

## Training Needs

If you find it difficult to manage and understand your training needs, this whitepaper with tested approach may be the solution you are looking for.



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*People often "jump the gun" by assuming that training is the best solution to performance problems. Before you make that assumption, be sure training is the best solution by conducting a performance analysis.*



**THE DANGER OF NOT CONDUCTING PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS** is that we [human resources and training professionals] are the ones held accountable for both success and failure of our programs and products. Professionals from all types of organizations recite epic tales of training programs that didn't solve the problem, instructional products that solved non-problems, or programs that resulted in entirely unexpected and often unpleasant outcomes.

### **The game has changed.**

*"Where once we enjoyed a niche defined by familiar activities, like offering classes and facilitating meetings, now we are expected to contribute to results, to the bottom line, to the business of the organization" (Rossett, 97).*

**Performance analysis identifies the whole problem, and offers organizations systematic solutions.**

Performance analysis allow training professionals proactively partner with their customers, providing valuable service and meeting customized needs with data-driven, coordinated solution systems. Good performance analysis maximizes training expenditures, ensuring a fertile environment for successful solutions.



Too many times within organizations training is used to try and fix problems that may not be skills or knowledge related. Similarly, providing training without having determined a need for can also a waste of time and money.

## What is a training needs assessment?

The first step in any training program is to determine whether training is needed and, if needed, to specify what that training should accomplish. Mitchell (1993) describes **needs analysis** as "an examination of the existing need for training within an organization". In other words, it identifies performance areas or programs within an organization where training should be applied. A needs analysis gathers information about present practices and compares these practices to the desired way of doing business. The difference between where you are now and where you want to be defines where a training program should concentrate its effort.

This information also establishes a baseline against which training accomplishments can be measured. If you know where you started, it is easier to determine if your training has been effective.

A needs analysis may identify more than one training need. These needs should be prioritized, and either placed into a formal training plan, or form a data base for future training.

Training Need is utilized to identify what training workshops or activities should be provided to employees to improve their work productivity. Focus should be placed on needs as opposed to desires.

For example, training dollars would be better spent on a new employee in the sales department who needs to learn Sales Skills for their job duties as opposed to learning Microsoft Publisher which the employees wants but does not need.

## Is Training Really the Answer?

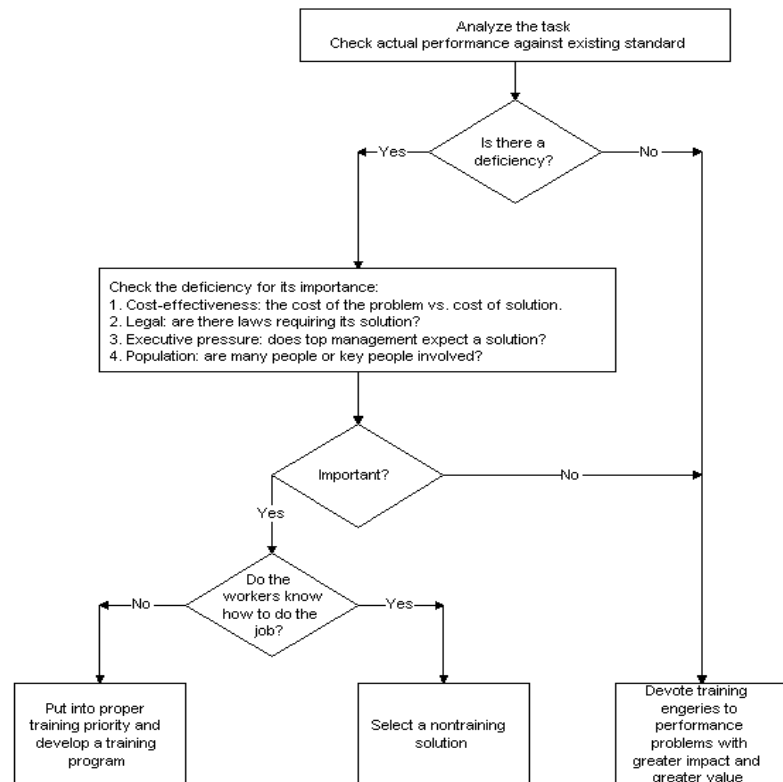
Let's say your Manager-In-Charge (MIC) comes to you and says: "We have a problem. Develop a training program to solve this problem." How do you react to this request? The first thing you don't do is to jump into the design of a training program. The first thing you do is to investigate the problem. Clearly and accurately state the problem, and, if possible, determine the real cause of the problem. Ensure that training is the proper solution to that problem. It may be; it may not be. If training is a solution, go forth and conduct an appropriate training program. If training is not the solution, talk to your MIC about what you found and make recommendations to solve the problem by means other than training. Refer to diagram.

