in an organisation are often precipitated by unconscious assumptions made by them about symptoms that are manifesting themselves in the business. The managers request the training they believe would assuage the symptoms. Sometimes they unwittingly ask for the training equivalent of a sticking plaster to cure a headache!

However, as with headaches, there are often many possible underlying causes of those symptoms and no trainer should proceed with writing or buying-in training until they are satisfied that they have identified those underlying causes. The trainer must satisfy themselves that the requested training is necessary to enable the organisation to progress towards achieving its Vision and Mission. If the training is not going to contribute in a clearly defined way to achieving the Mission and Vision, then why should the company spend scarce resources and waste the time of its people?

Introducing The “WHAT” factor and the “IMPACT” factor.

The relevance of the training to progressing the organisation towards achieving its goals is what we call the “WHAT” factor – what, if any, training will enable the people to overcome the difficulties so as to improve performance?

We will return to the WHAT factor a little later. First though, let us look at the other key reason why training is often cut. That is where the training does not achieve what it was designed to achieve – that is, the training fails to have the desired effect – it lacks impact. This is the “IMPACT” factor.

Far too much training fails to have the desired impact, with the result that training CAN then effectively be cut first because it has become a COST rather than an INVESTMENT.

How Can The Training Function build in the WHAT and IMPACT factors?

The essential requirement to enable trainers to link training effectively to business needs by identifying the WHAT factor - and then to ensure that training has the desired effect by achieving the IMPACT factor - were the two main drivers in putting together PITHON's Trainer Training team.

PITHON's **Trainer Training** team have been selected against two key criteria:

- Their experience as business consultants – helping senior managers and executive teams to identify ways to improve the performance of the businesses for which those managers and executives are responsible.

- Their experience of designing and delivering training that stimulates learners, makes learning enjoyable and enables them to perform more effectively

This team, by combining these two key areas of experience, have identified six key criteria that are essential if an organisation's Training function is to deliver results that contribute to the successful pursuit of the organisation's Vision and Mission. These six criteria can be easily memorised by the use of the acronym NEW WAY. "N.E.W." covers the WHAT factor, "W.A.Y." covers the IMPACT factor. Let us now overview each of these in turn and illustrate them with real examples.

Components of The WHAT Factor

N = Needs v Wants (are we dealing with causes or symptoms?)

How often are training initiatives in your organisation instigated with a request for "a 2-day workshop on..."? This is often (though not always) a sign that real training needs have not yet been identified but rather that some symptoms have been observed and a decision made to request an antidote to the symptoms!

It is a perfectly legitimate request – on most occasions the person making the request is not qualified in the identification of training needs and so expresses their requirement in the best way they can. One day does not seem serious enough and three days presents difficulties with releasing people. So, in the absence of a real understanding of the underlying needs, a 2-day workshop is what is requested.

Example I

Client "A" was instigating a new, global approach to key account management where a range of territory-specific approaches had been used before. They designed a series of forms to be completed following all key-client contacts and requested the trainers to deliver one day's training on how to complete those forms.

Discussion with the client quickly revealed that the combined expectations of several internal stakeholders included more sophisticated analysis of data, consistency of client service, more effective negotiation and better communication across the company, resulting in increased profitability and market share.

The real training needs were around the people skills and communication systems that would need to be used if these benefits were to be accrued. The completion of the forms was a minor element of the required learning – acquiring the information to record on the forms was the most training-intensive part and that had not been anticipated at all! What they thought they wanted would not have generated the outcomes they were expecting to see

The effective trainer will apply a supportive but challenging approach with business managers and senior teams in order to identify accurately what the desired outcomes

of the training are and the degree to which they are common to all the interested parties in the organisation. See Example 1 above.

Extreme care is needed here! Usually the desired outcomes are assumed by most stakeholders to be the same across all the interested parties. Our experience however is that they are actually often different for each stakeholder but that none of the parties realises it! If training is designed to meet assumed desired outcomes rather than specified, agreed ones, the probability is that the training will not meet expectations for anyone and will therefore be perceived to have been unsuccessful.

Have your trainers been trained in the techniques and skills required to identify training needs systematically? Or are they expected to function as “order takers”? In many organisations, trainers are expected to behave like order-takers but are judged as if the solutions they deliver were their own! We have seen many training teams who were forced to deliver solutions that were inappropriate but who delivered them very well!

E = Environmental Factors v Training Needs (What mix are we dealing with between trainable or non-trainable issues?)

Our experience when dealing with clients is that up to 70% of the causes of non-performance are often not training related!

These non-training related causes of non-performance are often to do with internal organisation, systems, external factors, or rules and regulations. Quite often, these non-training issues can be addressed quickly and easily once management become aware of them. However, in most cases management do not become aware of them until a correctly structured needs analysis is undertaken.

