A Holistic Approach to Implementing Effective Training Programs

Environmental Project Management & Sustainability Solutions

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Introduction

It is unfortunate that still many training programs often fall short of meeting desired outcomes, even those that are well designed and have good intention. It's indeed unfortunate because so much time, funds and resources are invested in actualizing these initiatives, and we must ensure all these efforts culminates to expected, measurable outcomes for the sake of all stakeholder involved. Many reasons may be the cause of such lackluster results, yet one reason that seems often overlooked is the fact that we are not looking at the initiative from a *holistic* perspective.

This white paper offers some insights and guidelines to better tool your team to ensure the training efforts are successful in that they are appropriately aligned with the performance improvement requirements, which in turn align with the overarching goals that guide the direction of the enterprise, whatever that may be. In the following paragraphs, we propose a model that takes a much broader scope to ensure we identify the right solution(s) that will positively impact the transformational change at hand. This model is essentially inspired by existing performance improvement models, in particular the ASTD HPI model proposed by ATD's Certificate Institution (ATD, 2004). The purpose of this model is to helps direct our analysis and decision making process when engaged in any form of transformation, which may impact many stakeholders and/or may have significant consequences.

Process in Facilitating Transformational Change

Contextual Analysis

Both clients and professionals in the training space, often assume that where there is a gap between the current and desired state, there is a need for training. This may indeed be true – at least in part, yet one must resist jumping to this hasty conclusion, take a step back and scan the situation with a broader perspective. It is of paramount importance to have a **holistic** appreciation of the stakeholders involved as well as the context in which this transformation will be introduced. This is what is referred to as **systems thinking**. This approach is analogous to looking at an ecosystem as a whole, in which various components influence one another (trees, water, air, earth, etc.). Systems Thinking can be define as “The process of understanding how those things which may be regarded as systems influence one another within a complete entity, or larger system” (Wikipedia). This approach will ensure the most effective training programs are proposed - should this be in fact the right solution - to meet the successful implementation of a change initiative.

With this in mind, the very first step is to conduct a thorough front-end analysis or **contextual analysis** that encompasses a comprehensive assessment of the various dynamics in which the proposed transformation, and in turn potentially the training program, will be planned, designed, and deployed. This is true for any type of organization, whether it be a business, a community, or an NGO. It is important to get a clear understanding for example of the current vision, mission, values, goals, and culture. This contextual information will guide many of our decisions throughout the process. Questions to consider may include:

- What is the background regarding the organization, community?
- What is the community, organization structure, political construct?
- Who are the stakeholders and what are their demographics?
- What strategic goals have been identified as priority and why?
- What are the driving forces that are impetus for these goals?
- Define exactly what is the change we are intending to bring forth? What is the rationale behind introducing this, why is it a priority?
- What are the benefits we see in implementing this change?
- What are the key challenges, barriers, constraints to success?
- What strategies have been attempted in the past to meet these goals?
- What are the resources assigned to attain these goals?
- What are the risks involved to implement these goals?
- How does Human Performance relate to these goals?
- What are the internal and external realities that may hinder or support these goals?

What is the Desired State?

After gaining a clear appreciation of the contextual dynamics, it is important to define what the **Desired State** is for the particular transformation at hand as well as it's rational. A key consideration when collaboratively defining this future state, is to use a method called **Appreciative Inquiry,** developed by David Cooperrider and his colleagues at Case Western Reserve University in the early '90s. This strategy, as defined by the author of this method, "seeks intentional change that identifies the best of "what is" to pursue dreams and possibilities of "what could be"; a cooperative search for the strengths, passions and life-giving forces that are found within every system and that hold potential for inspired, positive change." This approach, rather than focusing on problems, focuses on what is positive now and on opportunities and visions of what is possible in the future.

During this **Discovery** phase, we can use a variety of methods and tools to conduct our analysis, including surveys, interviews, focus groups, brainstorming sessions, and so forth. Whatever method(s) we employ, we must be sure to frame our probing questions in a positive light. Here are some examples:

- What are we doing well right now?
- What are our current strengths and capabilities?
- How can we create a community, organizational environment that attracts and retains citizens, employees? What makes it unique?
- How can we master project implementation success?
- How can we create a learning environment where people grow and help the organization respond to change needs?
- What needs to be in place to ensure information flows easily throughout our team, our organization, our citizens?
- What is attractive about our community, our organization?
- What do people like best here?
- What 2 or 3 changes would make this environment the best it can be in terms of satisfaction, pride, results?