**Four kinds of problems have been identified: systemic problems, organizational problems, motivational problems, and skill problems.**

**systemic problems:** A systemic problem is related to the way in which a system works, whatever that way may be. For example, a organization had a backlog of executives awaiting promotion. This bottleneck caused a problem. The movement of these executives into Managerial positions was slow due to budget constraints placed on the Modernization and Associated Restructuring (MAR). Training can not solve systemic problems like this one.

**organizational problems:** Organizational problems lie in the way an office or program is organized. For example, the MIC insists that he/she make all administrative and public relations decisions for the office. This approach tends to cause delays in some of the routine administrative functions within the office, particularly when the MIC is out of the office. The problem in this situation is organizational, a lack of delegation of authority by the MIC. In general, problems like this are not solved by training programs. However, a training seminar on delegation for the MIC may be part of the solution.

### Training Problems



***motivational problems:*** Trainers are sometimes asked to motivate employees. Employee motivation is not a training function; it is a supervisory function. Also remember that true motivation comes from within, not from external factors. Training may be part of the solution to a motivation and morale problem, but it alone will not create motivation. The supervisors and MIC needs to be trained first to gain skills in motivating others.

***skills problems:*** Skills problems fall into the domain of training. The aim of training is to change the way a trainee does something, i.e., create a change in his/her knowledge or skill level. Identifying what skills need to be changed is a primary concern of needs analysis. This kind of problem is a training issue.

**The bottom line:** when solving problems, ensure that training is really the right solution to the stated problem before developing and conducting any training.

Ask yourself these 3 basic questions such as:



- Who is to be trained?
- What will the training consist of?
- Why is training needed?

## Training Need Categories

One way to review office operations for potential training topics is to examine these operations in terms of five categories of training needs listed by Rae (1992):

- newcomers to an organization
- a change in work within an office
- improvement of a poor performer
- developmental requirements
- consideration of a potential promotee

Let's examine each of these categories individually and define what each category refers to.

- ***newcomers to a organization:*** When a new employee arrives at an office, he/she needs to become acquainted with the duties and responsibilities of his/her new position. This may require a formal training program for personnel new to an organization; or it may be as simple as a good orientation for someone transferring in from another part of the organization. In any case, don't overlook the need for training as part of a new employee orientation program.
- ***a change in work within an office:*** Change is a constant part of any business. Some changes evolve slowly while other changes arrive suddenly. These changes may include things such as a formal business re-organization, new tasks, new equipment, or new software. These types of change require training and will probably be the biggest source for new or continuing training requirements.
- ***improvement of a poor performer:*** Occasionally inefficient, ineffective or incorrect performance by an employee requires a change in the way an employee does something. Training may be the vehicle used to make this change easier. Identification of the need for this type of training is not always easy.
- ***developmental requirements:*** Many employees seek tasks or knowledge that go well beyond their basic job requirements. These desires are referred to as their self-actualization or self-development needs. Supervisors can often help motivate employees by helping them satisfy these needs through training.
- ***consideration of a potential promotee:*** In some organizations training is provided as part of an internal advancement program. This training encourages personnel to seek higher levels of authority and responsibility, as well as provide some of the skills needed for these higher positions.

