

DEVELOPING SKILLS THROUGH TRAINING

► Training can be a very effective way of building skills, and yet results don't always live up to our expectations. There are two reasons for this: first, companies often invest in training that doesn't respond precisely enough to people's needs; and second, what people learn during training sessions is often forgotten before they have a chance to put it into practice. For training to be effective, you must learn how to set it up, how to follow it through, and how to assess it properly.



Defining why training is needed

Before signing someone up for training or setting up training sessions for a group, it's important to define why training is necessary:

- What knowledge and behaviour do you want people to acquire?
- Who exactly does this need apply to in your team or department?

- Will trainees be able to apply what they've learnt right away?
- What impact do you expect the training to have on performance?

Choosing the most relevant training solution

Should you choose in-house or outsourced trainers?

- Both options have their advantages:
 - In-house trainers are familiar with the organisation and its business; they also cost less.
 - Outsourced trainers can bring in expertise that is lacking in house: they use tried-and-tested learning methods; and they provide an outsider's perspective on things, using examples from outside the company.
- Which option you choose will depend on the individual situation:
 - If there's someone in your team or company who is able and willing to run training sessions, it might be worth thinking about an in-house solution.
 - Similarly, if you want to train people about a technique or product in which your company specialises, you should opt for in-house training.
 - If on the other hand you wish people to acquire a new approach or master a new technique, it would be preferable to use a trainer from outside the company.

How can you make sure training fits your needs?

Whether in-house or outsourced, training must be perfectly suited to your team members' needs:

- If the ideal training session is available off-the-peg, you should opt for this solution.
- If not, ask for an existing training course to be specially adapted for your particular needs, or have new training sessions tailor-made for you.

How should you manage training for maximum benefit?

- Encourage your team members to engage fully with their training, to focus on what they can get out of it, and to be clear about their expectations.
- Explain the context and goals of the training to the trainer.

Following up on training

Having made sure a training solution is well adapted to your team members' needs, you must now make sure what people have learnt is applied in real situations.

For follow-up to be effective you need to stick to four rules:

Set up a debriefing session as soon as the training period is over

As soon as people get back from training, set up a debriefing session where they should tell their team members the key points they've learnt.

Provide e-learning

Give everyone involved the opportunity to access e-learning modules in order to consolidate and complement what they have learnt.

Ensure real situations right away

Make it possible for people to apply what they've learnt in real situations as soon as their training is finished.

Give people results-driven goals

Set your team members goals that take into account the training they have undertaken.

Assessing how effective training has been

Proper assessment of training will give you helpful pointers for setting up future sessions. Assessment should be carried out in several stages.

Immediate assessment, as soon as the training is over

Check what people have learnt and ensure it can be applied immediately:

- Are people happy with their training?
- What have they learnt?
- How do they plan to apply what they've learnt in the immediate future?

Second stage of assessment, three months on

Ascertain how effective training has been on three levels:

- Actual use of what has been learnt: are people applying what they've learnt in their work?
- Impact on results and performance: are people performing better in the relevant area?
- Knock-on effects: has the training initiative had any unexpected positive or negative fallout?

Final assessment: one year on

Work out your return on investment: assess direct and indirect profit made as a result of the training, and set this against cost in terms of time and money spent.