

# Where training fails, but learning pays



Training courses are largely ineffective and a waste of money. Yes, you read it right. Research shows we are lucky if we retain 10-20% of what we “learn” on a traditional training course. Research also shows that it takes around 21 days of conscious repetition for new behaviour to become permanent so how can we expect a one day training course to change someone’s behaviour on its own?

Now we are not saying that we should not train people. It has its place, as we shall see, but training can be expensive so we want to provoke your thinking with regard to the return on investment of training versus other ways of getting the best from your people.

There are things that can be done to improve the retention figure quoted above, thereby improving the likelihood that this will translate into improvements in job effectiveness, but let us first consider what we are trying to achieve.

## What are we trying to achieve?

If you think about some of the things you might like to change or improve about your employees these might include :

- productivity
- accuracy
- attendance
- working relationships
- time management
- customer contact
- delegation
- presentation skills
- etc

There are undoubtedly many training courses available that would appear to be able to offer a solution to all of these things. However, the danger with sending people on random training courses in the hope that they will come back “fixed” is that we waste their time and the company’s money.

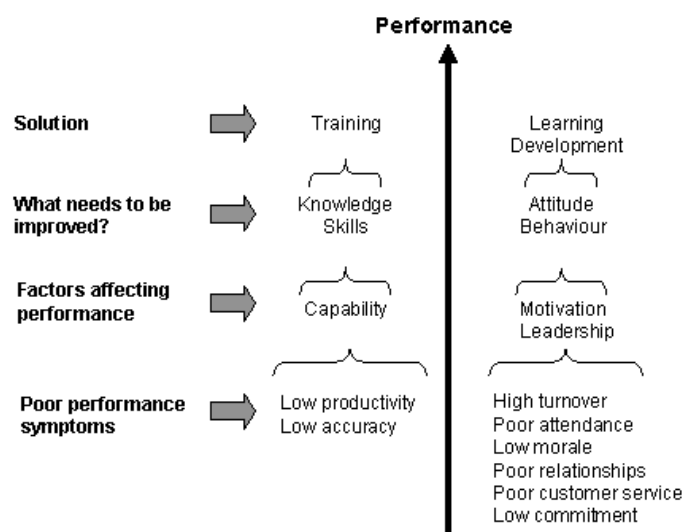
What we should really be concerned with is how to improve performance. The responsibility for achieving, improving or managing people performance is part of every manager’s job. Our challenge to you is that although training plays a part in improving performance, we should not ignore the manager’s responsibility to facilitate performance improvement through the ongoing learning and development of their people.

## Focussing on performance

It makes sense to first explore what things really impact on peoples’ performance before we consider how to improve it. The image to the right provides an overview of how these factors fit together.

When thinking about what makes people perform they need :

1. the capability to do the job
2. the motivation to do the job
3. leadership which encourages performance



Capability is about what someone knows and what they can do – their level of skill.

Motivation is a complex area and much work has been done. We do not intend to cover the research here, but essentially motivation is a combination of internal factors and external factors i.e. someone can be motivated to do a job by themselves or they can be motivated to do it by someone else. You can imagine that even though someone may have the capability to do a job, if they do not have the desire to do it, or at least do it with minimum error and maximum productivity, the end result will be poor.

Leadership has a massive impact on motivation. It can affect how someone approaches the job, i.e. their attitude and behaviour, and the output of the job. Again, much research has been done and I do not intend to cover theories of leadership.

### **Where does training fit?**

Training is appropriate at the capability level i.e. when someone does not know how to do a job fully. Of the list of poor performance symptoms above only productivity and error rate would be genuinely improved with training. Where other knowledge and skill areas impact job performance, e.g. presentation skills for a salesperson, then training may also be appropriate, but the key thing to focus on is whether or not training is really going to improve job performance. If someone's motivation to perform is low and their manager unsupportive they will continue to go off sick, make mistakes, give poor presentations etc.

### **Training versus learning and development**

Improvements in motivation and attitude are where training becomes less effective, but ongoing development can play a part. Development is not just a fancy name for training – it is a management or leadership responsibility. The difference is that whilst training is often initiated by the organisation, development is an ongoing process of learning where the employee values the benefits as much as the organisation does. Training helps people *do* better. Development is about helping people *be* better. It also makes them *feel* better about themselves and the organisation thereby improving their motivation and loyalty. The other benefit is that learning is free – it happens every day and all the time. We just need to put processes and a culture in place that help people continually learn and develop in their roles.

### **What does development involve?**

It can take many forms, some formal some less formal, but organisations who are serious about people development have one or more of the following processes in place. By formalising these processes it increases the likelihood that Managers will focus on development and it signals to the employee that the organisation is committed to helping them develop.

Appraisal – a simple mechanism to give employees feedback on what they have achieved, how they achieved it and how they can develop to achieve more in the future

Development Planning – can either be part of appraisal or a separate process. It is designed to focus people on where they need to develop and how they are going to do it.

Succession management – a business imperative as much as a developmental process. Organisations who do succession management well not only ensure they have a continuous supply of talent available to promote into more senior positions, they also focus on developing their best people and have a much higher chance of retaining them as a result.

### **Development as a leadership responsibility**

In addition to the processes outlined above, development focussed organisations also continually develop their leaders. Some managers are naturally people focussed and will do everything in their power to develop their people. However, ongoing leadership development is another must if businesses are to deliver results above and beyond the norm. As with other employees leaders may also lack capability e.g.

how to give feedback, how to conduct interviews etc., and these things are best developed with appropriate training.

The point of this article is that the impact on performance of any form of development, including training, is dependant upon the manager.

Training effectiveness is improved by :

- ensuring that training is used only when there is a capability issue
- follow-up with employees after the training to help them apply the training to their job

Development is most effective when :

- managers encourage their people to take charge of their own learning
- managers create an environment of high performance by providing good feedback to their people
- processes are put in place to support learning and development

By following this simple logic you may find yourself spending money on people development methods other than formal training. However, we guarantee that you will see a higher return on your investment as a result.