## The Types of Training Need Analysis

Many needs assessments are available for use in different employment contexts. Sources that can help you determine which needs analysis is appropriate for your situation are described below.

- **Context Analysis.** An analysis of the business needs or other reasons the training is desired. The important questions being answered by this analysis are who decided that training should be conducted, why a training program is seen as the recommended solution to a business problem, what the history of the organization has been with regard to employee training and other management interventions.
- **User Analysis.** Analysis dealing with potential participants and instructors/trainers involved in the process. The important questions being answered by this analysis are who will receive the training and their level of existing knowledge on the subject, what is their learning style, and who will conduct the training.
- **Work analysis.** Analysis of the tasks being performed. This is an analysis of the job and the requirements for performing the work. Also known as a task analysis or job analysis, this analysis seeks to specify the main duties and skill level required. This helps ensure that the training which is developed will include relevant links to the content of the job.
- **Content Analysis.** Analysis of documents, laws, procedures used on the job. This analysis answers questions about what knowledge or information is used on this job. This information comes from manuals, documents, or regulations. It is important that the content of the training does not conflict or contradict job requirements. An experienced worker can assist (as a subject matter expert) in determining the appropriate content.
- **Training Suitability Analysis.** Analysis of whether training is the desired solution. Training is one of several solutions to employment problems. However, it may not always be the best solution. It is important to determine if training will be effective in its usage.
- **Cost-Benefit Analysis.** Analysis of the return on investment (ROI) of training. Effective training results in a return of value to the organization that is greater than the initial investment to produce or administer the training.



## Training Needs Methodology

Mager (1984) describes a number of procedures that can assist a trainer in determining whether deficiencies exist. Five of these procedures are briefly described below. Only the first two, however, will routinely help a trainer during the needs analysis process. Refer to diagram for collecting information using various sources.

### a. Performance Analysis

"The performance analysis is used to determine **why people** aren't doing something they are supposed to be doing, or why they are doing something they shouldn't be doing." This analysis looks for the difference between actual performance and a desired performance.

### b. Critical Incident Analysis

Critical incident analysis tries to answer the question: "What isn't happening according to expectation?" This process attempts to identify deviations from normal performance with an objective of returning things to normal operation. This type of approach might be used to focus on the cause of a series of accidents.

### c. Task Analysis

Task analysis breaks down large tasks into small, step-by-step components so that each component can be taught as a separate step. This approach is useful for teaching people how to operate a piece of equipment such as a computer. Each step is fairly simple and easily learned, but must be combined with other steps to accomplish the primary task. This process is not a needs analysis method.

### d. Target Population Analysis

The objective of target population analysis is to not teach people what they already know. With "careful examination of the characteristics (abilities, education, interests, biases, experience) of those for whom the instruction is intended ... it is possible to select instruction for any individual by subtracting what the individual knows from what the individual needs to know." The bottom line: match the training to the needs of the individual. This process is more important in training design and development than in needs analysis.

### e. Learning Outcome Analysis

"The function of Learning Outcome Analysis is to define the indefinable, to make tangible the intangible - to help you say what you mean by your important but abstract goals ... to identify the main performances that go to make up the meaning of the goal and Learning Outcomes." For example, how do you measure someone who should "develop proper customer attitude"? This analysis is a tool for design and development of training material.

**Needs Assessment Matrix**

TYPE OF INFORMATION	SOURCES OF INFORMATION		
	OBSERVATIONS	INTERVIEW	DOCUMENTATION
AUDIENCE	Observe in work environment.	Interview audience or supervisors.	Review employee files or personnel records.
TASKS	Observe audience or expert performing.	Interview expert or other performers.	Review job descriptions, policy statements, and trouble reports.
CONTENT	Observe expert or creators of product/process.	Interview SMEs, policymakers, marketers, or managers.	Review product plans, specifications, and marketing guidelines.

## How do I collect info for a training needs assessment?

When conducting a training needs assessment, gather information that will help you identify the most effective solution.

