

Is Training Necessary ... and Sufficient!



by

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Summary

“I need a training program on ...” the opening statement in what often turns out to be a costly, frustrating and unsuccessful campaign to achieve the desired performance. The rationale for training seems clear. We are implementing a new system, receiving too many complaints from our clients, not selling enough products, etc. On the other hand, several prominent researchers [Gilbert (1996), Harless (1975), Rummler and Brache (1996), and Robinson and Robinson (1998)] have demonstrated that most performance deficiencies in the workplace are due to environmental factors such as vague expectations, insufficient and untimely feedback, limited access to required information, inadequate tools, resources and procedures, inappropriate and counterproductive incentives, etc. Yet, when a performance gap occurs, the default intervention is all too often training – although it is much easier to fix the environment than people. To put it in simple terms – if the gap is not due to a lack of skills and knowledge, don't train! Moreover, even when you determine that training is necessary, is it sufficient? A one-shot training injection rarely works if it is not part of a total performance system.

ADVISOR P.I. – A Needs Assessment Tool to Improve Performance

ADVISOR P.I. is a decision support tool designed by BNH Expert Software. ADVISOR P.I. analyzes a performance deficiency, detects the source of the problem, identifies solutions – including training – that could produce the desired level of productivity, and recommends interventions to maximize your return on investment. ADVISOR P.I. is based on the published works of several experts in the field of Human Performance Technology. It uses a systematic process for improving performance in the workplace. A demo copy of ADVISOR P.I. can be downloaded from BNH's web site at <http://www.bnhexpertsoft.com>.

Biography

Dr. J. (Jay) Bahlis obtained his Bachelor in Engineering from Technical University of Nova Scotia and Ph.D. from McGill University. Since 1987, Dr. Bahlis assisted hundreds of organizations in evaluating their training programs, developing learning strategies and aligning learning with business goals. Moreover, Dr. Bahlis, evaluated a wide range of learning technologies, directed research projects on the application of adult learning theories in CBT/WBT courseware, and managed the design and development of needs assessment, media selection and return on investment (ROI) tools, learning investment management, authoring and testing systems as well as over 70 CBT/WBT courseware and electronic performance support systems (EPSS).

Introduction

With few exceptions, training is not the answer to most performance deficiencies. Baldwin and Ford, (1988) and later reconfirmed by Ford and Weissbein (1997) concluded that although American industries annually spend more than \$100 billion on training, not more than 10% of the expenditures actually result in transfer to the job. Broad and Newstrom (1992) observed that most of the knowledge and skills gained in training (well over 80% by some estimates) is not fully applied by employees on the job. And more recently, (Robinson, 1996) reported that on average, less than 30% of what people learn (in training) actually gets used on the job.

