CHAPTER 4 : Identifying Training Needs

Aims:

To establish the role of the trainer in identifying training needs

To identify key times when training may be required by individuals or organisations

To introduce a range of methods which can be used to identify training needs

To develop skills in using one of these methods

Resources required:

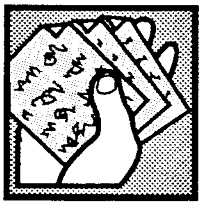
Plenary room and small group discussion areas; flipchart, OHP and pens

3.1 'Methods for identifying training needs' handouts

4.1 'Identifying Training Needs' exercise: participants' instruction sheets

'Learning log' sheets

1 Background notes



Whose responsibility is the identification of training needs?

Trainers should *not* have the primary responsibility for identifying training needs. This may seem a rather controversial and paradoxical statement. If trainers don't identify training needs, then who does? In our view, training needs identification should be seen as a key element of staff development. The primary responsibility for identifying an individual's training needs should, therefore, be shared between the individual and the person who is directly accountable for her performance and development. In most cases, this person will be her manager. Supervision sessions and annual staff review/ appraisal meetings are ideal opportunities for managers to help their staff identify training needs.

To do this effectively, managers need the following:

A clear statement of the organisation's goals
An accurate job description for each of their staff
An audit of each staff member's skills and knowledge
Knowledge of staff members job performance
A system of regular supervision sessions
A system of regular (usually annual) staff review/ appraisal
The staff member's own views about her training needs

Together, this list forms the basis for a staff development system. The trainer's role in the creation and operation of the staff development system will depend on the wider role they play in their organisation. This is explored in the next section.

The role of the trainer in identifying training needs

The trainer can fulfil a range of possible roles in an organisation. The main roles are outlined below:

• Direct trainer

A learning specialist who runs training events personally. The direct trainer is usually told by someone else what training to run. She therefore has little say in the identification of training needs. One of the specific roles she can play is helping managers build their confidence in using the skills of staff development, and training needs identification.

• Training provider

A technical specialist who ensures that others provide training appropriate to the needs of the organisation and its staff. The training provider typically has influence over the methods used in training but not the identification of the needs which the training is designed to meet.

• Internal consultant

A training role which is concerned with analysing organisational problems and making recommendations about which ones are amenable to training. The internal consultant usually works closely with the organisation's managers and takes a pro-active approach to identifying training needs. She may also provide managers with a range of creative ideas for how to respond to staff training needs (not just courses!).

• Innovator

A strategic role which involves helping the organisation deal with change. Innovators are often involved in establishing systems for responding to change. The role overlaps with that of internal consultant although the pro-active identification of training needs is on a more strategic, long-term level. Setting up systems for staff development would be one of the innovator's tasks which contributes directly to training needs identification.

• Training manager

As the title suggests, this is a management role which is concerned with planning, organising, controlling and developing training in an organisation. The training manager is likely to be an innovator and internal consultant but is less likely, except in small organisations, to be a provider and direct trainer.

How training needs can come to light

• Coping with Change

Training is often required to deal with change. Changes can affect individuals, teams or whole organisations.

Changes affecting individuals:
- Change of job
- Change of responsibilities

Changes affecting organisations/teams:
- Change of goals
- New policy to implement
- New procedures to implement
- Restructuring
- Change of management
- Introduction of new technology
- Change of legislative framework
- Staff recruitment

• Building on strengths

Training is not only a means of filling gaps, it is a way of enhancing and developing individuals so that they achieve their full potential. Any system of training needs identification should focus on individuals' strengths as well as their weaknesses.

• Dealing with problems

Problems can highlight a gap in skills or knowledge for an individual, team or organisation. Training can play a part in closing the gap by creating opportunities to practice skills or acquire new knowledge. Alternatively, training can be used to introduce problem-solving processes which enhance individuals' abilities to deal with the problems.

What is and is not a training need?

Training is not the solution to every work problem. Whilst some of the changes identified above might signal possible training needs, most will require a wider range of responses than training alone. Many will signal the need for alterations in the structure of the organisation. Some will demand changes in working relationships. These all require discussion and planning.

One of the most important skills in training is to be able to appreciate the limits of training and recognise when an issue should be dealt with in another way. Examples of situations where training may be inappropriate include:

• Resolving interpersonal conflict between team members

This is a management problem and should not be reframed as a need for the feuding team members to attend 'conflict resolution skills' training! It may be that their manager is avoiding dealing with the conflict within her team because *she* lacks confidence in this area and this could signal a training need *for the manager*. However, there is no avoiding the uncomfortable fact that the responsibility for resolving the conflict lies with the manager, not the trainer.