The following techniques will help you get the information you need:

- Interview employees
- Interview customers
- Conduct surveys
- Observe the workplace
- Read documents relevant to job



### The Training Need Cycle

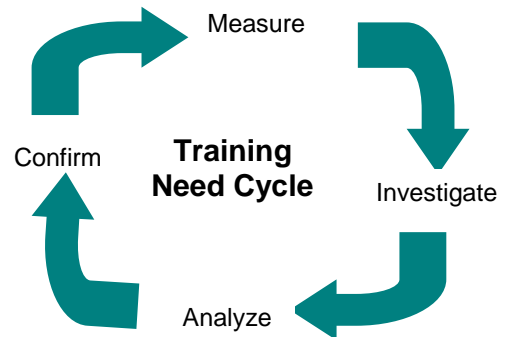
#### Measurement

This is a 'store review' using a critical area checklist developed in conjunction with your management and staff. It identifies what is happening now and compares it with what should be happening and determines gaps using the store objectives, performance standards and staff appraisals as the basis.

#### Investigation

Once performance gaps are identified from the measurement stage they are investigated to gather more specific and detailed information. The investigation uses a combination of methods which could include:

- Observation
- Interviews
- Questionnaires
- Performance appraisals
- Skills audits



#### Analysis

Once information is collected and investigated as to what types of issues or problems exist, analysis is made to determine causes including skill or knowledge deficiencies, equipment issues or systems and procedure issues.

#### Confirmation

Once analyzed a full report is developed outlining findings, training requirements based on competency deficiencies and possible solutions to any other non-training issues.

## How is a training needs assessment performed?

There are several techniques that can be utilized individually or in combination with each other. More than one tool should be considered to get a better view of the big picture, however, which tools are used should be left up to company.

