Change the Way Training is Done: Train Me on What I Want to Know

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Abstract: Is the business environment training their workforce to become leaner and more competitive? Organizations send their employees off site for training in applications that are not specific to the employees' actual day to day operations. Often training of this type results in the employee not being able to apply what they have learned. Corporate training should think about shifting their paradigm from instructor led textbook training to personalized programs with employee centered training. Instead of sending the employee to an offsite location to be trained on widgets, bring the trainer on site and develop customized training material centered on the employee actual needs. Colleges and universities cannot keep up with the ever-changing advancements in technology or adapt their curriculum quickly enough to keep in line with the needs of the students. Consequently employees struggle with understanding how to apply what they have learned to complete daily work projects. How will the employee be able to apply the training into functional work processes?

Key words: training, customized training programs, employee centered training, education, business technology

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The business environment has created pressure on corporations to become leaner and more competitive while working with fewer resources (Kanazawa, 2009). To become a leaner organization, Kanazawa (2009) argues that the organization needs to retract to the core of its business as it becomes leaner and more competitive. The human resources of the organization need to work diligently to improve their productivity as the economy scales down. Downsizing generally results in fewer employees as well as products while workloads may increase due to a need for greater control of costs. Organizations are affected by the boardroom's decisions. In the business environment, organizations need to stop talking about what they need to do and instead start doing it. The ability to quickly adjust to changing market place dynamics is crucial for the survival and success of an organization. Doing more with less often means automating business tasks using Information Technology (IT) based solutions. Organizations today need to embrace the decisions made in the boardroom and begin implementing those decisions thus "walking the talk and talking the walk" (Rushton, 2009).

Bringing in new technology, however, is not a cure-all. It does not always mean that an organization can do more with less. As Kanazawa (2009) pointed out, doing more with less often means automating business tasks using Information Technology (IT) based solutions. It is the automation of the tasks that support the organization that will help IT based solutions do more with less. Determining what those tasks are is a fundamental step in the

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process of automation and improved efficiencies. A corporate atmosphere that supports the discovery of opportunities for automation encourages employees to participate in the discovery of tasks ripe for automation.

Failure arises when organizations do not properly prioritize, allocate and invest the proper resources to support the right priorities. The skill set of the employees must be correct in order to identify opportunities and apply the new tools brought in by IT solutions. This will position the employees with the appropriate skill sets to be productive in their jobs. Rushton (2009) argues that not all organizations are immune to those expectations of becoming leaner and more competitive this is why organizations are in business to be competitive. It does not always mean that an organization can do more with less; this is why Kanazawa's theory often failed. The foundation of the projects often seemed to lack a fundamental foundation (Kanazawa, 2009). As Kanazawa's (2009) theory predicated that management did not put the right people with the needed skills set in the correct position. The author has experienced this mis-appropriation of resources personally as resources are put into positions which they have no idea of the business or the business rules that the organization has come to adapt into their day to day activities.

Organizations and employees need to take a holistic view of the entire project. When the focus is too narrow, the organization and human resources within the organization, only see a small piece of the puzzle and not the whole picture and how the smaller pieces interact. The employees generally do not understand how the ramifications of the organization's decisions will trickle down through the departments. Rushton (2009) argues that if the organization does not have strong leadership that understands both the technology and the business side, the cure-all solution will fail (Rushton, 2009). Once the technology is implemented, the workforce will then need to be trained on how to use the technology while the organization is trying to become leaner and more competitive. Thang and Buyens (2008) argued that training workers within their own organization resulted in more engaged employees who more readily applied the new technology. Customizing the training that is offered to the organization as Thang and Buyens (2008) argue would reduce cost of training, as the employee would see the benefit of training and understand how it could apply to their current position.

Corporate training should think about changing their paradigm from instructor-led base training to customizing their training programs to employee- centered training. This would be instead of sending the employee to an offsite location to be trained on widgets, bring the trainer on site and develop customized training material centered on the employee.

As we all know, colleges and universities cannot keep up with the ever-changing advances in technology to adapt their curriculum fast enough to keep in line with the needs of the students. As Michael Martinez noted in The Detroit News article on September 24, 2013 that Damien Rocchi noted (2013), "If you talk to employers, they're desperate for talent, Universities aren't teaching skills employers are looking for." This is where corporate training can fill a gap and create training that is specific to the needs of the corporation. This allows the students/employees to immediately apply new skills to relevant tasks.

Formalized training has value in that it creates a foundation of knowledge to be leveraged for more specific applications. Unfortunately, it does not touch the core questions that the employees have. How will they be able to apply the training into functional work processes? Employees go to a training course away from their environment and are given a manual that does not apply the training to their job functions and an instructor who does not understand their business. The employee has to not only absorb what the instructor is saying but also interpret and understand how it will apply to their work environment. This is an extremely difficult task, to take a newly gained skill and apply to an existing process efficiently; on their own. Generally do that application with no additional

support from the instructors or experts of the new technology.

