Value of Training

EHRD 612: Training & Development

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Introduction

Training has played a fundamental role in organizations for centuries, and continues to be an integral part of business strategy today. Members of the business world understand the importance of developing their workforce in order to stay abreast of the competition in a rapidly growing economy. Noe (2010) states "companies are experiencing great change due to new technologies, rapid development of knowledge, globalization of business, and development of e-commerce" (p.4). Therefore, organizations must invest in improving the skills set and knowledge base of their employees by continuously providing structured and purposeful training. Swanson (2007) proposes that the goal of training is to improve performance by identifying performance deficiencies and tactically designing programs to address those needs. While plenty of literature supports organizational training efforts, few have drawn sufficient attention to the importance of strategic training.

Noe and Swanson are among the select scholars who have placed heavy emphasis on purposeful training efforts. Both authors argue the need for businesses to align training efforts to business goals, because while some training programs may be useful not all of them are directed at improving performance gaps. For example, members of an organization may express a high interest in a training program designed to enhance communication skills. However, if communication is not currently a performance deficiency within the organization, and more serious skill and knowledge gaps exist, it would be ineffective for the organization to invest time and money in conducting a training course to improve communication skills. Swanson (2007) states "money spent hastily on programs based on erroneous assumptions yields very little for the organizations and the individuals participating in them (p.3). Because resources are scarce, organizations must use them wisely and tactically choose what programs to invest in.
Reading Reflections

The readings this week served as a refresher; they brought to mind once again why training is vital to organizational growth and development, what type of trainings are most effective, and some of the fundamental theories used in performance improvement and program design. In the Noe (2010) readings, the chapter I found to be most valuable was chapter two, because I am a strong advocate for strategic training. While many organizations know and understand the definition of training (as discussed in chapter one) and base their training efforts on credible learning and program design theories (as described in chapter four), few understand the characteristics that distinguish good training from effective training!

Noe describes strategic training as a learning-focused effort that is aimed at improving organizational performance. He places particular emphasis on continuous learning and knowledge sharing. The more organizations encourage their employees to infuse their daily work routines with the things they learned in training, the greater the likelihood that knowledge, skills, and work processes learned will be retained. Furthermore, knowledge sharing increasing the competitive advantage of organizations by allowing employees to share knowledge gained through personal experiences; this sort of information can be incredibly useful and is difficult for competing organizations to learn and imitate.

Another key characteristic of strategic training is to identify and collect metrics that show training success. In the five years I have spent studying Human Resource Development (HRD), it has become increasingly evident that one of the greatest flaws in organizational training efforts is the failure to measure the success of the training. Management hardly ever follows up on the impact training had, the value it added to the organization, and whether or not it was effective. Strategic training, however, ensures that "training and development activities actually attribute to
business goals" (Noe, 2010, p. 67) by developing metrics that will assess the effectiveness of training and use feedback from employees to improve future training initiatives.

The Swanson (2007) readings put into perspective the concept of performance improvement. The whole point of providing training is to improve performance so that the organization can better meet its business goals. The interesting thing about this book is that I read it recently this summer for a Training Task Analysis course; so much of the information is still fresh in my head. The concept that fascinates me the most about this book is actually not one that was heavily discussed in the chapters assigned for this week, but it was covered briefly in chapter two. The concept I am referring to is the systems model of performance improvement.

This model encourages organizations to view the organization as a system and to understand performance improvement as an effort that influences the overall work flow process. Swanson (2007) states that viewing the organization from a systems perspective can "help prevent professionals from thinking and acting simply and mechanically" (p.27). In other words, organizations who apply this theory do not consider performance deficiencies in isolation; rather they consider the bigger picture and look for potential causes in the break of a system flow by analyzing all of the system relationships and their potential influence on the deficiency at hand.

For example, assume a department within an organization is failing to meet its monthly goals. One could examine areas in that department to determine possible causes for the performance gap; such as assessing the involvement and assistance provided by management, the tools and resources provided, or even assessing employee motivation and morale. However, reviewing the performance issue at the departmental level only can provide limiting results and insight into the true source of the problem. Perhaps the issue is truly stemming from the fact that
the goals provided to this department by company director are not feasible. This is why it is important for organizations to analyze and diagnose performance issue on a much larger scale.

**Discussion Reflections**

Everyone learns and processes information differently, that is why I can always appreciate an intellectual conversation about class readings. The discussions for this week helped me consider how other people in this class have interpreted and applied the materials in this module. It was interesting to see what other students thought about the readings and how they felt it could be applied in their career fields. One thing that surprised me was how diverse our class is in terms of careers. I'm not sure why I figured that everyone in the HRD program would be professionals in the field of HR.

As I read through discussion posts this week, I realized many of my peers work outside the realm of HR; yet they still find significant use for HR practices and theories in their jobs! This made me realize that HRD values are applicable across all fields. It was also interesting to see the varying views on which learning theories were the most valuable and to see how each classmate argued their views. This reminded me that organizations are ran by people; and that every person has a different learning style and preference which inevitably influences the way they run the organization. That is, in part, why organizations today are so diverse!

The learning styles inventory was refreshing; it's always fun to engage in an interactive activity that is relevant to course material. The survey was new to me, though the results didn't surprise me. It was interesting however, to read about the varying learning styles among classmates. It again, serves as an important reminder that organizations are made up of diverse people just like this class! This is something critical to keep in mind when designing training.
Implications for Practice

I could not have taken this course at a better time! I was recently hired as an HR specialist for the Civilian Personnel Advisory Center (CPAC) at Fort Bliss. My organization has recently undergone reorganization and we were divided into two teams. One is called the production team and the other is the Training and Special Projects team, which I have been assigned to. In addition to our regular staffing duties, our team coordinates and conducts all organizational training activities and special projects.

Our team was recently assigned a customer service improvement project by our headquarters and have been meeting weekly to discuss training initiatives to improve the quality of our customer service. I am proud to say that many of the tips I have given at these meetings have come directly from what I have learned in my course readings. I feel that my input has been valuable given that it stems from scholarly work and not just ideas I make up. My teammates were impressed with the level and quality of information I contributed for our project, which reminded me the value a good education has on one's career!
References