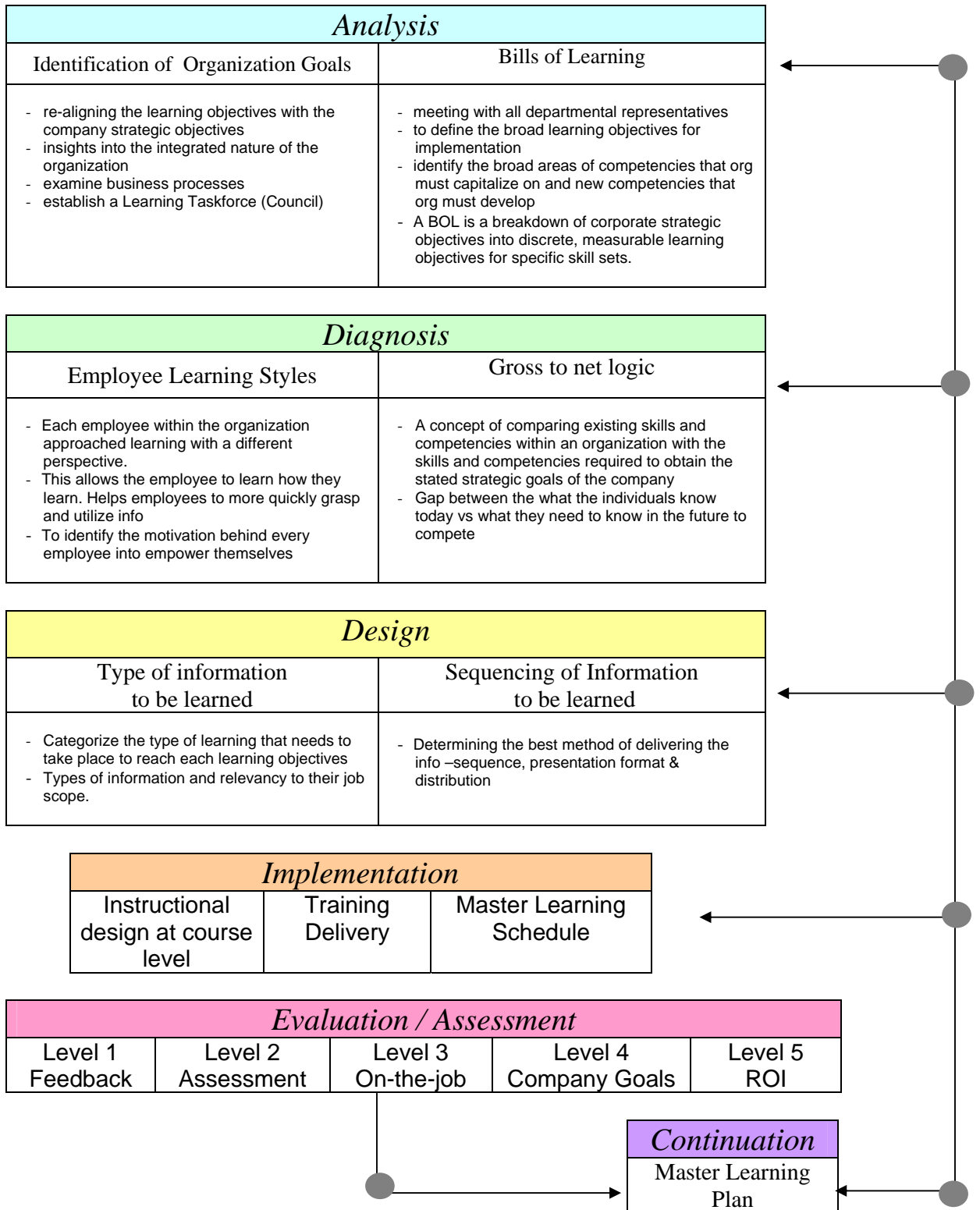
- ***Meet with management.*** Since most line managers are involved with the planning of projects and the future of the company, they know what will be needed. They should be able to communicate where their employee's current abilities lie and what is needed to get them to the next level for new projects on the horizon.
- ***Meet with employees.*** Discuss what struggles they may be facing from day-to-day and what would make their job easier and more efficient. Remember to keep them focused on what they need rather than what they want.
- ***Conduct surveys.*** Surveys are beneficial because many people can be polled in a short period of time. Additionally, surveys provide employees with the opportunity to confess a need on paper that they may be too embarrassed to admit needing in a face-to-face meeting. Surveys should take the form of a questionnaire and can include close-ended or open-ended questions, or a series of both. Close-ended questions require the respondent stay within certain perimeters set by the person who created the survey. Being that the answers are limited, tabulating the data is simple. Open-ended questions allow an employee to provide more feedback and introduce new ideas that may not have been considered initially, although tallying the results may be more difficult. A good option during the creation of a survey would be to include a combination of both close-ended and open-ended questions.
- ***Conduct focus groups.*** Focus groups allow for small group interaction, allowing the assessor to uncover details about their target audience. Brainstorming is encouraged allowing for an exchange of new ideas and a revelation of what training may be needed. They should be at least ninety minutes long to initially break the ice and for participants to become comfortable enough to express their thoughts. Depending on time limits, focus groups can be held once or repeatedly.
- ***Review company goals and mission statement.*** A brief review of the company's past and where they are headed for the future may reveal valuable information for training. A comparison should be made of what employees are currently doing and what will be expected of them as the company continues to grow and change.

## In Conclusion

**Analysis:** *The study we do in order to figure out what to do.* - Allison Rossett & Kendra Sheldon (2001)

Needs analysis is the first and most important step in any training process. If there is no training need, there is no need for training. In these days of tight fiscal and temporal budgets, organizations must make optimum use of its training time and resources. This means that important training needs must be identified up front so that these resources can be best utilized. Diagram on the next page coins the whole process on Learning-Training Requirement Model.

## Learning Requirement Planning Model



## Further Resources

Training Needs Analysis Forms

Performance Appraisal with Needs Forms

Staff Training Survey

Training ROI templates

And many more articles and resources **available** at [www.hrd-coach.net](http://www.hrd-coach.net) and [www.learners-coach.net](http://www.learners-coach.net)

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