

Guiding managers in Training Needs Analysis

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Key learning points

- The manager's role in Training Needs Analysis (TNA).
- The trainer's role in guiding managers.
- The managed process to meet the Training Needs Analysis.
- A guide to department Training Needs Analysis.

Introduction

We believe most companies recognise that it is the people they employ that create their prosperity. It is the responsibility of the managers to harness the skills, knowledge and attitudes of the people in their part of the organisation, in order to achieve the company's goals, leading to that prosperity. It is your role, as a trainer, to help managers identify the learning needed to enable the employees at all levels – from executives to the humblest workers – to meet the needs of the organisation. Having gained clarity as to what is required, it is your responsibility to apply your professionalism to ensuring the employees have the required knowledge, skills and attitudes.

The parties involved

It is part of your role, as a trainer, to ensure that the environment for training is positive and conducive to learning. It is also your job to ensure that the training contributes to the requirements of the business.

Learning a new skill or enhancing an existing skill is not accomplished on a course. The real value occurs when the learning is transferred from the training venue to the workplace. The key to this is getting the needs clear, and then having a process that ensures the needs are fully met. Here are some suggestions to make that happen effectively.

Managers

Before the course

It is a normal part of managing staff to determine, with the staff members, what their learning needs are and agree with each person the means of meeting those needs.

It is usual for the person's manager to be involved with the person in deciding and actioning



attendance at an off-the-job learning event. Normally the manager holds the budget for the department, a significant factor in making the decision about this.

In the case of a course, they will review the course content with the potential participant. Having agreed the course, the manager and the participant agree the learning objectives that the participant is to achieve on the course. We note that the course objectives are often only a part of the individual's learning objectives. In support of these objectives, the manager assigns an on-the-job task that will permit application of the learning after the course. This is crucial to the transfer of learning into the workplace. If no such opportunity exists, the whole purpose of the training must be questioned.

The manager will then agree, with the person, how they can prepare for the course. The person will come to the learning situation equipped to participate, with clear back-on-the-job objectives and opportunities.

Example questionnaire

Policy and legislation

- Will there be any changes to company policies, orders and so on, that will affect your department?
- Will there be any changes in legislation that will affect your department, products and so on?

Organisation

- From your department organisation chart, which jobs:
 - are vacant or may become vacant in the coming year?
 - do not have a trained deputy or successor?
- Will there be any organisational change that will affect the skills required by your staff?

Trainees

- How many graduates or other trainees will be starting in your department in the coming year? What training will they need?

Job change

- Will any of your staff be doing the same job in a different way in the next few months?
- Will any of your staff be doing different jobs?

Individual development

- Which of your staff have the potential to grow or advance? What training do they require?
- What training are your staff requesting for their own development?

Operations

- Will your customers (outputs) or suppliers (inputs) require changes affecting your staff's skills?
- Will you be changing any operating processes?
- Will new projects or products be started that require different knowledge or skills?

Quality

- Will any of the company quality initiatives impact on your department?
- Will you be taking any action on continuous improvement?

Health and Safety

- Health and Safety training is a company requirement and legal necessity for all people in employment. Have all your staff been trained appropriately?
- Do you have first-aid cover?

Equipment and technology

- Are you getting new or different equipment?
- Are there any technology changes that will affect the skills required by your department?

Effectiveness and efficiency

- What barriers or blockages to the improved performance of your department exist? What skills or knowledge are required by your staff to ensure improved operations?

Functional training

- What training, specific to the functional skills of your staff, is required?

Information systems

- Are new information systems being introduced?
- Do more staff need to operate current computer systems?
- Are all the staff that need to operate computer-based systems both efficient and effective?
- Are any of the systems or applications changing?

Other headings

Other areas that may need to be addressed include the following:

- European languages
- communication skills
- financial skills
- personal skills
- staff development
- staff management
- other training.

Conclusion

A fundamental principle of Training Needs Analysis is helping the manager to identify needs that contribute directly to the performance of their department and to have in place a process by which those needs are met. From this support of the manager, you, the trainer, gain credibility, while at the same time contributing directly to the effectiveness and efficiency of the company. It is from the gathering of this information that the next stage of needs analysis – what exactly the trainees need to learn – can be started.

Further information

Information about encounter groups can be found in *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*, by Irvin D. Yalom, Basic Books, 1995.

Authors

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During the course

The manager will also liberate the employee fully for the course and plan to have their work covered by someone else. Expecting a person to participate in a learning event, and to be on call to the workplace at the same time, is highly detrimental to the individual's learning and to the learning of other participants. We might say that, unless a person is free to participate in the learning event for themselves, they are merely acting as a delegate – someone chosen to represent, or given the authority to act on behalf of, another person, group or organisation (usually at a meeting or conference).

After the course

To ensure the planned transfer of the learning back into the workplace, the manager needs to commit to facilitating the transfer of the learning.

After the course, the manager will discuss what the participant learned. There is no need to direct attention to the venue, the trainer or the methods. While these may be of interest, what is essential is what the participant learned. Leading on from what was learned, what can be applied to the job?

The manager will facilitate the on-the-job task agreed before the course, ideally observing the performance and coaching, and reinforcing correct skill usage.

