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Barry Johnson

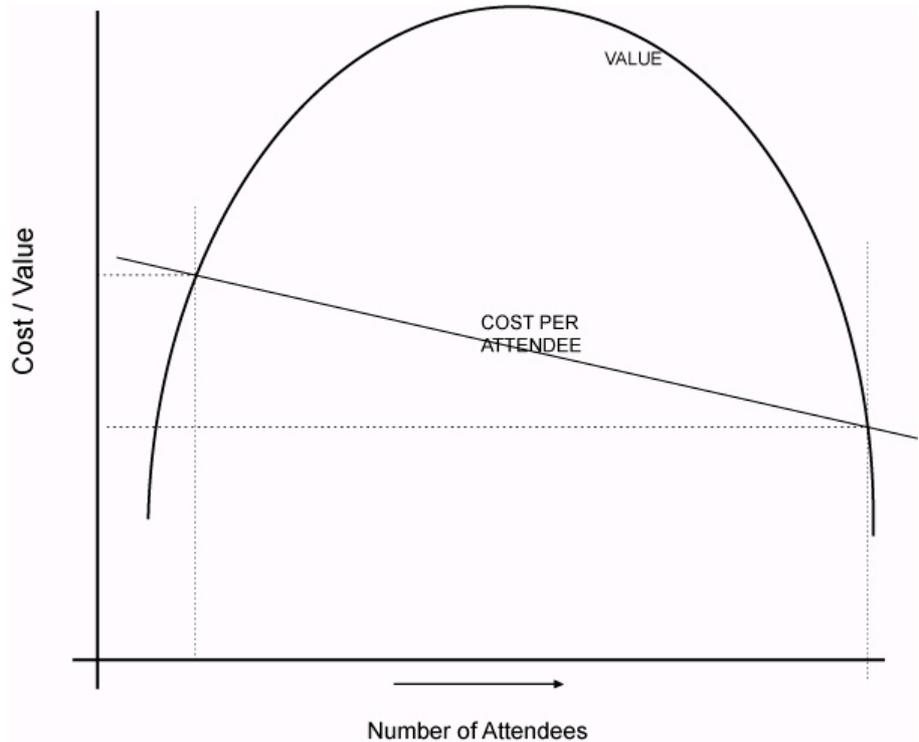
Training cost & value

by Barry Johnson, Learning Partners Ltd.

Let's not beat about the bush, training is expensive. Not only has the organisation to pay for the learning event but there may also be travel and accommodation costs. Added to that is the loss of 'production' of the people while on the learning event. We also know that however good the learning event is, what has been learned has to be translated into action on the job and that means the learner practising and gaining on-the-job competence in the skills. Therefore, the person will be relatively inefficient for a period of time. The on-the-job element probably also requires diverting the time of a skilled person to be an on-the-job trainer or coach so adding to the cost of training.

Yes, training is expensive. What most organisations want is 'greatest bang for the buck' to use an Americanism, but managers have tight budgets. It is not surprising therefore that some managers attempt to short circuit the process. When a three day residential learning event is proposed, the pound signs go up in these manager's eyes. They consider the budget and say, "Can't you just tell them about it, they are bright and they can practice on the job." That may in some instances be true. More usually, if the trainers are unprofessional or weak and agree to this proposal, the chances are the 'on-the-job' element is not carried out. If the 'on-the-job' element is carried out, it is still horrendously expensive as the on-the-job time will be extensive. This is a hidden expense.

Our experience is that training in some companies is highly effective due to the professionalism of managers and training in other companies is ineffective due to the lack of perceived value of training or managers not understanding the difference between cost and value. In this later case we have a vicious cycle that wastes both time and money, and even worse, the effectiveness and efficiency of the employees may not improve. The 'bottom line' takes a knock through this little recognised inefficiency.



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Let us focus on getting value. It is usual when designing a learning event to specify the target population, terminal behaviour, the entry-level behaviour required, the learning time required and number of attendees. If an old-fashioned information course is proposed then the numbers that can be accommodated and gain some value for both themselves and the organisation can be quite high. As interaction in such an event can be quite low, the minimum number can be quite low and the maximum number high. The value curve will be shallow, so the value per pound of cost is relatively low. The more interactive and powerful the learning and the more simulation of reality involved, leading to greater value to the organisation, the smaller the maximum numbers become and the more critical the lower number of participants becomes.

If we consider the diagram the shape of the value curve depends on the instructional methodology. In a highly interactive learning event with simulations in which the facilitators role play so that the participants can practice and receive feedback from their peers and the facilitator, the curve, as shown in the diagram, may be quite deep. The minimum number may, for example, be as low or as high as six. In this example, it may be that the maximum number of participants may be fourteen and the optimum may be twelve. Moving outside of those limits reduces the value of the learning. The pressure is normally to increase the number of attendees as this reduces the cost per person. The loss of value is much greater than the reduced cost per attendee.

It follows for maximum value to the organisation for any learning event, to achieve the required terminal behaviour is, use the training methodology that can give greatest value, have only attendees from the target population that meet the entry level criteria and have the optimum number of attendees.

www.learningpartners.co.uk

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