CHAPTER 18 : Evaluating Training

Aims:

To establish the importance of evaluation in the training process

To compare reasons for evaluating training events

Resources required:

Plenary room and small group discussion areas; flipchart and OHP

3.1 'Questions for focussing an evaluation' OHP transparency

3.2 'Evaluation can enable participants to:' OHP transparency

3.3 'Evaluation can enable the manager/training organiser to:' OHP transparency

3.4 'Evaluation can enable the trainer to:' OHP transparency

3.5 'A selection of evaluation methods' handouts

4.1 A set of 'Diamond Ranking' cards for each group of four participants

4.2 'Why Evaluate?' participants' instruction sheets

'Learning log' sheets

1 Background notes

Evaluation is the process by which judgements are made about the value of a training event. Evaluation should be an integral part of planning any training event, not something that is added on as an afterthought. In fact, thinking in advance about how she will know if the training has been successful can help the trainer to define the learning outcomes for a training event.

In order to plan and focus the evaluation, the trainer should ask herself a number of questions:

Who is the evaluation for?

There are three groups of people who will have a keen interest in the evaluation of training. They are:

Participants in the training event
Managers or sponsors of the training event
The trainer herself

Each is likely to have different reasons for evaluating the experience. Each will use different criteria for measuring the effectiveness of the training. As a result, each may come to different conclusions about the value of the experience. However, the trainer should not be satisfied unless the participants and sponsor of the training event are, themselves, satisfied with the outcomes of the training.

What is the purpose of the evaluation?

Possible reasons for evaluating training are:

To identify which learning outcomes have been achieved
To determine how participants have changed as a result of the training
To identify how participants responded to the methods used
To find out participants' views of the practical arrangements
To enable the trainer to receive feedback about her performance
To collect suggestions about how future events could be improved
To identify unmet training needs

The reasons will, to a large extent, reflect who the evaluation is for.

When should the evaluation take place?

The main decision here is whether evaluation should take place at the end of the event or some time following the training. Each has advantages and disadvantages:

At the end of the event: The experience is fresh in the participants minds but they may still be too involved in the process and the dynamics of the group to be able to reflect on specific learning outcomes. At this stage, it is impossible for the participants to identify the effects of the training on their 'back-at-work' practice. This is the better time for evaluating the *process* of the training.

Some time after the event: The participants have had the opportunity to reflect on the event with the benefit of hindsight. They may now be able to comment on the practical usefulness of what they learned. However, they may need to be reminded of the specific exercises and methods used. They may also find it difficult to recapture the feelings they had on the training event which relate to the atmosphere created and the role of the trainer.

Who will undertake the evaluation?

It may be that the trainer has no choice about who will carry out the evaluation. The organiser of the event may reserve the right to carry out the evaluation in order to check on the trainer's performance or the effectiveness of the training undertaken. It is important that the trainer should not feel threatened by this. It is important for an organisation to account for the use of its funds in this way. Trainers should encourage this as matter of good professional practice.

However, it is more likely that the trainer herself will be expected to carry out the evaluation (even when commissioned to carry out the training by an organisation). If she has co-worked with another trainer each may take responsibility for evaluating the other's exercises, contributions or small-group work with the participants.

Whoever undertakes the evaluation, the trainer should arrange to discuss its findings with the training organiser or participants' manager.

How should the evaluation be undertaken?

A range of evaluation methods are available to the trainer. Some involve written responses to questions or statements. Others involve group or one-to-one discussion.

Factors which might determine the choice of methods include:

- the amount of time available
- what is being evaluated
- how public or confidential are the responses being sought

A selection of some evaluation exercises which we have found to be successful are outlined below.

Event lifeline

The trainer draws a line along a large piece of paper (several flipchart sheets taped end-to-end). The line represents the course of the training event. She marks key sessions of the training event on the line in chronological order, left to right. Participants are invited to write their comments about the training event on the sheet, positive ones above the line and negative ones below. A group discussion is then held.

Talking wall

The trainer writes a series of sentences for completion, one on each of a number of flipchart sheets. Examples we have used include: 'What I enjoyed most about this course was......', 'The course could have been improved by.....', 'The course should be followed up with.....'. Participants are given a number of self adhesive 'Post-it notes' or blank cards and are asked to complete each sentence, using a separate 'Post-it' for each comment. They are asked to stick each comment on the appropriate sheet as soon as they have written them. Participants should be encouraged to read the comments as they are posted on the sheets as this may spark off ideas for their own comments.

Feedback forms

This is a commonly-used method of collecting information for evaluation. In designing a form, trainers should consider:

- Number of questions

  Try to limit the number of questions and the number of pages. One sheet of paper with questions on both sides is less intimidating than two single-sided sheets. Use word lists, sentence completion and other techniques for variety.

- Process or outcomes?

  Make sure that you cover how the event was organised as well as what it set out to achieve.

- At the time or take-away?

  Do you want feedback from participants before the event finishes or some time after? If later, remember to put your name and the address to which the form should be sent on the form itself. Don't forget to add the date by which the form should be returned. And don't expect many returns!

- Personal or anonymous?

  Do you want to be able to follow up the comments with particular participants? If so, you will have to ask them to put their name on any written feedback exercise they complete. This may limit the frankness with which they make their comments.

- Learning goals achieved?

  Evaluation should always refer back to the learning goals which were established at the beginning of the event.

- Personal goals achieved?

  Individuals should be asked to comment on whether their own learning goals were achieved.

- Follow-up required?

  Participants should have an opportunity to comment on what they, personally, would find helpful as a follow-up to the training event.

Memo exercise

It can be very easy for participants to forget all their good intentions about putting plans into action following a course. This exercise is less of an evaluation of the course itself, more a self-evaluation for the participant. The trainer produces 'Memo' pro-formas, one for each participant. The memos are headed 'To: Yourself' 'From: Yourself' and have the name of the training event under 'Subject:'.

Participants are asked to complete the memo with a summary of what they plan to do as a result of being on the training event. Each is sealed in an envelope which the participant addresses to himself. The envelopes are marked 'Personal' and are collected by the trainer. The trainer explains that she will send each participant his envelope after a certain number of weeks (we suggest about four to six). Participants will then have a personal reminder of what they intended to do as a result of attending the course. They can measure their progress against their intentions.

Positive, negative, interesting

This is a good way of carrying out a brief end-of-session evaluation. It can take as little as five minutes but it provides useful information for the trainer. The trainer writes the words 'Positive', 'Negative' and 'Interesting' on a flipchart sheet leaving enough space for comments under each heading. She then asks participants what, for them, was positive (what they enjoyed or found useful) about the event. She writes these on the flipchart under the appropriate heading. When the participants run out of comments, she moves on quickly to what, for them, was negative (not enjoyable or irrelevant) about the event. Finally, she asks about what does not fit easily into either previous category but was interesting enough to note.

2 Suggestions on using these materials

1 Outline the aims of the session and introduce your session plan.

2 Introduce exercise 4.1, 'Diamond Ranking'. Lead a discussion on the issues raised.

3 Introduce exercise 4.2, 'Why Evaluate?'. Lead a discussion on the different outcomes which may be required from an evaluation using the three OHP transparencies 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4.

4 Input focussing on the key questions outlined in the background notes using OHP 3.1.

5 Distribute 'Learning log' sheets.

6 Close the session with a review and evaluation of its aims. Try using one of the methods described in handout 3.5.

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