

11 CRUCIAL POINTS TO MAKE YOUR MANAGEMENT TRAINING REALLY WORK

By



Creating superior corporate performance

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11 CRUCIAL POINTS TO MAKE YOUR MANAGEMENT TRAINING REALLY WORK

Make Your Training Really Work For You

With more pressure on managers to get the very best performance out of their resources on a consistent basis, staff training continues to play a vital role in maximising business effectiveness, and ultimately, bottom line financial performance. But with more companies focused on reducing costs by outsourcing the responsibilities of their human resources team, operational managers are increasingly being placed in the centre stage to deliver tailored, results focused training packages that will help the organisation perform at its best, operationally, and of course, financially.

And whilst operational managers possess a 'have a go' attitude when invited to implement training projects, whilst positive in its intent, this attitude alone can not only waste the organisations budget, and the managers time and energy, but more importantly, performance can end up being worse than it was before the training project commenced.

With so many factors needing consideration when researching a training project, managers need to quickly develop some awareness of a whole range of specialist skills and training methodologies. Needs analysis, the learning cycle, accelerated learning methods and even methods of evaluating success are all required. And these needs are all as well as needing to deliver their own business critical results.

So, how should an operational manager set about designing a training project? Well, there are many ways but for the purpose of this article, let's keep it straightforward and easy to understand.

Developing and delivering good quality training interventions is a skilled business and one that should not be entered into lightly. Where possible expertise should be brought in and a DIY approach is not recommended. However, training forms a part of many people's duties, many of whom have little or no formal training on this area.

If you are one of these people and you are charged with implementing a programme of learning, what follows are a few principles to apply when constructing such a programme.

1. The Blue Peter model

In many areas there are commercially available training packages that can be bought off the shelf ready for delivery. Although they can be expensive and may vary in quality they are a good starting point for the complete novice. These packages have ready-made exercises and materials and may save a considerable amount of time in the preparation. Many companies will allow you to have a preview copy to examine prior to purchase and this makes the assessment of the materials painless. Remember if you do purchase such material it will need customising and a detailed run through to make sure it is appropriate for your audience.

However, the most such material can do is give you ideas, examples of activities that are well tried and tested and save you some time in producing participant handouts, slides etc. It will not help you to customise the material to your audience and will not help you to deliver it!

2. Focus on outcomes rather than ‘training’

Managers can focus so much on delivering ‘training’ to their teams but forget to focus on the outcomes needed from the training intervention. For example, if you need to enhance customer satisfaction, keep in mind the personal skills needed by your people in order for them to deliver the outcomes needed in terms of increased customer satisfaction. By remaining focused on ‘outcomes’ you can then more easily measure the success of your training.

3. Make learning fun

People learn best by ‘doing’. The days of ‘chalk and talk’ training are long gone and I expect that you, like me, have attended a training course where there is lots of flipchart paper stuck on the walls and coffee and biscuits to try and keep you awake. Get participants actively involved in a relevant exercise or activity right at the outset and support them in developing new, improved thoughts, attitudes and behaviours that will benefit them as individuals and the organisation as a whole.

4. Get clarity on organisational goals

Take time to reflect on the organisations goals and design your training package to fit in with helping the organisation move towards where it wants to be. In terms of quality, service, income and a host of other criteria, if your training is not designed with these factors in mind, don't do it! In addition, consider your departmental goals. Your business plan should clearly detail the departments goals so invest some time in making sure that your training meets the needs of the department too.

5. Plan precisely

Effective planning is crucial to the success (or failure) of any training project. It is essential that if you are going to build a successful training programme, you must first have a solid foundation on which to build it. And that is the planning of each stage, identifying risks, resources, measurement criteria and even calculating a return on your investment in time, energy and of course, money. If you get everything else right and forget about the planning, all of your efforts could be rewarded with little more than a loss of credibility, annoyed participants and lets not forget...the angry boss who expected so much from you.

6. Communicate with participants

Communicating effectively with participants in advance of the training not only helps in terms of finalising the logistics but also can add so much value to the psychological contract between the organisation and employees. Rather than 'nominate' a colleague for a course, think about how you can 'invite' them and communicate with them in such a

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way that generates genuine curiosity, interest and even a bit of excitement in advance. Communicate clearly and effectively throughout the project, reporting points such as results achieved, commitment demonstrated by participants and even issues that arose. Open, honest and supportive communication is usually welcomed.

7. Undertake a pilot project

A safe, low cost way to test the validity of a new training programme is to undertake a pilot project. Perhaps select a group of up to 12 people, each with different levels of skill and knowledge to be 'guinea pigs' in the nicest possible way. This will allow you to test your approach in a safe environment, obtain participant feedback, be flexible with your methods and add even more value to subsequent events.

8. Make learning relevant to 'real life'

Participants need to be able to relate to the material you are using. Stay away from pure 'intellectual' learning that deals with complex concepts, models and paradigms, and use wherever possible, real life examples that participants can easily relate to which will help them absorb not just the skills but their application too. You can't afford to collect a bundle of evaluation documents stating the training was excellent and then not have improved results in the business.

9. Deal with workloads

One key objection that we used to hear from course participants is that they couldn't focus on learning because they would have hundreds of emails, memo's and deadlines to deal with when they returned to the workplace. But when people are learning, they need to be focused on the learning. So, ensure that you arrange in advance for the participants workload to be allocated to a supportive colleague and that any deadlines that can be flexible are amended accordingly.

10. Provide support back in the workplace

Many well-intended training programmes fail to deliver long-term, sustainable improvements because the learning is not transferred from the training room, back to the 'real world'. Post learning support is an essential factor in ensuring that the level of success for the organisation and the individual is fully realised. Support the development of a coaching culture where participants can help each other's development as well as add more value in terms of skills and knowledge to their colleagues. Top-level management involvement is key at this stage and should be proactive to reinforce participant commitment.

11. Remember, Training is not always the answer

Training is not always the answer to your performance issue. If a team are not performing to the required standard, undertake some discreet research before you decide to deliver a training intervention to fix

it. For example, we know of a sales team who for several months failed to achieve their income target. And whilst the executive responsible for the team asked for training to help them, we quickly established that it was the changes to their compensation package that was the problem. A new, less attractive system has been introduced without proper briefing or context, subsequently; the team lowered their performance in protest and focused on how disappointed they were with their senior manager. So before putting a [training package](#) together, do some research and find out exactly what is the root cause of the issue requiring attention.

To find out more on maximising the effectiveness of your training programmes, visit our [Management Training](#) website or call our Managing Director, Scott Watson on (+44) 0845 052 3701 or contact us via the Summit Training [website](#).