Training for a Changing Workplace

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

• List four characteristics of the changing workplace that affect training.
• List the types of training necessary to adapt to the changing workplace.
• State the training responsibilities of managers, training and development professionals, and trainees.
• Describe a training model.

"Fast-paced," "rapidly changing," and "dynamic" are words that characterize the current era. Individuals and organizations alike must constantly adapt to technological, economic, social, and political changes. To succeed in such a swiftly evolving world, organizations need flexibility, speed, and a quality product. These market realities in turn demand adaptable, highly qualified employees. Training employees and retraining them to keep pace with change are the keys to an agile, quick-thinking workforce.

WORKPLACE CHARACTERISTICS AFFECTING TRAINING

Among the many characteristics of the changing workplace that can affect training, four stand out: accelerating global competition, the continuing reorganization of work structures, advancing technology, and increasing workforce diversity.

Accelerating Global Competition

The marketplace today is truly worldwide, extending to all parts of the globe. Organizations may buy production materials from a supplier in one country, manufacture the product in a second country, process their accounts in a third country, and sell their product internationally. Buyers choose from the best, most innovative product and service suppliers in the world, selecting those that meet
their needs with high quality standards, prompt delivery, and reasonable costs.

To compete globally, American organizations must offer superior goods and services that match or surpass the standards of the global market. To avoid losing market share to foreign competitors, many organizations apply quality improvement principles to the making of products and to organizational services. Total quality management, for instance, involves the entire workforce in process changes.

For quality improvement efforts to succeed, managers must prepare employees through training for their new roles in a quality-focused organization. Training in team building, problem solving, and interpersonal skills is as necessary for quality improvement as training in technical subjects and new equipment operation.

In addition, to achieve successful international business relationships, management must train employees—particularly those in marketing, sales, customer service, and technical support—to interface harmoniously with representatives of foreign businesses. The training should include cross-cultural communication skills and a study of the cultural values, social customs, and business practices of clients' home countries.

**Continuing Reorganization of Workplace Structures**

To improve productivity, many organizations are changing the hierarchical management structures of the past into participative management arrangements such as partnerships between managers and employee teams. New working groups such as cross-functional teams have emerged, and there are working relationships between employee teams and customer advisory groups. Organizations have formed alliances with other organizations such as suppliers, vendors, and university research centers. And globalization has created international business arrangements requiring teams of culturally diverse people to work together.

Barriers that separate employees—such as hierarchy, job function, and geography—are disappearing; and employees need new social, intellectual, and communication skills to adapt. Without training in new work concepts like team building, for instance, teams will be unable to handle their new autonomy, productivity will suffer, and interpersonal tensions will surface. Smart managers train employees in the skills they need to successfully handle their new responsibilities.

**Advancing Technology**

Employees must also be trained to keep abreast of technological advances, such as information systems technology and telecommunications, which have changed the
modem office and methods for conducting business. Information systems are now used to communicate with suppliers, maintain inventories, distribute products, and manage financial assets. High-speed information technologies are essential for just-in-time production; they also make possible multinational networking and new ways of accessing knowledge. Managers and office personnel need ongoing training in these communication technologies to keep up with the dynamic information flow necessary to compete successfully in business today.

Technological advances in automation have also changed the skill requirements for other employees. For example, supply clerks must be able to operate automated logistic accounting systems to inventory spare parts, and microcomputer pay systems demand computer-literate disbursing clerks.

Likewise, factory production is changing. Many production lines today are staffed by robots who do tasks such as welding, painting, grinding, and performing assembly operations. The workers that the robots replace are needed to program and maintain the robots, and to apply quality control standards to all components and procedures. Employees need higher-level thinking skills and comprehensive retraining to interface with these sophisticated machines. Additionally, because technology becomes obsolete so rapidly, organizations want employees who can learn quickly and adapt readily to new business tools.

**Increasing Workforce Diversity**

The workforce today includes more diverse groups--such as people who are disadvantaged, have disabilities or are foreign-born--than in previous decades. And because the supply of workers is shrinking, entry-level staff increasingly will include older employees as well as young employees deficient in basic skills. Training this heterogeneous mix of individuals presents a challenge to the manager.

Managers will have to adapt training to meet the needs of these individuals. Some workers, for instance, may need to improve their basic skills before learning more complex procedures. They may not read well enough to understand manuals, or they may lack the mathematics skills to do statistical process control. Older workers may need study skills, while the foreign-born may require special English-language speech and vocabulary courses.

All employees will need training to increase their sensitivity to individuals whose color, gender, age, language, background, or value system differs from their own. Training in cross-cultural competencies can help employees to recognize their own biases towards those who are different, to understand the behavioral patterns of
diverse groups, and to improve their interpersonal communication with them. Additionally, cultural diversity training that focuses on respect for others reduces conflicts, helps employees to work together harmoniously, and improves productivity.