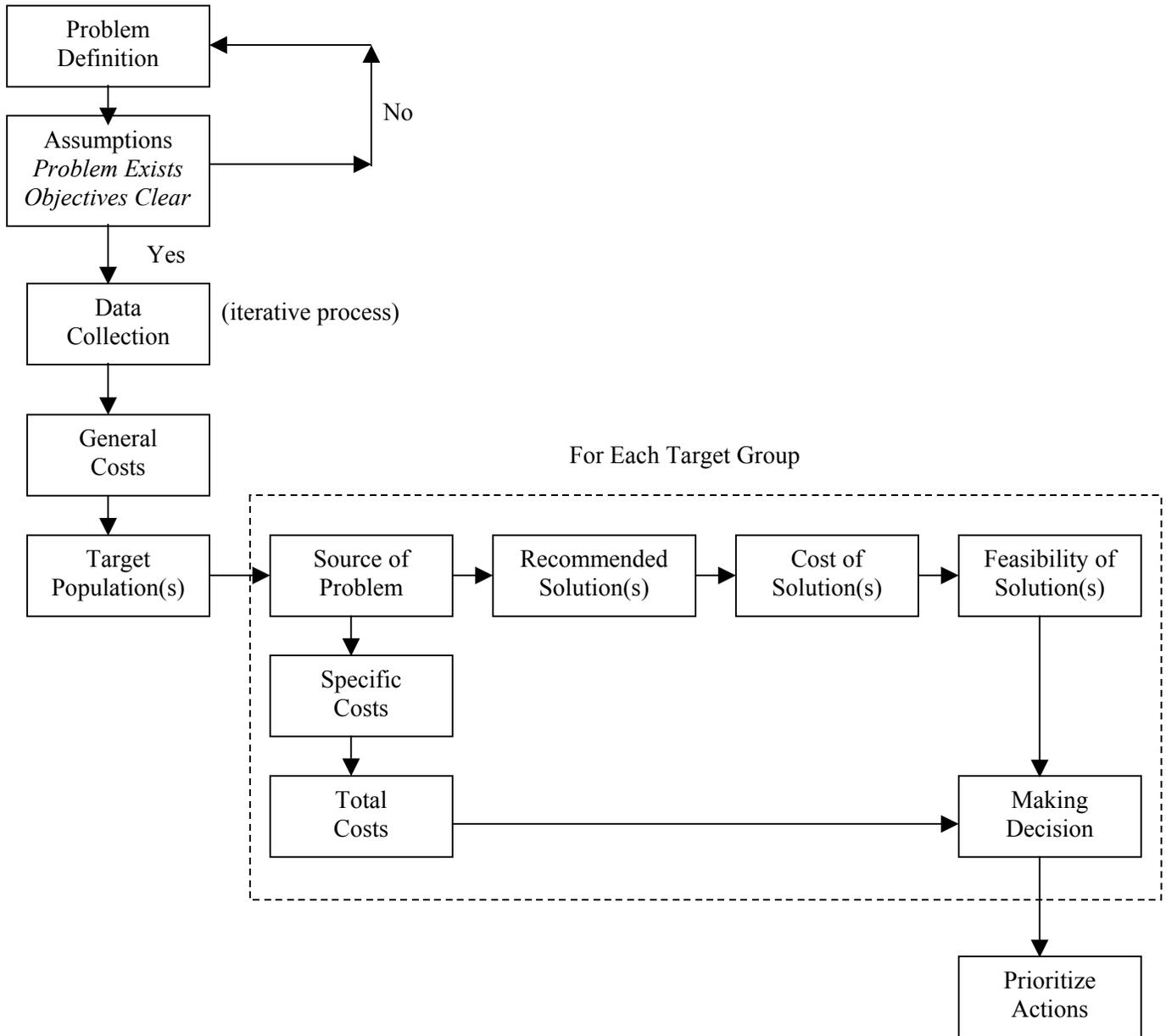
The phenomenon is due to many reasons including poor selection of persons to attend the training, lack of expectations set by supervisors on how training is to be applied on the job, lack of support back on the job, lack of post-training performance monitoring, lack of resources, lack of incentives to apply new skills and knowledge. The list goes on. Without a clear link between the performance deficiency and training program, and appropriate support, a one-shot training injection on its own, rarely works.

This paper presents the process used by ADVISOR P.I. for analyzing a performance deficiency to determine the source of the problem, as well as solutions – including training – that could produce the desired level of productivity and maximize your return on investment.

Analysis Process

ADVISOR P.I. conducts the analysis at two levels. At the macro level, ADVISOR P.I. focuses on actual versus desired performance (Problem Definition), feasibility of achieving desired goals (Assumptions), how the data will be collected (Data Collection), impact of problem on the organization (General Costs), and group(s) that contribute to the problem (Target Population(s)).

For each group, ADVISOR P.I. zeros in on the Source of the Problem, estimates the impact of the problem on each group (Specific Costs), conducts root cause analysis and recommends interventions (Recommended Solution(s)), estimates the costs of each intervention (Cost of Solution(s)), evaluates the feasibility of implementing each intervention (Feasibility of Solution(s)), compares the cost of the solution to potential gains and measures the return on investment (Making Decision). A schematic diagram of the process and a brief description of each module are presented below.



Step 1. Problem Definition - The first step is to identify who made the request for the analysis and for what reason. The analysis could be driven by a training mandate, a need to get acquainted with a new system or a decision to improve performance. Moreover, a combination of these factors might be operating.