Stakeholder Analysis

The next critical step is to determine who the **Stakeholders** are in relation to the transformation. Analysing the individuals and/or groups that will impact or be impacted by the change will help determine how to address their specific concerns, interests and needs. This analysis is critical as it drives many deliverables downstream such as the Change Management and Communications, Performance Improvement strategies as well as the instructional strategy and design of the required learning programs. Questions to ponder for this analysis may include:

- Who are the stakeholders who impact and are impacted by this initiative (internal, external, partners, government, staff, clients, suppliers, users)?
- What are their profiles (generation, age, gender, education, income, cultural background, attitudes, languages spoken, employment status, etc.)?
- Where are these stakeholders located?
- Are they positively or negatively engaged in this initiative?
- At what level are they impacted by this transformation (High, medium, low)?
- What is their level of involvement? How are they involved?
- What is their level of influence/interest/power relating to this change?
- What resources do they bring to this change?
- What are their specific needs, expectations?

Communicate, Early On!

Stakeholders need to understand why a change is required and have a positive vision of what the future state will look like. Any disruption to the status quo inevitably and quite naturally leads to some level of unpredictability and uneasiness. This is to be expected. Communication is key and is a blended effort of selling and educating. The sooner the case for change is communicated to the various stakeholders (with the appropriate message, timing and medium of course), the more time stakeholders have to understand, accept and even become advocates or champions for the transformation. Therefore, getting stakeholders involved in the process early is vital in securing project success.

People don't appreciated having change being sprung on them – so it is vital to let them know what the change is, why it's taking place, when it will happen (provide milestones dates), who will be impacted and what is expected of them. This information needs to be communicated early on and at regular frequency throughout the transformation.

Getting from Here to There

So we now have the context in which this transformation is to take place. We have the Desired State clearly in our minds. We now know the Stakeholders involved in this change. And we have begun communicating this change to them. The next phase is to figure out the **gap** between the **current** state and this **future** state. From this assessment, we'll need to develop a strategy for the **transition** phase – in other words, how we will get from where we are now to the desired future state.

Before doing so however, we need to uncover the road blocks that are hindering the attainment of this desired state. In other words, it's not enough to define the desires state, nor the gap, we also need to explore the **root causes** of this gap (i.e. why is there a gap? What is causing it?). This can be somewhat like detective work, as some root causes are not that obvious to identify. Root causes may be far removed from the actual pain point or issue at hand. We may in fact need to do a little digging through the symptoms to get to the underlying cause.

There are several methods that can be used to uncover the root causes. Herewith, we propose two very effective tools. The first is the **5-Whys technique**, developed by Sakichi Toyoda, in the 1930s. This remarkably simple technique is most effective when the answers come from people with hands-on experience of the issue being examined. To uncover the nature of the problem, simply ask "why" and provide possible answers. Then, repeat no fewer than five times. Another technique is the **Cause and Effect technique**, (also known as Fishbone or Ishikawa Diagram) devised by professor Kaoru Ishikawa, in the 1960s. This diagram-based technique, combines brainstorming with a visual fishbone-like graph. It provides a visual reference to help a team consider all possible causes of a problem, rather than just the ones that are most obvious. There are three steps: first write down the problem. Second, define the major factors that are possible contributing causes. Third, for each factor, brainstorm to identifying all possible root causes.

This Root Cause analysis process should uncover many insights to helps determine the appropriate transition strategy to set forth to bridge the gap. This requires close examining of for example the current infrastructure, systems, processes, resources, and the environment in which the transformation is to take place. Is it lack of resources in place, lack of knowledge and skill, inappropriate processes in place, outdated technological infrastructure, lack of motivation, a cultural discrepancy, or a combination of some or all these causes? By the same token, remember to consider what factors are *supporting* or driving the transition to the desired state? Is it external government or economic pressures, changes in the law, partnership opportunities, client requests, etc.?

Defining the Transition Strategy

With the aforementioned analyses completed, and a clear vision of what the desired state is to look like, we can then confidently proceed to the next phase, which is to select the most **appropriate solution(s)** to bridge the gap. If the root cause analysis was done correctly, selecting the appropriate solution(s), should be fairly easy. From this 'systems thinking' approach, training requirements for example, may in fact be one of possibly many interventions that will contribute in closing the gap. Specifically, if the root cause relates to a team's lack of knowledge and/or skills, then the solution will involve the implementation of a training strategy. If on the other hand, the root cause relates to not having the right IT system in place, the solution would relate to the acquisition of the right technological resources. Always keep in mind that the solution(s) that are proposed must support and align with the overarching goal(s) identified at the very beginning of this enterprise.

Whatever the solutions may be, we must make sure that we are aware of the resources and budget that are available to us to bridge this gap as well as the cost of each solution proposed. We will also need to develop a close working partnership with all the stakeholders involved, to engage in collaborative decision-making processes relating to identification of objectives, determining implementation strategies, clarifying stakeholder roles and responsibilities, and so forth.