There is also a difference between learning and training, however training can be learning. Learning is defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary as "The act or experience of one that learns" while training is defined as "The act, process, or method of one that trains." (http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/learning). If you are able to learn what you are being trained, then you are better able to use and apply your new skills.

Higher education also can gain from these training objectives as of September 4, 2013, the Big Dog & Little Dog's Performance Juxtaposition listed on its website, according to Keller (1968). The course is set up with a "go-at-your-own-pace feature, which permits a student to move through the course at a speed commensurate with his ability and other demands upon his time." This course was taken during his education from a course he took at Arizona State University. It featured self-paced modules where the student could work at their own pace and could manage their time during the semester.

Recently, while teaching a technology course in China the author was able to apply the principles that are used in the United States in teaching higher education courses. The focus was on making the courses highly interactive, student-centered versus teacher-centered. The lecture base was changed so that the content was briefly discussed and then students were asked to apply the concepts through exercises in their book and think about how they would apply these lessons outside of the classroom. Even though these students have not had the opportunity to experience work life, it was a consistently asking them to think about the day that they would. After returning from China one of the students did in fact obtain a position where she needed to produce data and she created a pivot table as she learned this in class, she emailed me to see how she could make it better. This is how you can apply concepts through exercises in the book to apply outside of the classroom.

Students were asked what a normal course would be like in their current curriculums. The students explained that in a typical class, a professor would lecture to them for the entire class time allowing for no questions or interaction. The students' initial reaction to the interaction with me was surprise and hesitant excitement. The author's classroom methodology used the material in the chapter, and then selected a book that was current and was tailored toward business, a field which many of the students were aiming their careers towards. In an email message to the author on December 7, 2013, Yiluyi Zeng wrote:

> "Contrary to traditional instructors, standing on the stage telling students what to do and what not to do, you are more like a mentor and friend to students. In your class, students have learned study is no longer a nightmare but instead it is something we can enjoy.
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> The course Decision Supporting System-you taught was condensed into one month. Usually students would suffer a lot of pressure from courses that only last one month. But you offer a brand-new experience to us and redefine the meaning of study.
>
> In the class, you let students positively participate in the process of learning. Even small actions will make students feel they are involved, for instance, asking students typing their names on the computer on the stage when giving an example of making decisions. By using cases that related to students, it draws our attention and increases our interests in learning how to apply the knowledge in real world, especially at work."

As a personal reflection over the past five years, training has been put on the back burner within the organization that this author has had experience with. The Business Intelligence department has provided the department with a training program for new technology that it is using for data extraction. The technology is slow and does not respond very quickly to users trying to use the tool to extract data. The department was invited to an outside vendor to be shown how to use the tool. On site at the vendors' location, the training materials were designed to learn about widgets instead of the business needs. After an entire day doing examples of small and

simple functions, fellow workers returned to work and found that the canned simple examples did not associate with the business practices. As days go by, the tool and skills gained are not being used thus the training has been forgotten and has become useless.

The trainer should have come to the organization and trained the employees on their data with customized training to show the department what was wanted or needed to learn and how to apply it to specific tasks. The employees were not able to take the generic training and transfer that newly gained knowledge of that tool to their jobs. To address the training's shortcoming, as the author set up a training program within my department and had approximately ten employees attend the course. The course was a four-week program for three hours on one day each week. Each employee had a different reason why they were there. The author interviewed each one and asked what they wanted to gain from the experience. The initial training was standardized to build foundational skills but as the weeks went by, the author customized it to the employees' needs. This resulted in the employees being more engaged and excited about how their new skills would have a positive impact on their current tasks. As the skills were developed and applied, the students were able to see where additional applications of this new skill could be applied. This increased their acceptance of the new skills and expanded the applications to additional areas where the new skills and tools could be applies. At the end of the training program, both the students and the areas they worked and deemed the training as a success.

Three months after the training program, the employees had not only retained the knowledge learned but had applied what they had learned. This in turn led them to spread the word to other employees on how successful their training sessions were. It was a very successful program, and our Corporate Education department was approached about including this training methodology for other classes and employees. The offer was rebuffed as the author was told that the corporate training was an outside vendor and that the employees have to go off site to be trained.

This is a classic example of a current corporate environment and how some corporations continue to do the familiar processes versus changing or improving methodologies. Internal training programs require a different skill set from the training department's staff. The skill set would require engaged and knowledgeable instructors versus staff people who select vendors.

Change the way training is done and train me on what I want to know. Education is all about how it applies to you. Not what the trainer or the instructor knows, this is why you enter the training or classroom, is to learn. You want to learn how to apply the skills to your current position or a future job opportunity.

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