Dealing with high staff turnover

This may be an indication of a job which is boring or badly managed. It could also indicate an uncomfortable or unpleasant working environment or a job which is poorly paid or badly planned. None of these factors call for a training. They would therefore require a management response.

• Dealing with too much work

'Time management' courses are not the answer to every workload problem. Sometimes the job description may need to be radically altered to ensure the job is 'do-able'.

• Complaints about staff performance

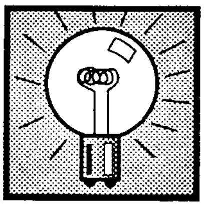
Training needs may arise from an investigation of complaints, but trainers should resist the use of training as a 'solution' to poor staff performance. If training is built into a disciplinary package, this may well have an adverse effect on the potential of the course for all concened.

Methods for identifying training needs.

The following techniques are explained in detail in handout 3.1.
- Critical incident technique
- Bubble charts
- Card sorts
- Forms/questionnaires
- Group discussion
- Analysis of complaints
- Observation at work
- Personal SWOT analysis
- Learning logs
- Attending training events

Each method can be used as a 'stand alone' technique. However, the methods are most effective when used within the staff development framework outlined above, within supervision or as part of an annual staff review/appraisal meeting.

2 Suggestions for using these materials



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

2 Introductory input/discussion on the role of the trainer in the identification of training needs using background notes. Ask people to identify which roles they play in their organisation.

3 Run exercise 4.1 on 'Identifying Training Needs'.

4 Discuss the outcomes of this exercise and compare with the other methods described in handout 3.1.

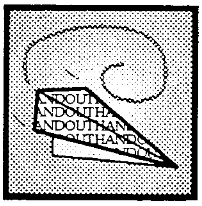
5 Distribute 'Learning log' sheets for completion by participants.

6 Close the session by reviewing its aims.

CHAPTER 4:

3.1 Handout

Methods for identifying training needs



Critical incident technique

This involves an individual talking about specific and significant work incidents. The individual is asked to recount work-related incidents when they felt:

Lacking in confidence or
Out of their depth or
When they thought they had let someone down or
When they had a problem they couldn't handle

Recounting the incident is used to help the individual identify what would have to happen to enable them to handle a similar incident more effectively and confidently and what training needs, if any, are indicated.

Bubble charts

These are sheets of paper with a number of circles ('bubbles') drawn on them. Each bubble contains a suggested training need related to the particular subject being investigated. For example, an organisation working with volunteers wishes to identify the training needs of its 'volunteer co-ordinators'. The trainer starts by asking those staff members to brainstorm a list of possible training topics. To this list the trainer adds subjects which she thinks are important (for example, 'the induction of volunteers' or 'insurance matters'). Each of these subjects is written in its own bubble on the sheet. A copy of the bubble sheet is given to each individual and they are asked to indicate which of the subjects they see as a personal training need. A number of empty 'bubbles' should be provided for individuals to write in subjects which are not already listed.

Card sorts

This is a variation on the 'bubble chart' idea. Each potential training need is written on a separate card. These are handed to the individual who is asked to sort them into different piles. The piles are headed 'Major training need for me', 'Training need for me' and 'Not a training need for me'.

Forms/questionnaires

A wide range of personal checklists can be found in texts on training. These are particularly common in popular books on management development. Many can be used or adapted for the purpose of identifying training needs (but be aware of copyright restrictions on some).

Group discussion

Structured group discussions can be very helpful in identifying shared training needs and ways of meeting them. Discussions can be particularly valuable in identifying the training needs which will arise from the implementation of new policies or procedures.

Analysis of complaints

If an organisation has a user or worker complaints procedure, this can be used to identify problems which may be amenable to training. Trainers should beware of reframing management or inter-personal problems as training needs when using this method.

Observation at work

This can be both time-consuming and threatening if mis-handled but can provide excellent first-hand evidence for the trainer or manager about how well tasks are being performed in an organisation. It requires sensitive introduction by managers or trainers who should also ensure that they give the observed staff positive feedback for good performance.

Personal SWOT analysis

SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. It is a technique which is much-used for strategic planning but which can be adapted for training needs identification. It involves taking stock of an individual's personal strengths and weaknesses (in areas such as skills, knowledge, attitudes, contacts and personal qualities) and listing these under the appropriate heading. The next stage is to think about the person's work setting and identify the opportunities for development or change which currently exist or could be created. Finally, looking again at the work setting, the individual identifies the threats (unwanted changes over which they have little or no control) in their job. These lists are used to help the person to identify the strengths they would like to enhance; weaknesses they would like to overcome; opportunities they would like to take and threats they need to respond to. These can then be analysed to identify changes which would be amenable to training.