Implementing the Transitional Solution

To this point, there has been no mention in regards to the need for proper Project Management. But if not done already, at this stage, it becomes critical to introduce proper Project Management methodology, tools and techniques. Ideally, the sooner a Project Manager (PM) is assigned to a given initiative the better, as it allows the PM to get involved early on and gain insight in order to properly plan, organize and monitor the timeline, resources, and required work.

Although all phases of a project need to be closely monitored to ensure proper advancement, one task in the **Definition** phase that should not be taken lightly is the definition of the **Project Scope**. This document clearly delineates the desired outcomes and acceptance criteria, as well as defines the project deliverables, project exclusions, constraints, costs and deadlines. From this, the management of the project through its lifecycle can be executed with the proper controls in place. Much can be said on the subject of Project Management, as it is very rich and broad topic. It is an essential aspect for the success for any change initiative. That said, it rightfully deserves its very own white paper.

Training Strategy as Part of Recommended Interventions

In this phase, should a training strategy have been retained as one of the recommended interventions to bridge the gap, then the process for implementing such a project begins. The most classic of frameworks is the **ADDIE** model, which consists of the following five phases: analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation. The **Analysis** phase defines who the learners are, their current knowledge and skills, the context in which the training will take place, constraints, the timeline, budget, resources and the like. Specific questions to address in this phase may include:

- Who are the learners and what are their characteristics?
- What are the knowledge and skills gaps that need to be closed? What are the desired new behaviors?
- What types of learning constraints exist? (Budget, Timelines, Resources)
- What has worked well, not well in the past?
- What training programs currently exist that can be leveraged? How much new training content needs to be developed?
- What are the learning objectives per learner track; how do they tie back to the overarching goals?
- How will training be measured? What evaluation mechanisms should be set in place to validate learning (e.g. Kirkpatrick levels 1 – 4, Philipp's ROI)?

- How will training be delivered? In-class setting? Online?
- What are the priorities, and from this, the deployment sequence look like?
- Who would deliver training?
- Who will be the Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) to validate, even develop the content?

The **Design** phase involves creating an instructional blueprint, which typically consists of the learning objectives, assessment instruments to be used, breakdown of modules and lessons, type of exercises, media selection as well as the identification of the SMEs. The **Development** phase is the execution phase where content is developed and assembled. In this phase, the training materials are typically created by the learning specialists and validated by the SMEs. In the **Implementation** phase, trainers are trained, pilots are conducted, administration tasks such as registration are done, training materials are reproduced and delivered, and last but not least, learners get trained. The **Evaluation** phase should actually be an integral part of every stage listed in this model. There are two evaluations methods to consider. The first is called the **formative** evaluation, which occurs continually throughout the analysis, design, development, and implementation phases. Its purpose is to gather feedback and validate accuracy, thus seeks to improve the training program to ensure it is positively impacting the knowledge and/or skills gap that was identified. The second is called the **summative** evaluation, which occurs only *after* course completion and is used to determine the effect the training program had on the learners and in turn, the broader goals.

Evaluation of the Solution Implemented

Although most initiatives overlook this critical phase as it may be a daunting task to action on for many of us, evaluating the impacts of any change initiative is central because it ensures that the results of change initiative have met with the initial expectations, and that money, resources and effort were well spent. A well designed and executed evaluation also helps drive accountability and transparency, informs decision making about project design and management, and provide lessons learned for improvement on future projects.

There as many definitions for Evaluation. One definition offered in Hugues's book "A Project Manager's Guide to Evaluation" is that evaluation is the "systematic method for collecting, analyzing, and using the findings to answer key questions about a project's success. It ensures that those answers are supported by evidence". Another definition is that "evaluation compares what has been accomplished (evidence) with what should have been accomplished (criteria) and then makes a judgment about how well it was done (Hugues, 2005)."

There are many evaluation methods to choose from. But at the very least, the essential steps should include, the identification of the evaluation's purpose and goals, the development of the evaluation design and strategy, the selection and/or construction of the evaluation tools to use, the definition of success indicators and their related success criteria, the validation of these with the appropriate stakeholders, the conducting of the evaluation (i.e. the gathering of data), the collection, processing and analysing/interpretation of the data and finally the reporting of the findings. Some questions that Hughes proposes to help guide the approach include:

- What is the purpose of the evaluation?
- What are the questions that you want answered by an evaluation?
- How comprehensive will the evaluation be and what is the general approach?
- What will be measured?
- Who has authority and responsibility for the evaluation?
- What will be the role of the evaluator?
- What will be the main sources of the data and how will the data be collected and compiled?
- How will the data be analysed and presented?
- How much will it cost? Have you enough resources?

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