Impact of training on organisations

By R. Palan Palaniappan and Jamaluddin Zainal

DOES training make an impact? The sports world says "Yes". If a football team loses several matches, the coach emphasises intensive training. Can anyone imagine the coach cutting down on training because of a series of losses?

However, the business world cuts back on training during recession as they see it as a "nice-to-do" thing. It is the first way to save money. It is not central to the needs of the organisation. Whilst the training function is partly responsible for this situation, top management-/decision makers must shoulder most of the blame.

The tremendous pace of change in the business world, in such fields as technology, competition and customer needs, demand that organisations invest in training so that they can meet challenges of the modern business world and make a profit.

Many successful organisations have clearly demonstrated the correlation between training and business results. To maximise impact of training, training has to be carried out in a systematic and professional manner. However, prior to doing this, several misconceptions about training have to be eliminated. Can it be done?

MISCONCEPTIONS

Some of the common misconceptions about training involve:

- Education vs Training;
- Adhoc Approaches;
- Perks/Privileges;
- Activity not Accomplishment;
- Packaged Programmes;
- Inappropriate Design and Delivery;
- Training as a substitute for good management.

EDUCATION VS TRAINING

"Trainers are too theoretical. They do not relate to business needs," says a general manager. This criticism may be partly valid as most trainers have a background in education. However, we need to make clear the difference between education and training. The role of training is to *train*, not educate.

The training manager is not an expert in sales or accounting. His expertise lies in ensuring that learning takes place to satisfy the identified training need. It may be desirable, though, to have a line person (salesman or accountant) trained as a trainer.

Schools and colleges aim to educate their pupils. Businesses select employees on the basis of their level of education or tertiary achievement. The entry behaviour is clearly defined by the organisation.

Due to the tremendous demands in a changing business environment, it is recognised that learning must be an ongoing process. Herein lies the role of training. Training aims to develop systematically the knowledge, skills and attitudes required by an employee to perform to required standards.

The distinction between education and training can best be made from the remarks of an Englishman. His young son returned from school beaming with the news that they had a class on sex education. The father was pleased with the class but relieved that his son was not given sex training in school. The function of training is to *train*.

AD HOC APPROACHES

Some companies pursue an ad hoc approach which is purely reactive rather than proactive or need-based. They send employees for an overseas training programme because sales have declined; they conduct a safety programme due to an accident in the plant; or they have a course because the general manager wants it. Training must be need-based.

PERKS/PRIVILEGES

A manager is sent for an overseas training programme; the secretary, to a Singapore seminar even though there is a relevant programme locally. Training here is seen as a reward; it is not need-based. The development and social aspects cannot be overlooked but training loses its credibility if it is not need-based and relevant to the needs of the organisation.

ACCOMPLISHMENT, NOT ACTIVITY

"Ten thousand people went on courses last year. My target next year is 120,000," boasted the training manager of a local company. Management assesses the training function on how many people went on courses, how many courses were conducted, and how voluminous the course materials were. Due to survival needs, training responds to the activity spree. Unfortunately, none of the above issues is any indicator of whether people are trained or not.

It is not activity but the accomplishment of training objectives that is the goal of training/human resources development. We have seen enough of incompetent managers boasting of participation in numerous overseas seminars. Training must be judged by quality and not quantity. During these days of total quality management, it seems that training is the only function without a quality audit.

PACKAGED PROGRAMMES

One organisation boasted of its packaged American training programme. There is absolutely no harm in running a packaged programme, be it American, British or French, but the question is: is the programme relevant to business needs? Is it worth the huge cost?

There are hundreds of packaged programmes off the shelf. Sure, a packaged programme saves time and money in development but does it fit into our needs and culture? This local organisation only finds, after spending two million Malaysian ringgit, that the programme was a failure. The general manager even made a public statement to this effect. Packaged programmes are not a panacea for all training problems.

INAPPROPRIATE DESIGN/DELIVERY

The learning strategy selected must satisfy the identified training need. It would be totally inappropriate to use computer-based training or invite an external speaker to deliver a one-hour presentation and expect such dramatic results as an increase in sales. Every training session must include time for demonstration and practice.

The UK Royal Navy recommended that no more than 10 per cent of training time be spent on explaining new knowledge through lectures. They insisted 25 per cent of time be used for showing trainees how to do the job and the remaining 65 per cent of time to be allocated for practice.

It is easy to lecture to an aspiring swimmer on the art of swimming, but after the lecture he will hardly be able to float in the pool. It is important to demonstrate to him how to do that in the pool itself, and actually swim.

Moreno developed role play; Sorcher and Goldstein in their book *Changing Supervisory Behaviour* demonstrated the power of behaviour analysis; the Centre for Creative Leadership emphasised practical applications. All these approaches had four consistent steps: demonstration, understanding, practice and feedback. Emphasis shifted from teaching to learning. Just plain talking results in no training at all.

NOT A SUBSTITUTE FOR GOOD MANAGEMENT

The training manager of a local insurance company conducted a two-day Selling Skills course for the insurance agents, a one-day management programme for the agency managers, and coordinated regular two-hour briefings to brief the sales force. This was part of a total quality enhancement programme for the sales force.

One month after the training events, the training manager was pulled up by the assistant general manager of sales. The latter held the training manager responsible for the decreased sales and high lapses.

How much should training be held responsible here? Should it be blamed for poor and incompetent management? In this example, the AGM Sales was appointed to his position because the chairman liked him. Without any prior experience of selling or managing a sales force other than his desire for the benefits of the position, he was leading the sales force. His general manager was a technocrat who was appointed just because of his being at the right place at the right time. He enjoyed a 9-to-5 desk job. With two incompetent persons leading the sales force, sales naturally declined.

They expected a growth in premium income when their incentive schemes were based on sums assured. They were unsure of business directions, absolutely without vision and finally providing no motivating spirit for the sales force.

What we have in this example is a management problem and morale problem; certainly not a training problem.

It was not a training problem because the programme was validated. It was evident that appropriate learning had closed the training gap. Course reactions from participants were good.

Behaviourists have propounded the following model for several years:

If the salesman cannot sell, training can ensure the appropriate learning. But the salesman who can now "sell" will not sell because of other factors. The objective of the sales training was to ensure sales people learn how to sell policies and the objective of the management training was to ensure sales managers learn how to manage the field force. And the objective of briefing sessions was to brief and not to train.

Should not management be conducting a post-mortem on their fallacies rather than pulling up training personnel, particularly when the training was need-based and validated?

Should not the role of sales managers be to make the salesman who, now after training, knows how to sell but will not, to go and sell?

Training supports good management to achieve business results. It is not an alternative to poor management. A simple equation would be:

Business Results = Training x Work Environment

In this example, training did its job but management failed. We can only hold training responsible for ensuring appropriate learning. The responsibility to transfer that learning into positive action rests with the line managers.

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JOB WATCH

Top six jobs advertised in New Straits Times
(From 20th Mar - 26th Mar 1994)

EXECUTIVES	-	228
ENGINEERS	-	191
MANAGERS	-	182
CLERKS	-	167
SUPERVISORS	-	84
TECHNICIANS	-	48

Note: All figures are conservative. Some advertisers did not disclose the number of vacancies available for a given position.

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