Example II

Client “B” had identified that its IT team was not generating the kind of results that the company expected. They were not receiving good service from their suppliers and most projects were going over time and over budget. The company requested negotiation skills training.

Whilst the subsequent needs analysis confirmed the need for negotiation skills training, there emerged from the needs analysis 13 groups of issues that were preventing the IT team from achieving the desired results. Only five of those groups of issues were things that could be addressed with training. The other eight comprised issues around their market, their competition and their internal systems. Without addressing these issues, even the most effective negotiation skills training would not generate the desired outcome.

Once highlighted to management, most of these issues were addressed simply and inexpensively so that training could be transferred readily into the working environment.

Many organisations are reluctant to commission a needs analysis because they fear it will be a time consuming and expensive process. Ironically, the failure to identify needs systematically usually ends up costing the organisation far more time and money when the training fails to deliver the desired results. Equally ironically, the needs analysis could usually have been undertaken for a fraction of what the organisation feared it would cost!

Identifying environmental factors that masquerade as training needs, requires specialised facilitative and analytical skills. Do your training people have the skill and resources to conduct facilitative enquiry to clarify training needs and distinguish them from environmental factors that generate the same symptoms?

W= What Must Training Contribute? (What kind of training should be used?)

Having identified what is causing the symptoms, the trainer must express the required outcomes of the training in observable, measurable terms and be able to specify the types of learning that must be mastered in order for trainees to perform effectively.

These learning outcomes fall into three categories, known as domains. They are physical skills (Psychomotor Domain), interpersonal skills (Affective Domain) and knowledge and thinking skills (Cognitive Domain). Different training approaches are suitable for outcomes in each domain.

Example III

Client “C” had requested a two-day event on “selling skills”. They had already invited two other providers to suggest what topics they would include in the event.

Upon further enquiry of the client, it became apparent that each of their 12 sales persons would be required, within a month of being trained, to set up and conduct sales meetings with important clients. This would entail organisational skills, interviewing skills and the effective use during interviews of a Client Relationship Management system, as well as the process of sales. Training on the first two of these areas alone required two days!

On examination of one of the designs already submitted, the sales director realised that only 20 minutes had been allowed to cover planning and conducting an interview. Participants on such an event would gain a high-level understanding of the topic but no skills. Whilst the “topics” were being included, the proposed 2-day event was never going to deliver the desired outcome of skills because it was entirely knowledge-based.

This would not preclude a 2-day event from being run, but it would mean that the result of a 2-day event would not meet the client’s expectations. Further support would be needed – perhaps a longer handover or on-the-job coaching. It might well be quicker and cheaper to do the training correctly in the first place.

Clearly, the methodologies used must be appropriate to the domain of the training, for instance to learn to drive, each driver must have the opportunity to sit behind the wheel and actually drive the vehicle. One cannot learn to drive through sitting in a group and discussing driving! Learning Domains therefore determine the length and structure of training, the ratio of participants to faculty and the methodologies that can be used.

Have your trainers been trained to operate in the three domains of training and to express learning outcomes accurately within those domains? Are they able to distinguish between training methodologies that are suitable in each domain? It is only by doing this that training designers can produce training events that will meet the expected outcomes. Sometimes trainers will put their recommendations into a document proposing the outcomes, methodologies and likely duration of training in a document known as an Instructional Strategy.

Components of The IMPACT Factor

W = Will The Training Achieve It? (What will be the Design of the training?)

Once the strategy – including the outcomes - for the training have been agreed, the trainer must then produce a design that will achieve the defined learning outcomes. Whatever the domains involved, training design requires a practical understanding of the learning process and mastery of a range of techniques and methodologies that will achieve desired outcomes for each of the three domains of learning.

Example IV

Client “D” was introducing an upgrade to their brand image and to do so required their Relationship Managers to treat clients in a way that was very different to what had previously been the case. They had conducted an expensive roll-out of a five-day training event but two years later, nothing had changed. We were asked to ascertain what action would be needed to generate the anticipated changes in behaviour.

Whilst the new approach required sharply honed people skills and needs-based business-development skills, the training was designed to generate excitement, enthusiasm and publicity across the organisation. Much money had been spent on high-profile speakers from industry; industrial psychologists had provided each participant with a detailed profile of themselves and the new strategy had been the subject of presentations at after-dinner lectures by senior members of the board. Everyone who had attended reported that it was intensive, high-profile and very enjoyable. So why hadn't it worked?

At no time had participants practised or received feedback on the way they dealt with clients! The result was that they knew what was needed and believed in it – but they did not have the necessary skills because the course had not at any point taught in the Affective domain. Everything had been knowledge-based i.e. in the cognitive domain!

The process of designing training that stimulates the right learning is a highly skilled one. Do your trainers have the skills to structure and build training events that are designed to achieve defined learning outcomes by following the learning process?

