

ST APPOINTMENTS

MAKING OPPORTUNITIES KNOCK ON YOUR DOOR

Staff Training - Make vs. Buy?

By Ben Manickam

Visionary companies are characterized by a strong emphasis on streamlined training for optimal staff performance. But should these training programs be outsourced or handled internally? Or should it be a mix of both? These are questions that heads of HR departments grapple with. These are both important and difficult questions. Important - because it has to do with the organizations

vital asset - its people. Difficult - because both options present distinct advantages and disadvantages. Certain initial questions must be considered when exploring organizational training. Is the organization at ground-level zero? Have training been assessed comprehensively? How many staff members need training? Do in-house materials exist that can be reproduced? Will class room training (C-learning) prove to be the best channel of delivery? Or should it include internet- and intranet-based training?

Time

Another aspect that needs to be considered is the time required to design, revise and produce effective training programs from zero. If management is pressed for time and external consultants can meet your needs, it will of course save time to retain their services rather than "reinventing the wheel". On the other hand, customized outsourced products can increase the organizations time commitment considerably. For instance, consultants can often do the "couture" for you, but they face the challenge of acquiring extensive company and employee job-role knowledge...this adds more time. The brighter side of course is that working with an expert who specializes in designing quality improvement curricula, with considerable experience, knowledge, and previous project experience etc. means minimizing organizational time investment.

carefully screened public workshops. When considering a large number with a continuous learning plan it may be more cost effective to develop the organizations own in-house program with consultant-led guidance and train-the-trainer programs. On the other hand, top Management would often require outsider-credibility or when a large group of senior executives need to be trained promptly an outsourced program may work best.

we do it this way" question.

Advantage of In-house trainers
 Reduced costs
 Excellent understanding organizational history, culture, politics etc.
 Safety of sensitive information
 Freedom to discuss issues with peers - Transparency
 Greater flexibility when scheduling training programs.

Other factors

Apart from time and quantity the following factors need to be considered when making the decision to make or buy:

- (1) Credentials and credibility - the trainer's expertise, professional involvement, bona fides, real life experience in industry reference from clients and confidentiality of issues discussed at training sessions etc.
- (2) Training philosophy - ethical standards and core values maintained by trainer? Any misalignment between organizational mission and vision? Will sensitive information/documents of the organization be treated in confidence? Is the trainer committed to seeing long term change? Is staff treated with dignity and respect during sessions?
- (3) Delivery method - techniques and methodology used? Is there an emphasis on learning as opposed to teaching?

Several researchers including Malcolm Knowles have noted that many principles of learning are based on Pedagogy (how children learn) and not on Andragogy (how adults learn). Adults learn differently and professional trainers need to bear this in mind when developing training programs. The works of Professor Howard Gardner of Harvard University on Multiple Intelligences (MI) and David Kolb on the diverse ways adults learn need to be woven into the training program.

- (4) Content - Is it relevant and up to date? Is staff being exposed to the latest trends and futuristic issues in the industry? Are the cognitive, affective and behavioral dimensions of learning (Desimone, 2002) covered?
- (5) Results - how will results of the training be measured? Training programs need to go beyond the "feel good" state. How are they tied in with ROI, productivity and performance? How frequently will evaluations be conducted?
- (6) Support - are the trainers available for help with implementation, follow up, continuous advice etc. In short, is there a long term commitment to the wellbeing of the organization?

Advantages of external trainers Staff has the opportunity to receive from the best experts in the field of training.

Value addition to the organization through new perspectives, the trainers unmatched experiences, etc. Borrowing from the popular Asian advertisement, "organizations may know where they are headed, but trainers can help them see what's around the corner"

External trainers have the edge in getting staff to engage in "Kaleidoscope thinking"

the approach made famous by Rosabeth Moss Kanter of Harvard Business School. They can play the role of the "outsider" who can help change the existing paradigm. As Joel Barker (2002) points out, due to "operational naivete" these "outsiders" do not know what cannot be done and therefore are not limited in their ideas.

"Detecting blind spots - archaic and irrelevant policies and procedures that are assumed as right by the organization, are bound to catch the attention of an outside trainer. A learning organization that never tires of asking "how can we do it better?" will find this aspect valuable in outside trainers. Outside trainers are in a better position to ask the "why do

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