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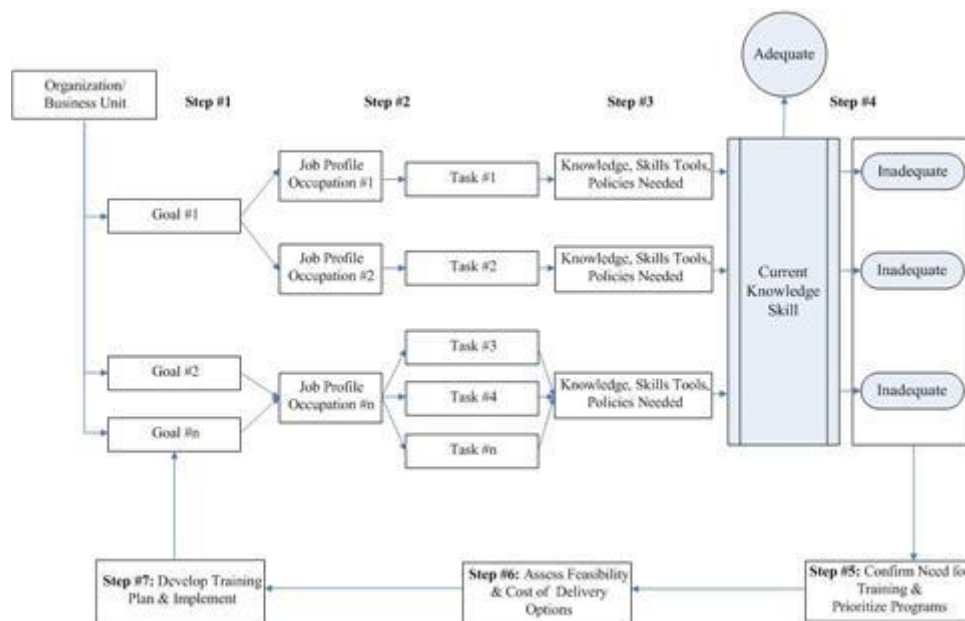
Seven Steps for Aligning Training with Organizational Goals

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According to CLO 2007 Business Intelligence Industry Report, "training can be considered an operating cost or a key component of the business plan. Where it falls depends largely on whether training is successfully aligned to the organization's strategy. To achieve this transformation from overhead expense to competitive advantage, learning activities must be clearly linked to business results." Moreover, the CLO study points out that the three biggest challenges to establishing and maintaining links between training and business objectives are:

- Demonstrating learning impact on organization's strategy
- Identifying, defining and implementing training strategy
- Getting executive level buy in

I am not sure why aligning training with organizational goals is perplexing – after all it is no different than the alignment of marketing, IT, as well as other support functions to business strategy. Once the business goals are clearly articulated and prioritized, it is a matter of identifying who needs to do what to achieve these goals, and whether they have the knowledge and skills to perform the tasks to the desired level. A graphical illustration is presented below. What remains is simple mathematics to identify actions that will generate the greatest impact. To illustrate, a seven-step approach is presented that will address the three challenges identified by the CLO study.



Step 1. Define and prioritize organization/units missions and goals. Although the primary objective of training is the development of skills, competencies and behaviors, ultimately, what counts is how these newly acquired skills will help the organization/units meet their

goals. Therefore, it is critical to understand the current priorities of your clients – i.e., business units. For example, “retain 90% of clientele” may be classified as critical (4), while “reduce employees turnover by 10%” may be classified as very important (3).

Step 2. Assess the impact of tasks on missions/goals. Once the missions/goals of the business unit have been documented and prioritized, tasks needed to achieve these goals should in-turn be identified, stated in measurable terms and prioritized. For example, to “retain 90% of clientele”, “Account Executives should consult with clients once every quarter to identify and satisfactorily address 95% of potential problems” and “Customer Service staff should communicate all customer complaints to Account Executives within 48 hours”. Since Account Executives tasks directly impact the goal, it can be classified as critical (4), while the Customer Service task may be classified as somewhat important (1).

The above ratings imply that to attain the goal “retain 90% of clientele”, the performance of both Account Executives and Customer Service groups should be improved. Moreover, Account Executives have four times the impact on “retaining clientele” as the Customer Service group.

Step 3. Uncover the required knowledge, skills and attitudes. The knowledge, skills and attitudes needed by each task should be identified. For example, consultation with clients may require “in-depth knowledge of the products key functions” as well as effective “communication skills” and “problem solving skills”; while communicating customer complaints to account executives may simply involve “summarizing customer’s complaint in a predefined form” and “forwarding form to account executives”.

Step 4. Identify knowledge/skill gaps. The knowledge and skill gaps for each group (Account Executives and Customer Service, for example) can be determined by comparing the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to adequately perform the tasks with the knowledge, skills and attitudes that each group currently possess.

Step 5. Confirm the need for training and prioritize solutions. Based on task’s Difficulty, Importance and Frequency, the DIF model may be used to determine whether training is needed, and to which extent. Since each training program addresses a specific knowledge/skill required by a specific task to attain a specific goal, in addition to aligning training with organizational goals, the relative importance of each training program can be easily established.

Step 6. Identify and cost plausible delivery options. For each training program, assess the feasibility and effectiveness of alternate delivery options in meeting organizational, learning and learners’ needs. Options that do not meet critical requirements or minimum conditions are eliminated, and the direct (out of pocket expense) as well as indirect (productivity loss) costs of plausible delivery options over life are forecasted.

Step 7. Prioritize activities and prepare a plan of action. The cost benefit ratio of each training program can be computed by simply dividing the impact by the costs. With this in hand, it is easy to compile, sort and compare the costs and benefits of training programs and allocate money and resources to initiatives that will generate the greatest at the lowest possible cost. Moreover, clients and executives will become more keenly aware of the value of the training.

Conclusion

While a certain level of subjectivity is inherent in the proposed approach, it is nevertheless based on scientific principles commonly used in making various investment decisions. Moreover, with this approach you can quickly realign training programs as the organization/units' priorities change, new initiatives (i.e., products and regulations) introduced and new business challenges arise. And if you are overwhelmed by this level of detail, don't despair ADVISOR Enterprise "Align Training with Organizational Goals" is available to guide through the process.

Contributions

Contributions, on what worked and didn't - including practical tips, advice, white papers, case studies, articles, reviews, online seminars, software tools and research reports - are welcomed. Please send to ✉bahlis@bnhexpertsoft.com. Full credit will be given to author.

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