A = A Stimulating Style (How will the trainer enable learning to take place?)

One of the most frequently cited reasons for training losing the support of the organisation is that the training experience is found not to be stimulating. Trainers and participants alike frequently speak of training that includes “boring” subjects. To the properly trained trainer, there is no such thing as a “boring” subject; so if participants are bored, it can only be down to boring trainers who have not learned the techniques of stimulating delivery!

An appropriate training design is crucial if training is to have any chance of generating the desired outcomes; but even the most expertly designed training can become boring when it is delivered in an uninteresting way. That applies whether the training is delivered face-to-face or if it is paper-based, computer-based or e-learning.

Where training is face-to-face, the facilitative skills of the trainer are of paramount importance. The amount of learning retained by the participants depends as much on the delivery style of the trainer as it does on the design of the training. It also depends on the learning preferences of each participant – some participants need help at different steps of learning to others.

Example V

Client “E” had invested heavily in a new software system and was frustrated that the level of usage was low whilst the error rate by users was high. Even though training was available, courses often ran with empty places and participants frequently left the programme before it was finished.

The trainers running the courses were experts in the software system and were capable of handling any questions – no matter how technical. However, their training style – in the absence of trainer-training – was one of hour-long lectures built around text-filled slides. Participants were bored into leaving the programme and within a few hours could recall nothing of what they had heard. Furthermore, they were passing around the organisation the rumour that the system (not the training!) was not user-friendly. That caused other potential participants to avoid nomination.

After an appropriate training programme to help develop their facilitative skills, the trainers began to use more effective, participative styles and after a few weeks, usage of the system began to increase, error rates reduced and course places were filled.

Have your trainers been trained in the group-leading techniques that enable them to facilitate learning, hold attention and proffer the appropriate support to each learner?

PITHON offers programmes to help trainers learn to deliver training in a way that is stimulating and effective.

Y = Yes, It Worked! (How will you know?)

Many organisations fail to evaluate their training at all. Of those that do undertake evaluation, most only use a course reaction questionnaire or “happy sheet”. Very few organisations evaluate beyond that and they are therefore often caught out when their Senior Executives ask “what value does your training deliver?”

There has been much research into evaluation yet very few trainers draw upon evaluative techniques; many do not distinguish between evaluation, assessment and measurement. Consequently, very few organisations view training as an essential investment in the generation of business results – although training is often said to be “essential”, it is still usually the first thing to be cut.

Where needs have been identified properly and learning outcomes defined clearly, then the training should demonstrate that the objectives have been met. Further evaluative activity can also look at how effectively training has been transferred into the workplace and how much positive impact it has had on the business. There are several approaches – probably the most frequently cited is the Kirkpatrick model.

Example VI

The training manager at Client “F” had run a series of “Lifestyle Management” programmes for middle management. These programmes had been well received and he had applied for more budget to run a second series. Instead of approving the budget increase, the board asked for evidence that the expenditure to date had delivered value for money! We were asked by a worried training manager how to evaluate the programme. There had been no needs analysis and there were no published objectives for the programme.

On this occasion, we were able to demonstrate the value of the programme by conducting interviews with people who worked with some of the participants. Through this approach we were able to demonstrate some clear benefits that arose from the impact of the programme.

It could all have been done in a much more business-like way. Had the underlying need been researched in the first place, the objectives of the programme would have been clear and measurable, the design might well have been more appropriate and evaluation could have been built into the programme design. A sound business case could have been presented to the board for the requested budget increase.

Have your trainers been trained to link evaluative activity to business strategy, to distinguish between evaluation, assessment and measurement or to be able to generate data that will demonstrate the impact of training in a meaningful way?

In Conclusion: Harnessing the WHAT and IMPACT factors – approaching training in the NEW WAY

Our experience over the years has demonstrated conclusively that requests for “Trainer Training” are as much subject to “symptom easing” as are any other requests for training. Many clients ask for “trainer training” but there is little consistency in the expectations that lie behind those requests.

Consequently, the response of our “Trainer Training” team to requests for a two (or three, or four) day in-company Train The Trainer workshop is that it can be done – but let us first discuss what makes the client believe they need it and what they expect to see at the end of it! For these in-company requests, the solutions are rarely the same, although some elements of content may be similar between one solution and another.

We at PITHON urge all trainers and users of training to consider carefully the role of their training department or training suppliers. Is the training function in your organisation really working in a way that helps to achieve the Vision and Mission, or are they being used more as “shopkeepers” – delivering whatever is asked of them? Do they have the skills to function in the more appropriate, consultancy-based way that best meets the needs of a modern, rapidly changing business? Perhaps the best starting point to judge this is to ask where training ranks in your organisation when budgets have to be cut!

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