

Train, Measure, Succeed

Using Impact on Business to Validate Training Efforts



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Introduction

In today's competitive global business environment, a company must remain current with new technology and improved processes for completing tasks. A decade ago, it was fine if a company completed jobs the same way they had always done them because there was enough business to go around. But now, with increasingly fierce competition and demanding customers, that attitude decreases the chance of sustainability. "The way we have always done it" inevitably leads to complacency and opportunities lost to your competitors.

In my career, I have traveled the world consulting with businesses about the way they train their employees. When discussing this with an employee, my favorite question to ask is, "Why are you doing it that way?" And no matter what country I am in, no matter what job level I am speaking to, the overwhelming majority of the time the answer is: "That's the way I've always done it."

This paper is about questioning the attitude of "*That's the way we've always done it.*" In manufacturing, we are always looking for a better way to produce parts. From the days of inventing the assembly line to the invention of the CNC machine, our industry has evolved. Yet, when it comes to training our employees, we simply accept the status quo.

The old saying "If it's not broken, don't fix it" does not apply to our current economic environment. It is absolutely necessary to adapt and change to be competitive in a global manufacturing market. In this paper, I will be making the case for the importance of training, as well as the components of a good training program. I will also address training metrics as well as how best to communicate results.

Five Main Benefits of Training

When investigating workforce development options, you should be looking for the impact training will have on not only the individual, but the organization as a whole. In what ways will the training benefit the individual being trained? In what ways will the training benefit the bottom line? There are five main areas where training programs can make a significant, improved difference within an organization:

- Improved Skills
- Reduced Supervisory Time
- Risk Management
- Succession Planning
- Enhanced Morale

Improved Skills – The goal of a training program, by definition, is to improve skill levels. Each employee should be enrolled in a program that will increase knowledge and abilities within specialized skill sets relating to his or her career path. This knowledge can lead to higher productivity and a better ability to anticipate problems.

Reduced Supervisory Time – Once employees have increased their skill sets and feel that they are a true part of the company, it is easy to understand how supervisory time can be reduced. Managers no longer need to solve simple problems – they can spend their time focused on meeting the strategic goals of the organization.

Risk Management – There are many liabilities within a company when it comes to safety, harassment and discrimination. Proper training programs can mitigate these liabilities through increased awareness. For example, many companies will train their employees on workplace-related safety topics each year to certify them and to establish a culture that assists with risk management.

Succession Planning – Companies that look to grow should also look to add “bench strength.” This simply means that the company will need qualified employees to take over leadership roles within the

organization in the future. A robust training program helps to secure employees' loyalty and knowledge for a more seamless transition into key positions down the road.

Enhanced Morale – Every employee wants to feel valued. Companies commonly invest in capital equipment, machine maintenance and even building improvements but seem to be reluctant to invest in their most valuable resource – their workforce. Training programs enhance employee morale by showing a commitment to their development. This investment is crucial to company growth in the future. Companies need to understand that training is one of the easiest ways to show employees that they are valuable.

These five benefits of training can be recognized once you've made the decision to invest in your employees. For example, Company A, a US based manufacturer of air-worthy parts for the aerospace industry, has seen immediate impacts on their business because of a structured training program, including Toolingu.com. The pressure to produce parts within very tight tolerances means that Company A must always be on the leading edge of technology. Because of this strict adherence to quality, the management was very aware that they had to keep their employees well trained to continue to position the company as an industry leader. When the training program was launched, Company A immediately reaped the benefits. The employees showed increase morale and willingness to go further to get the job completed through voluntarily working overtime. In addition, and maybe most importantly, the training improved employee skills, which assisted the company to stay an industry leader.

The Training Process

When a company decides to implement a training program, it is extremely important for key stakeholders to realize that a proper training program requires a process. Plus, this process is not simple, and skipping steps will make the success of the training program quite difficult. During this process, there must be goal setting, measurement of results in relation to the goals and succinct communication of the results.

If you are considering a training program, you must first and foremost set concrete goals. These goals must address the needs of both the individual and the organization. Each goal should be “S.M.A.R.T”– Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely. Often, goal setting is questioned as to why it is needed or the goal stated is not the goal that is pursued. Goal setting is needed on both short-term and long-term timeframes to benchmark progress. These goals will help companies determine “root” problems within the company.

Once the goals have been set, the company can begin to objectively look for training solutions that will accomplish the previously set goals. There are many decisions that need to be made by an organization when deciding what type of training program is most suitable. Decisions need to be made in such areas as mode of delivery (face-to-face, online), frequency of delivery (daily, weekly and monthly) and topics to be addressed. These areas can all be refined to make sure that the training goals are met.

Once goals have been set and the training program is selected and launched, the effort of the organization should then focus on the next step of a training program – measurement. At this point in the process, you must decide what measurements are critical. As Bersin and Associates documents:

“Most learning and training organizations measure and report those items that are generally uninteresting to the business – completions, enrollments, satisfaction, student hours and compliance. Although these are most easily measured by the learning organization, they have little or no actionable value to the business. Does it address the effectiveness and efficiency of delivering the learning solution? It probably does not. Does it assess the impact on the learner to perform their job or improve business performance? It really does not.”

So what do you want to measure? Ideally what needs to be measured is the effect of training on each person's job, the training's business impact, and its correlation to business metrics.¹

The last, but possibly most important step in the training process is how the results are communicated throughout the organization. You absolutely must know your audience and what type of results are important to them. In addition, open communication within the organization is essential to the training program's success. If the training program was openly discussed early on, each of the stakeholders should have addressed their concerns and goals for the program. The people leading the training effort need to understand how to speak the language of business. Even though terms like "enrollments" and "completions" are important to the HR and Training divisions, they are not necessarily important to C-Level executives who are controlling the budget. Or to business-line executives who care more about what their employees thought about the training. These conversations demand knowledge of your audience. For business-line executives, you need to address consumption, attendance and satisfaction and for the C-Level, you need to trace everything back to the big three – profitability, productivity and revenue growth.

There are great examples for illustrating the effectiveness of how following a clear and explicit training process can lead to training successes. Company B is regulated by the FDA and was required to do training to maintain certifications needed for business. The company was able to effectively utilize a training program because they followed the steps necessary for success. They were very aware that they needed to set goals that tied in directly with the company business objectives, and by doing so at the beginning of the program, they set up the program for success. They had conversations with the key stakeholders at the company and thus knew exactly what needed to be communicated as the training was conducted. At Company B the business-line executives were able to document what training the employees took and whether it was satisfactorily completed. Whereas the C-level executives traced the training conducted back to the reduction of down time and thus higher profitability.

Conclusion

Training is essential to the success of a company. But how a training program is developed determines the impact the training has on the individual and the company. Successful training requires diligence and going through steps that are crucial and that cannot be skipped. The company must be willing to invest time to train, then measure and communicate training results throughout the organization.

References

¹ <http://www.berzin.com/>



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