Where clear benefits have occurred, the manager should invite the participant to share their learning with co-workers. It is extremely valuable for a learner to tell others about what they have learned.

Now the manager can establish a plan to review progress with the person, giving them reinforcing and developmental feedback.

Trainers

So, what has this to do with us, the trainers? Our role is much more than getting people on courses. That may be merely a superficial measure and, in the long term, it may be detrimental to the training function. Training to meet the business need is the route to credibility, and one route is building a relationship with managers which demonstrates value.

In some organisations, we have come across attitudes that suggest that trainers believe managers are not

supportive. That may be true. The response from the trainers in this situation may be to produce a 'popular product' from which their credibility can be established and a more professional approach to the whole training cycle achieved. We believe that a more effective route is to produce a product that demonstrates operational advantages to managers. Working with managers, and helping with the managers' actions described above, is a route to that credibility.

Above, we also emphasised that the prime interest of the manager should be focused on what was learned. We trainers need to know whether the training needs, as identified by the manager and participant, were met.

From the participant, you need to know whether the content and method were sensible and useful. This is not just a matter of looking at scores from a 'happy sheet'. Those are, in our opinion, not worth the amount of paper they take up. Talk to participants. Some real gems come out of their responses, such as: 'You remember you told us about ... ? Well, we could have ...' You get some valuable feedback, the participant feels wanted and valued, and those positive outcomes will spread in the organisation. That leads to better courses and better relationships. Does this take time? You bet it does. So do most things that are worthwhile.

Participants

During the course

We have looked at how the manager interacts with the participant before the event. What is it the participant needs to do? It is we who, through our expertise, will facilitate the learning. As trainers, we must get the participant to do the following:

- Concentrate on the learning experience, and not let their job responsibilities or domestic issues interfere.
- Share their learning expectations with us. They have already been shared with the manager.
- Make use of our help, in order to become genuinely open to learning, to challenge and to seek understanding.
- Prepare a draft action plan to apply the new skills and knowledge.
- Provide feedback to us on their learning experience.

After the course

After the course, the participant will be back in the care of the manager. In addition to the actions above, the most important thing a participant can do is establish a support network to reinforce learning. As trainers, we can facilitate this.

Helping the manager

What is it you can do to help the manager decide on the learning needs of their staff? The normal thing we see is a Chinese menu of courses, from which the manager can pick and mix. The only question is whether the 'right' people attend the 'right' course for the 'right' reasons. What we

are going to suggest is another approach, one that may help in identifying the right course, or might lead to identifying a learning need that has not been in the manager's mindset. Managers sometimes seek training for their staff that is related to a fashion; for example, 'Encounter Groups; that sounds good. We will give them some of that'. You, as the trainer, may even have generated a fashion such as this.

We have no problem with the Chinese-menu approach. An approach that we have seen to be effective is one where the menu is structured progressively, and related to job complexity and specific types of role. That means that it has a logical structure to grow the staff to meet the requirements of the business culture or the technical or professional requirements. This

demands clearly-defined target populations and strict entry-level requirements, along with tight course target behaviours. These three guidelines, supplied by trainers, are a great asset to the managers.

Department needs analysis

An effective way of helping the line manager identify needs is a department training needs analysis. You, the trainer, will be able to do this most effectively by sitting with the manager and working through some structured questions. If any of the questions give rise to a need, then the people it affects and the specifics of the need can be explored. You can now design or adapt a course to meet the department need. It also opens the opportunity to explore the post-course learning activity.

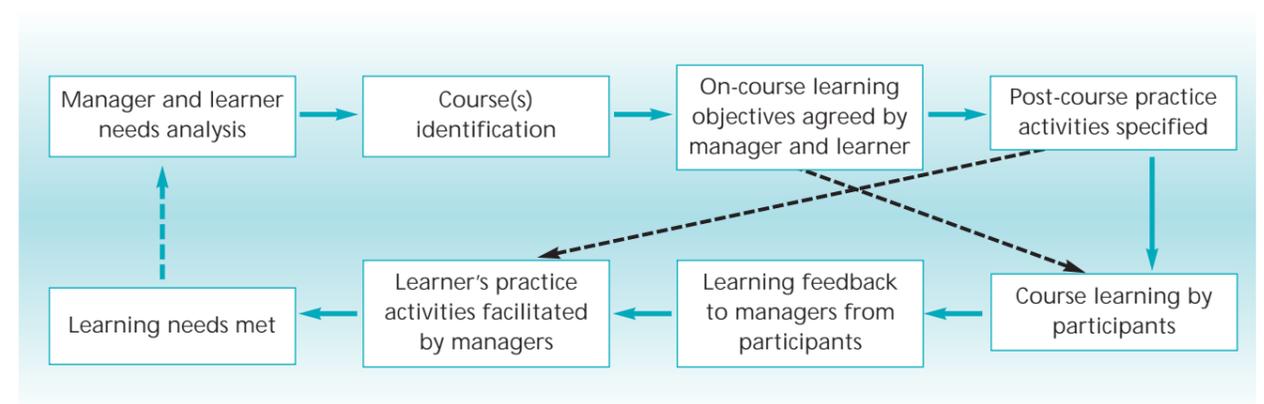


Fig. 1: Establishing a support network to reinforce learning