

Development of human resources

Part 6: High-performance training

ROBERT H. ROUDA AND MITCHELL E. KUSY JR.

This is the sixth in a series of articles to introduce methods addressing the development of individuals and organizations through the field of human resource development.

The education and training of the workforce in the pulp and paper industry now requires the involvement of the entire organization, not just a training department, if training is to be effective in improving the performance and profitability of our organizations. Effective training uses an instructional systems design process and operates as a high performance work team in partnership with the rest of the organization.

Learning, education, training

Learning is a process of gaining knowledge, skills, or attitudes through formal or informal means. Education is a process involving others as facilitators of learning. These others may be subject matter experts, instructional designers, or deliverers of instruction. Training is a learning process directly tied to specific situational results. In the case of training, the focus is usually based on improving individual and group behavior and performance and on results to the organization.

Beginning with the end in mind, let's examine the results desired from training. Kirkpatrick (1) classifies these outcomes into four categories: The first—reaction—evaluates the training program itself (are the trainees satisfied?). The second—learning—focuses on changes in the participants as a result of the training (have skills, knowledge, or attitudes changed as a result of the training?). The third—behavior or performance—deals with the transfer of the learning to the job or organization (are the results of the training being applied?). The fourth—outcomes or results—is the impact of the training on the productivity and profitability of the organization. While education tends to focus on the first two of these, training should be evaluated by the last two—on the transfer of learning to the success of the organization.

Instructional system design

To ensure that training is delivered effectively and efficiently, a process of instructional systems design (ISD) should be implemented as a planned process for the assessment, design, development, implementation, and evaluation of training.

Instructional systems design starts with an assessment of the needs of the organization, which may include surveying, identifying, and prioritizing mill training needs; analyzing the causes of performance problems and opportunities; and identifying possible solutions (2). It is imperative to determine if training is the appropriate solution and if it will be cost-effective.

Developing training should include analyses of the characteristics of the learners, the setting in which the work will be performed, and the tasks and duties which the trainees will be expected to perform. A complete review of the subject matter (and subject matter experts) is also necessary. Goals and performance objectives must be set, and a plan to evaluate the training should be developed. Instructional materials and strategies must be acquired, prepared, and pretested.

The implementation of training includes the preparation of mill workers and others to be trainers and subject-matter experts. The training process itself must be managed and evaluated.

Implementing instructional design

There are two approaches to implementing the training function. Most companies and instructional designers use a reactive approach. ISD is used as an intervention to solve problems involving employees, with a focus on performance and organizational results. In this sense training is often applied, like quality control, as corrections to problems. This type of training function usually operates somewhat externally to the organization's manufacturing, management, and other processes.

A proactive approach is taking place in some pulp and paper companies where training and ISD are part of a continuous improvement process, not viewed as interventions (3). This is more like TQM (total quality management) than QC (quality control), in that the training function is fully integrated with the regular process of organizational improvement.

The processes of reactive and proactive training are very similar. The differences are of time-scale, degree of overlap of

activities, and distribution of the training function throughout the organization. Performing needs assessments and task/duty analyses have usually been triggered by new technologies, equipment, or people. Shouldn't these be continuous, ongoing functions?

High-performance work teams

We have heard much about the benefits (and problems) with implementing team approaches to improve organizational effectiveness and to empower individuals and teams with the information and authority to make decisions on the front lines. Business success today mandates the use of these high-performance work teams throughout our organizations. But making the transition to teams is not easy. Training can be useful in many ways to help people function more effectively in team environments, including:

- Communication. People must learn how to communicate effectively in teams and between teams across the entire organization. Employees must use communication to resolve and manage conflicts and to air and resolve grievances and complaints.
- Team management and functioning. Managing projects, setting goals, clarifying roles, and solving problems in teams are skills that must be developed. New organizational skills must be developed if teams are to operate effectively and efficiently.
- Leadership development. Team leaders and upper management need to learn how to act as role models for team operation and how to promote the active building, leadership, and management of teams.
- Personal development. Employees need help in overcoming fears about the loss of job security and independence and to learn how to continue to make individual contributions within team structures. Interpersonal skills need to be developed, especially with respect to group problem-solving.

Let's start with the training function


As discussed above, training needs to be more fully integrated with, and responsive to, the business of the organization. A recent survey also substantiates this new business focus for human resource development directors(4). Distributed management and team environments are ways for the organization to become more effective. It is logical, then, that the training function itself is a good place to start implementing high-performance work teams.

Moving from a reactive to a proactive implementation of training will require a restructuring of the training function. (Notice that we did not say "Training Department," as training is everyone's job.) What better opportunity to bring the team concept into practice in the organization? This would give trainers the tools to be of value to the organization, of being directly connected to the success of the business. Trainers can most successfully understand, teach, and promote that which they have experienced and modeled themselves.

By reorganizing the ISD process into cross-organizational teams to improve the success of the business, trainers and instructional designers will become valuable resources to transfer the experiences, knowledge, and skills of high-performance work teams to others throughout the rest of the organization.

The result

State-of-the-art equipment is being purchased and operated by more and more organizations in the pulp and paper industry. Today, it is the preparation of the workforce for optimum performance that gives the competitive advantage. A more relevant, business-focused training function—distributed and integrated appropriately throughout the organization—will not only be more in line with organizational performance and profitability, but will help to bring the rest of the organization along toward reaching the goal of using effective, efficient, and performing teams.

Let's get started. 

Literature cited

1. Kirkpatrick, D., *A Practical Guide for Supervisory Training and Development*, 2nd edn., Addison-Wesley, Reading, MA, 1983.
2. Rouda, R. and Kusy, M. Jr., *Tappi J.* 78 (6): 255 (1995).
3. Gossett, J., *Developing Effective Learning Materials for the Workplace — A Practical Guide for Ensuring Learner Competence*, TAPPI PRESS, Atlanta.
4. Johansen, K., Kusy, M. Jr., Rouda, R., *The Business Focus of Human Resource Development Leaders: A Picture of Current Practice*. Accepted for presentation at the Academy of Human Resource Development Annual Conference, Minneapolis, 1996.

Rouda is a consultant on human resource development and process engineering and is a research associate and student of organization development and change management at the University of St. Thomas. He has practiced university education and consulted on training in the paper industry for 20 years. Kusy is professor of organizational learning and development at the University of St. Thomas, and is a practicing organization development consultant.