Think About It ...
What are the primary factors in your workplace that would affect training?

TYPES OF TRAINING NEEDED FOR A CHANGING WORKPLACE

To retain a technological competitive edge, organizations need employees with up-to-the-minute technical skills to work with their up-to-date plant equipment and to streamline their operating procedures. Continuous technical training is a must to maintain quality and productivity.

But, to function successfully on the job, employees also need training in a broad set of workplace skills. These skills have been well described by Anthony Carnevale and co-authors in *Workplace Basics* (1990). To sum up Carnevale's seven basic workplace skills (1990, pp. 2-3), employees need training in the following:

1. Learning how to learn
2. Reading, writing, and mathematics
3. Communicating and listening
4. Problem solving and creative thinking
5. Goal setting and developing their career potential
6. Relating to others and working in teams
7. Sharing leadership roles
Training in workplace basics and technical training can take place on the job, in the organization's classroom, and at outside locations such as schools, colleges, or vendor plants. Chapter 5 of this book describes the many internal and external resources the manager can draw upon to keep employees' skills developing.

**Think About It . . .**

What specific skills do your employees need to adapt to the changing workplace?

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**BENEFITS OF TRAINING TO THE ORGANIZATION**

While the changing workplace increases the need for training to keep employees updated, management may be reluctant to provide it because of training costs. However, a look at the benefits of training to the organization may persuade managers that investing in employees through training is a win-win situation for both the organization and the employee.

The primary benefit of well-designed training is increased productivity for the organization. Employees continually trained in current knowledge and skills to do their jobs are highly productive. They deliver quality products and services. In addition, they work efficiently, make few errors, waste little material, and frequently offer innovative ideas. Following are some examples of organizations where training produces large rewards.

One organization with an impressive payback from training is Motorola, which says that every dollar spent on training returns thirty dollars in productivity, gains in three years. Motorola not only improved sales substantially through training, but also reduced costs by training employees to simplify processes and reduce waste. Also, in another organization, managers at Corning's ceramic plant found that
training team workers improved productivity by virtually every measure. Corning employees spend 5 percent of their time at work on training (Henkoff, 1993).

Another way that training improves productivity is by increasing employee job satisfaction. Training can get people involved and excited about their jobs, boosting motivation to contribute to the organization's mission. Training stimulates employees to discuss ways of improving performance and to put their ideas into practice. Training also increases employee self-esteem. For example, some employers have found that funds spent for basic skills training not only improved performance and reduced accidents, but also improved the self-esteem of employees who acquired the skills (Fisher et al., 1990, p. 740). By investing in training, management demonstrates respect for employees' abilities, thereby increasing workers' confidence, morale, and feelings of job satisfaction.

Additionally, training experiences can strengthen organizational loyalty, decreasing employee turnover. Because many employees value opportunities to learn new skills, training can help an organization retain its best employees. And it can make downsizing more acceptable to workers. Though managers may be unable to offer promotions or permanent job security, they can offer training benefits that increase workers' employability. Training improves the quality of the workforce while it satisfies employees' desires to develop their abilities. Both management and employees gain from training.

**TRAINING RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE ORGANIZATION**

If one of the organization's success criteria for the new century will be the quality of the organization's workforce, then the organization must pay more attention to training. Every individual in the organization bears some responsibility for training.

**Managers**

Senior management is responsible for making training a part of its organizational planning and for allocating funds for training that serves its goals. Knowing that trained personnel are vital to the organization's success, astute senior managers continually invest in their human capital. They communicate to employees the importance of training and steer middle managers towards types of training that support the organization's business strategy.

Midlevel managers are responsible for ensuring that employees are trained to do their present work effectively and that they are prepared for future assignments.
Additionally, managers are responsible for seeing that training is linked to the organization's goals; they should work with training professionals to provide optimum training value for employees. Training funds should be spent wisely and equitably so that all employees have access to training.

Managers also play an important role in helping employees transfer their knowledge and skills acquired during training to the workplace. Chapter 8 describes specific strategies for facilitating the transfer of learning to the work setting, such as providing opportunities for employees to apply their training. In addition to the training responsibilities described above, midlevel managers in small organizations sometimes do their own needs assessments, training design, delivery, and evaluation.

**Training and Development Professionals**

Training and development professionals advise managers and assist them in training their personnel. For example, they can help the manager determine whether training is the answer to a performance problem. In large organizations, human resource professionals generally perform needs assessments, coordinate courses, design programs, and conduct in-house training, such as orientation programs for new employees. Other services offered by the training and development department are described in Chapter 4.

Trainers present material, facilitate its learning, direct trainees in practice exercises, help trainees with individual learning problems, and evaluate trainees' learning.

