

## 9.11: Training and Professional Development

### Learning Objectives

- Describe different approaches to employee training
- Describe different approaches to professional development



Figure 9.11.1: A medieval baker with his apprentice

In the late Middle Ages, craft guilds allowed master craftsmen to employ young people as an inexpensive form of labor in exchange for food, lodging, and formal training in the craft. Consequently, if a young man or woman wanted to obtain skills as a craftsman, he or she would spend at least seven years as an apprentice, supervised by a master craftsman before being released to work independently. Clearly the world of work has changed and so has the way that individuals obtain and hone their workplace skills.

**Training** is teaching, or developing in oneself or others, any skills and knowledge that relate to specific useful competencies. Training has specific goals of improving one's capability, capacity, productivity, and performance. In business, training is the investment of resources in the employees of a company so they are better equipped to perform their job. The types of resources invested may include time and money to develop, implement, and evaluate training programs.

### Benefits of Training

Training can be a source of a competitive advantage for a company. The primary benefit to the company is the result of an accumulation of smaller benefits. Training provides greater skill and knowledge to employees, which translate to improved job performance. Improved job performance, in turn, means greater efficiency, fewer errors, better productivity. The end result is reduced costs and higher profits. The company is not the only beneficiary of employee training, though; the employee can realize rewards, too.

The well-trained employee acquires an advantage for him- or herself. By participating in training, employees can deepen or expand their existing skill set and increase their understanding of the organization. In addition, a well-trained employee may be able to take advantage of internal promotion opportunities and becomes more marketable if he or she leaves the company. Other potential benefits are listed below:

- Increased job satisfaction and morale among employees
- Increased employee motivation
- Increased efficiencies in processes, resulting in financial gain
- Increased capacity to adopt new technologies and methods
- Increased innovation in strategies and products
- Reduced employee turnover
- Enhanced company image, e.g., building a reputation as a “great place to work”
- Risk management, e.g. training about sexual harassment, diversity training<sup>[1]</sup>

### Need for Training

The need for training exists in every business. However the nature of training varies depending on the type of business and operations involved. For example, a manufacturing company may have a need for technical skills training while an insurance company may emphasize customer service training. So, how does a company determine what sort of training is needed? The

process begins with a **training needs assessment**. A training needs assessment is a systematic and objective analysis of both the employee and organizational knowledge, skills, and abilities to identify gaps or areas of need.

Generally, training needs assessments are conducted as follows:

1. **Identify the need.** In this first step, the assessor looks for answers to questions such as: Why is the needs assessment being conducted? What is the desired result? What issues are trying to be addressed? Will training alone resolve the issues?
2. **Perform a gap analysis.** This involves comparing current knowledge, skills, and abilities against company standards. Training assessors may use HR records, interviews, questionnaires, or observation to identify gaps.
3. **Assess training options.** Once completed, the assessment will present a list of options for training that management can evaluate based on criteria such as cost and duration.

Not all training is the result of a needs assessment. Unforeseen circumstances may create an immediate need for training. For example, consider the Wells Fargo scandal of 2016, when it came to light that employees had secretly created millions of unauthorized bank and credit card accounts in order to generate bank fees and boost their sales figures. The bank fired 5,300 employees and had to put in place a rapid training and retraining program to mitigate the legal consequences of their employees' actions. Other situations that might compel a company to conduct impromptu training are changes in legal requirements, new regulations, natural disasters or other crises.

## Types of Training



The goal of training is for the trainee to acquire relevant knowledge, skills, and competencies from the trainer as a result of being taught vocational or practical skills. More generally, training is aimed at improving the trainee's capability, capacity, and performance.

Generally training is categorized as on-the-job or off-the-job:

**On-the-job training** takes place in a normal working situation, using the actual tools, equipment, documents, or materials that trainees will use once they are fully trained. On-the-job training is not limited to, but is most commonly used for, technical or skills training.

**Off-the-job training** takes place away from the normal work situation, and as a result, the employee is not a directly productive worker while such training takes place. Businesses often cite this as one of the disadvantages of off-the-job training. However, this type of training has the advantage of allowing people to get away from work and concentrate more thoroughly on the training itself. Off-the-job of training has proven very effective in helping people acquire and master new concepts and ideas.

## Professional Development

In addition to the basic training required for a trade, occupation, or profession, the labor market recognizes the need to continue training beyond initial qualifications in order to maintain, upgrade, and update skills throughout working life. This is known as professional development.

**Professional development** refers to skills and knowledge attained for both personal development and career advancement. Professional development encompasses all types of facilitated learning opportunities, ranging from college degrees and formal coursework to conferences and workshops.

Individuals who take part in professional development run the gamut from teachers to military officers. Individuals may pursue professional development because of an interest in lifelong learning, a sense of moral obligation, to maintain and improve professional competence, enhance career progression, keep abreast of new technology and practice, or to comply with professional regulatory organizations. In fact, there are many professions that have requirements for annual professional development to renew a license or certification, such as accountants, lawyers, and engineers.

There are a variety of approaches to professional development, including consultation, coaching, communities of practice, lesson study, mentoring, reflective supervision, and technical assistance. Professional development may include formal types of vocational education—typically post-secondary or technical training leading to a qualification or credential required to obtain or retain employment. Professional development may also come in the form of pre-service or in-service professional development programs. These programs may be formal or informal, group or individual. It's possible to pursue professional development on one's own, or through the company's human resource departments. Professional development on the job may develop or enhance “process skills”—sometimes referred to as leadership skills—as well as task skills. Some examples of process skills are effectiveness skills, team-functioning skills, and systems-thinking skills.

The twenty-first century has seen a significant growth in online professional development. Content providers have become well informed about using technology in innovative ways, incorporating collaborative platforms such as discussion boards and Wikis to maximize participant interaction. These content providers offer training on topics ranging from sexual harassment awareness to promoting diversity in the workplace. The ability to customize training for a business or industry has placed these providers in a position to supplement or even replace in-house training departments. Because businesses can purchase access on an as-needed basis for as many or as few employees as necessary, the cost of training is reduced. Thus, businesses can provide more training and professional development opportunities to their employees at reduced costs and at times that are more convenient for both the employer and employee.

### ? PPractice Questions

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Human resource management is all about increasing employee performance to their highest level corresponding to their role in the organization. Consequently, the importance of training to the organization and as a key function of HR management cannot be understated.

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1. Duening & Ivancevich, 2003 ↩

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