Learning logs

These are diaries in which individuals are encouraged to make brief notes about problems they have encountered in their day-to-day work and any ideas they have for overcoming the problems. Learning logs can be invaluable sources of information for supervision sessions, annual review/appraisal meetings and other discussions about identifying training needs. They need not be time consuming, particularly if pro-formas are used. We have incorporated a 'Learning log' pro-forma in this manual.

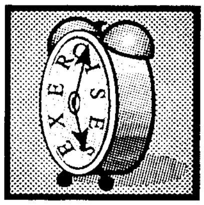
Attending training events

This is not as whimsical as it may sound. Attending a training event helps people identify "What they didn't know, they didn't know"! Well-designed training course evaluations can help people to identify training needs at a time when their self awareness is enhanced.

CHAPTER 4:

4.1 Exercise: trainer's notes

'Identifying Training Needs'



This is an example of the use of triads in training. You will find a number of exercises throughout this manual based on the 'triad' method. It is important to point out to participants that this exercise is not a role play. Participants should 'be themselves' and give authentic responses to each other, in all the parts they take during the exercise.

Purpose:

The aim of this exercise is to introduce participants to the 'Critical Incident Technique' method of analysing performance and identifying training needs. Participants are given an opportunity to develop their skills in using the technique and receive feedback about their performance as a 'training consultant'. They will also be given a brief opportunity to identify some of their own 'real-life' training needs.

Process:

1. Introduce the purpose of the exercise.

2. Form participants into triads and give each person a participants' instruction sheet. The triad members take on roles A,B and C.
   'A' is the training consultant who helps 'B' to identify his learning needs using the 'Critical Incident Technique'.
   'B' is the subject who is helped to identify his learning needs.
   'C' acts as an observer to provide 'A' with feedback on her performance.

3. Each participant takes it in turns to take on the roles of subject, training consultant and observer.

4. After three 'rounds', by which time each participant will have taken on each of the three roles, give the triads some time to discuss the exercise.

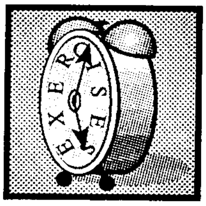
5. Bring the triads together and ask participants to evaluate the usefulness of the 'Critical Incident Technique' as a way of identifying training needs.

• • • Notes

CHAPTER 4 :

4.1 Exercise: participants' instruction sheet

'Identifying Training Needs'



This is an example of the use of the 'triad' method. It is important to understand that this exercise is *not* a role play. You should 'be yourself' and give authentic responses to each other, in all the parts you take during the exercise.

Purpose:

The aim of this exercise is to introduce you to the 'Critical Incident Technique' method of analysing performance and identifying training needs. You are given an opportunity to develop your skills in using the technique and receive feedback about your performance. You will also be given a brief opportunity to identify some of your own 'real-life' training needs.

Process:

1 In groups of three (triads), members take on roles A,B and C.
'A' is the training consultant who helps 'B' to identify his learning needs using the 'Critical Incident Technique'.
'B' is the subject who is helped to identify his learning needs.
'C' acts as an observer to provide 'A' with feedback on her performance.
Detailed instructions for each participant are given below.

3 Each participant takes it in turn to assume the roles of subject, training consultant and observer.

4 After three 'rounds', participants stop and discuss their experience of each role.

A: Training consultant

Your task is to help the subject (B) to identify a number of their personal 'real-life' learning needs. To do this you will be using the 'Critical Incident Technique' as a way of helping them to focus on a particular time when they were acting as a trainer and felt either lacking in confidence or 'out of their depth'.

When the subject has chosen an incident, you should encourage them to talk about it. You should help them to identify what they learned from the experience and, particularly, what would help them to deal more confidently with the situation again. Try to help them to express this in terms of a training need if this is possible. Remember that you only have a short time for this exercise so you cannot expect to have a completely worked-out plan for meeting this training need.

B: Subject

You should use this opportunity to think back to a particular incident when you were acting as a trainer and felt either lacking in confidence or 'out of your depth'. The person acting as training consultant (A) will help you to talk about this incident in such a way as to enable you to express what you learned from it. You should also be prepared to talk about what would help you to deal more confidently with a similar incident again. Can this be expressed in terms of a learning need or was the problem due to circumstances which were outside your control?

C: Observer

Your task is to observe the dialogue between the subject (B) and the training consultant (A). You will be expected to give the training consultant (A) some feedback about their performance.

How useful was the 'Critical Incident Technique' in enabling the subject to disclose their concerns about their skills or self-confidence?

To what extent was the training consultant helpful in enabling the subject to identify the learning needs arising from these concerns?

How well did the subject and training consultant separate issues where training might help from issues which would require other sorts of change (e.g. team development)?