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A systematic approach to setting training priorities: creating a training framework

Here is an unfortunately real scenario:

An organisation highly dependent on 'human capability' under spent on management development. Poor managerial practices led to higher dissatisfaction and turnover. Consequently the total training budget (time and dollars) was adsorbed on replacing lost skills and experience, rather than increasing capability. With no resources left for improving management skills, the vicious cycle of turnover and replacement continued through a number of years.

An oversimplification of events, but only slightly. And this is a familiar scenario for organisations, particularly with decentralised training budgets, that see their scarce dollars ebb away on short term necessities rather than long term strategic aims.

Undeniably, an organisation caught in this trap is more likely to suffer from poor morale and will lack adaptability. It stands little chance of creating advantage through its people resources.

There are a number of elements needed to create a more effective training strategy. We have covered some in other articles, but this article concentrates on one tool in particular; the training framework. A framework is merely a tool to make sure that training activities are coordinated and guided by some sort of big picture or master plan.

Some organisations base their framework around a stepped series of training events, developed from a needs analysis. So there may be a hierarchy of supervisory and management programmes and perhaps an array of interpersonal and technical modules – often depicted on a training map. Expenditure is channelled through the various modules and individuals progress through modules based on their current need and their potential. Traditionally, large organisations such as banks and insurance companies have favoured this approach.

An alternative approach that Cadence has designed and implemented and which works well with organisations of various sizes is shown in the Figure 1 overleaf. This approach focuses on the types of need (the left hand column) rather than the training solution (a hierarchy of courses, for example).

The Cadence framework does not assume that a course is the answer to all skills gaps. In fact a major use of the framework is to use the trigger points (left columns) to concentrate design effort on workplace resources that managers and staff can use to minimize off-job time and money. These resources may require some expenditure to create (often not much) but are durable and can be used again and again, lowering the ongoing cost.

The framework can also be used to concentrate senior management attention to decide where they want to concentrate effort in the coming year (e.g., on raising standards or on management development). Sometimes, by splitting the total training budget into smaller pots, it is easier to direct the money in each pot – and to see if overspend on

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expedient 'fire fighting' is eroding the ability to deliver on more important needs in a more strategic area. If the budget is insufficient for the aims, the framework will make it easier to pinpoint the gap, and perhaps help justify more funds, more realistic management aims, or better discipline to deal with ad hoc training requests.

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Figure 1: Cadence Training Framework

<i>When training may be needed</i>	<i>Triggers to identify the specific need</i>	<i>Who should do this</i>	<i>What sort of needs are likely to come up</i>	<i>How should these be addressed</i>
Induction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment • Job & person specification • Pre-employment testing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manager, HR & new staff member 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Company knowledge, culture, plans • HR & managerial processes • Job specific technical skills • Office procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job & induction kits • Induction courses • Coaching, buddying & mentoring • Job aids
Development within the job to 'get up to speed'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation by manager • Development plans • Promotion decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manager 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical • Interpersonal, political or managerial skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coaching, mentoring, off-job training, supervised projects / delegations • Job aids
Development within the job to 'raise the standard' - excel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance review & development plans • Managerial observation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manager & staff member 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical • Interpersonal, political or managerial skills • Skills to coach / mentor others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coaching, mentoring, off-job training, projects / delegations, secondments
Development within the job to deal with performance problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problems / mistakes / critical incidents • Performance reviews & managerial observation • Feedback from others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manager 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical • Interpersonal, political or managerial skills • Attitudinal – may not be a training issue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coaching & mentoring • Specific off-job training or practice
Development beyond the current job - personal growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance reviews • Career plans • HR strategies & succession planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manager & staff member • HR & senior management team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical • Interpersonal, political or managerial skills • Strategic skills & exposure/ experience in other areas of the business 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentoring & coaching • Secondments or transfers • Specific projects • Delegation & deputising • Internal or external off-job training events
Management development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance reviews • Strategic & business plans • Senior management discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manager • HR • Senior management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managerial & strategic competencies • Skills to conduct key management processes such as performance management, coaching, recruitment, feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal or external training • Mentoring & coaching • Secondments • Special projects • Self-driven study & education
Dealing with change such as new technology, new processes, different strategies, culture or functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic & business plans • Introduction of new technologies or processes • Restructuring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior managers • HR • Change initiators or champions • Local managers • Staff members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills related to new technology or process or changed role requirements • “Unlearning” of redundant skills/practice • Managerial skills to manage & support change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managerial training re change & behaviour management • Specific technical, interpersonal or managerial skills • Job aids • Workshops to share pragmatic use of new ideas • Encouraged experimentation • Removal of support for old practices