Step 2. Assumptions – Based on circumstantial details about the employees, subject matter experts, and organizational constraints, ADVISOR P.I. evaluates the reliability of the needs analysis and generates a go/no go recommendation.

Step 3. Data Collection – Vital information required to pinpoint the performance deficiency and how the data will be collected, is indicated in this section. A large assortment of forms can be accessed and customized in order to simplify the acquisition of the information.

Step 4. General Costs – Once the impact of the problem on product development, public image, and legalities has been determined, the minimum (best-case scenario) and maximum (worst-case scenario) costs of the performance deficiency can be computed. Costs related to a specific group are not considered in this module. They are computed separately under the Specific Costs module for each target group. Moreover, you can classify the costs as direct (i.e., impact your operating budget) or indirect (impact resources within the unit or the organization).

Step 5. Target Population – Identification of personnel, who contribute to the performance deficiency, is essential for isolating the source of the gap between what exists and what is desired. All groups – including supervisors/managers they report to – that may contribute to the problem should be identified. Moreover, the percentage of the performance gap that each group is responsible for should be carefully estimated.

Step 6. For Each Target Population

Step 6a. Source of the Problem – This module brings the work environment of each target population into focus. By filling in relevant cells, the cause of the problem for each target population can be determined. There are many factors that can lead to a performance deficiency. They include employees' lack of knowledge and skills, misunderstanding of the job functions, misunderstanding of the rules and regulations, inability to use certain tools, conflicts with colleagues, limited access to feedback, and flawed hiring process. Furthermore, the trouble may not be related to the target group but to their supervisors. ADVISOR P.I. reports the results of this inquiry into the Recommended Solutions module.

Step 6b. Specific Costs – The cost of the problem for each target group is computed in this step. Considerations include loss of productivity, equipment maintenance and replacement, lost revenue, and hiring new employees. One or more of these criteria may be selected at the beginning of the module in order to compute the minimum and maximum costs specific to the group.

Step 6c. Total Costs – Are computed by adding the General Costs and the Specific Costs attributed to each target group. This provides the impact of the problem (best-case and worst-case scenarios) on each group of employees. The percentage of the General Costs allocated to a target group is equivalent to the contribution of that group to the performance problem.

Step 6d. Recommended Solutions – Offers a set of remedies derived from information gathered in the Source of the Problem module. The remedies include:

- Employee Training related to skill/knowledge, interpersonal skills, policies/procedures and/or tools.
- Supervisor/Management Training related to incentive system, performance policies, leadership skills and/or organizational skills.
- Task, Job and/or Organizational Re-design.
- Communication Plan to employees and/or supervisors/managers.
- Feedback related to work or interpersonal relationships.
- New/Improved Incentive System.
- New/Improved Policies/Procedures.
- New/Improved Tools.
- New/Improved Hiring Practices.
- Job Aids.

More importantly, the recommendations are rated, defended, and charted in terms of their power to bridge the performance gap.

Step 6e. Costs of Solutions – Allows the user to capture all costs pertaining to each remedy. It includes personnel time, lost opportunity, travel, development, facilities, equipment, and perpetuation.

Step 6f. Feasibility of Solutions – Assesses the feasibility and effectiveness of implementing proposed solutions. The attitudes and reactions of trainees, supervisors and management may influence the chances of success. Moreover, the feasibility analysis takes into consideration the availability of resources and compatibility with existing systems.

Step 6g. Decision-Making – The results for each target group are compiled in this module. For each solution, direct, indirect and hidden costs are computed and compared to potential savings. Up-front investment, potential savings, return on investment (ROI) and break-even points are calculated and presented in a graphical format. Solutions that provide the highest return on investment are given highest priority. In this section you will be able to weigh the alternatives and make an informed decision about the best intervention(s) for each target group.

Step 7. Summary – The results from all target populations are compiled and presented from three different perspectives. First, the top ten interventions are prioritized according to the ROI. The percentage of the problem resolved by each intervention, as well as the distribution of costs and savings generated by each of the top ten interventions are presented. Next, the percentage of the problem resolved by each target group, the distribution of cost and savings generated by each group is given. Finally, the percentage of the problem resolved by each type of solution, the distribution of costs and savings generated by each solution type is shown.

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