

# TO TRAIN OR NOT TO TRAIN

## MAKING THE CASE FOR A TRAINING NEEDS ANALYSIS



“Training for the sake of training.” That sounds a bit oxymoronic doesn’t it? Yet lying within the context of that statement is the impetus of how many organizations will formulate their training strategies. Organizational training strategies based on the precept that if there is a budget for training, then there must also be a need for training, can run counterproductive to the objectives of a training program.

In the vernacular of training programs and strategies, are a multitude of how training is applied. On one end of the spectrum, there are training programs that are targeted and specific based upon detailed organizational, operational, and personal training needs. On the opposite end of this spectrum, however, are training programs that have allocated budgets, but beyond that lack structure and targeted objectives. For example, I once worked with a company that had an annual employee performance objective based on the total hours of training each person took in a calendar year, irrespective of any performance or targeted objectives related to the employee’s position or job function. So in this example, if an individual had an annual objective of 120 hours of training, they could pick and choose whatever they wanted to fulfill their training performance objective for that year – or - “Training for the sake of training.”

## PERFORMANCE GAPS



There is an obvious chasm between the aforementioned training strategies which in a word should be the objective of any training program or strategy, and that word is “gap.” Not the gap that lies between two extremes, but the gap that precipitates all training needs, a “performance gap.” The tale tell signs of a performance gap and what if any training is needed will be determined by identifying whether gaps exist between actual organizational performance and expected

organizational performance. Performance gaps can have deleterious and reactionary effects on the viability for organizational growth and profitability. As such, organizations would be better served by taking a proactive analysis approach to establishing a training strategy through conducting a Training Needs Analysis (TNA).

There are many theories on why and how to conduct a TNA as well as many organizational development and organizational training consultants who are well versed in TNA theory and application. However, before scouring the trade journals and Internet for a list of consultants to conduct a TNA, there are a

few precursory things that you can do to understand the breadth and depth of a TNA for your organization.

First and foremost, before starting down the TNA pathway, it is essential to understand that a TNA is not going to be a cure all for your organization's training performance gaps, but more of a framework on how to analyze and identify performance gaps that can be addressed by training. Secondly a TNA needs to be a comprehensive study of the entire organization and not just bits and pieces of it. In such a comprehensive study, a hierarchical analysis of the organizational, operational, and personal aspects of performance are part and parcel to a TNA as each of these key areas is contributory to the overall effectiveness of organizational performance.

The organizational component of a TNA hierarchy are the strategies and policies that dictate company structure, job design, and personnel forecasting. Organizational objectives emanate from the upper levels of the organization. It is from this point that a TNA gathers adequate amounts of information on the company's mission and purpose, which dictate organizational outputs and performances. The operational component of the TNA hierarchy involve the specific jobs that necessitate the accomplishment of the day-to-day functions. As part of a TNA, an operational analysis determines the Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs) necessary for each job function. With this information, it will be easier to establish baselines for performance by which an organization can use to identify performance gaps.

The third and final component of the TNA hierarchy, as well as probably the most confounding, is the personal or person analysis. At the personal level is the most likely point for even a well-intended training strategy to diverge onto a "training for the sake of training" path. Why? Because, of the intrinsic or extrinsic motivational objectives of each person.

## MOTIVATION



In my experiences in delivering training to tens of thousands of individuals, I can succinctly characterize the motivational aspects of each person into one of two categories, people who want to be there (intrinsically motivated) or people who have to be there (extrinsically motivated). In a person analysis for a TNA, Intrinsically motivated persons are innately competent and self-determinant. As an organismic function of an organization, intrinsically motivated persons crave training to feed their behavioral energies with feelings of task interest and enjoyment.

Persons who are extrinsically motivated base their training needs on material and social rewards for performance, or even conversely, the avoidance of sanctions for under performance. So from an organismic perspective, if there is something in it for them, a TNA may at a minimum identify

extrinsically motivated persons and how best to target and apply training that is of optimal value to the individual and the organization.

On the surface, conducting a TNA may seem to be a bit arduous. However, two intended benefits of a TNA can make the effort worth the while. First, a TNA will identify “if” and “what” type of training can correct or improve performance gaps. Secondly, a TNA will help to justify the expenditures of time and money on training as productive investments and not just “training for the sake of training.”