**Employees**

Employees are responsible for developing job competency. They must acquire the knowledge and the skills to do their jobs effectively and to advance in their careers. Training courses offer employees opportunities to develop their job potential while contributing to the organization's goals. Employees should make managers aware of their training needs, should participate actively in training sessions, and should strive to apply training lessons on the job.

By involving employees in the planning stages of a training program, as described in Chapter 2, the manager increases employees' commitment to the program. As a result, training improves employees' on-the-job adaptiveness, skills, and motivation, boosting organizational productivity.
A TRAINING MODEL

Training might be defined as an organization's planned action to make its employees proficient in their work by building knowledge, skills, and attitudes that align with the organization's culture and values. The object of the training is to improve employees' job performances and to develop employees' capabilities. To be effective, training must not be a hit-and-miss exercise, but a series of learning experiences planned in a systematic manner.

When training is approached systematically, it is more likely to be successful. One of the training systems that has become accepted as a standard in most large organizations is Instructional Systems Development (ISD), which was first used by the military in the 1950s (Kearsley, 1984, p. 83). Although there are many different ISD models, they all focus on improved job performance in the various phases of their systems.

The training model described in detail in this book is patterned on ISD methodology. Our training model has four phases: assessment, design, delivery, and evaluation.

- In the assessment phase, employee performance is analyzed to identify training deficiencies. A task analysis to determine the knowledge and skills necessary for each task may be conducted. After the assessment is completed, behavioral objectives for the course are written.

- In the design phase, using the above objectives as a guide, a course outline is made, training methods and media are selected, lesson plans, tests, and other materials needed for training are written.

- In the delivery phase, training is conducted using the methods and media outlined in the lesson plan and applying the training principles that facilitate learning.

- The final phase of training, evaluation may be carried out on five different levels: measuring trainees' growth, assessing the course design, evaluating the trainer's performance, surveying trainees' on-the-job application of training, and measuring the results of training. Even though good managers continually evaluate their training projects informally; they also plan for more formal evaluation measures to be carried out when the training is completed.

After the evaluation report has been written, the evaluation analysis and recommendations can be incorporated into the next training assessment, and the data can be used to improve training design and delivery. In this way, training is
always being improved. See Exhibit 1-1 which illustrates how the four phases of training form a loop. Following the training loop continuously will ensure a quality training program that keeps pace with the changing workplace.

In this self-study course, each phase of the training process is described in detail so that managers will gain an in-depth understanding of the four training phases. While managers may not necessarily have to use all the specific information, it will help managers to initiate and to carry out training programs as well as to communicate knowledgeably with trainers or consultants. At the same time, the course's how-to information will reliably guide managers with shoestring training budgets to do the training themselves.

In our fast-paced era, four characteristics of the changing workplace stand out: accelerating global competition, continuing reorganization of workplace structures, advancing technology, and increasing workforce diversity. To meet these workplace challenges, organizations need to train employees in state-of-the-art technical skills and in the workplace basics. They must also pay more attention to the management of training with all employees assuming their particular training responsibilities. And finally, the organization will benefit from using a systematic training process such as the four-phase training model described in this book.
Review Questions

1. The workplace today can best be described as 1. (c)
   (a) stable.
   (b) declining.
   (c) changing.
   (d) exciting.

2. To succeed in a rapidly changing world, organizations need 2. (d)
   (a) flexibility.
   (b) speed.
   (c) a quality product.
   (d) all of the above.

3. The hierarchical management structures of the past are being 3. (c)
   pushed aside by
   (a) management by objectives.
   (b) quality circles.
   (c) participative management
   (d) human resource development.

4. A workplace that consists of heterogeneous groups of employees 4. (d)
   will need training in
   (a) cross-cultural awareness.
   (b) communication skills.
   (c) interpersonal skills.
   (d) all of the above.

5. Which of the following skills is not one of Carnavale's seven 5. (a)
   workplace basics?
(a) Business forecasting
(b) Problem solving
(c) Creative thinking
(d) Working in teams

6. Managers are not responsible for

(a) ensuring that all training is linked to the organization's business strategy.
(b) coordinating interdepartmental courses.
(c) seeing that employees are trained to do their present work effectively.
(d) preparing employees for future work assignments.

7. Who is responsible for acquiring the knowledge and skills to do the job in an organization?

(a) The manager
(b) The employee
(c) The supervisor
(d) The training department

8. One training system that has become accepted as a standard in most large organizations is

(a) IST
(b) IDS.
(c) ITS.
(d) ISD.

9. A task analysis is conducted in the _____ of training.

(a) assessment phase
(b) design phase
(c) delivery phase
(d) evaluation phase

10. In the design phase of the training model, you make a
(a) training assessment.
(b) task analysis.
(c) course outline.
(d) strategic business plan.