



Book Future Training

A Roadmap for Restructuring the Training Function

James S. Pepitone
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Recommendation

James S. Pepitone, a pioneer in the transformation of workplace training, wants companies to get their money’s worth from this vital yet often ill-used activity. To that end, he developed “Humaneering,” a training concept focused on helping workers attain top performance and productivity. Pepitone based his approach on synthesizing “more than 100 scientific laws, theories and models concerning human behavior, technology transfer, organizational learning, performance improvement, organizational productivity and managed change.” Clearly, making this mix work is a bold, ambitious undertaking. Pepitone repeatedly warns that his book is difficult to read. This is not necessary. He is a strong writer and extremely knowledgeable, though perhaps too negative about current training. He presents a logical case for restructuring corporate training. Although he leaves programming specifics up to individual companies, he does provide clear, sensible reasons and goals for change. *BooksInShort* believes that executives, corporate learning officers and training directors will benefit from his insights and suggestions.

Take-Aways

- For decades after its debut, corporate training achieved great productivity results.
- But training got off track. As a result, it now offers little value and rarely aligns with corporate goals.
- Classroom instruction reduces productivity because people must give up work time.
- Too often, the training department becomes just another bloated, self-aggrandizing bureaucracy that serves no useful function.
- Many firms find that the current approach to training – particularly classroom instruction – is costly, time-consuming and ineffective.
- Companies must seriously upgrade their training activities with the understanding that properly designed training can make a business more competitive.
- Training must change to make performance enhancement its primary objective.
- Such revamped training can do more and cut instruction time and costs by 50%.
- Revise training in four stages: “preparation, diagnosis, redesign” and “conversion.”
- To renew management’s confidence in training, reduce the time between the onset of training and the day when employees can operate at peak levels of performance.

Summary

Training: Once Tremendous, Now Off the Tracks

Corporate leaders don’t think they get their money’s worth from their investment in training, so they are inclined to cut it back. These executives know their firms can’t compete if their employees don’t learn to work up to their full potential, but what is the cure if the current methods don’t deliver? Companies must begin to use an organizational design approach to upgrading training and reengineer their tactics to offer programming that enhances performance and becomes a genuine “source of competitive advantage.”

“The only justification for an investment in training is a consequent improvement in performance.”

Training has an illustrious past. American engineer Frederick Taylor (1856-1915) first introduced U.S. corporations to workplace training. Managers who trained their employees soon discovered that these laborers became far more productive. Thanks to Taylor, by the 1920s most U.S. executives strongly supported worker training.

In the 1930s, training enabled people to update their skills and earn new jobs. In the 1940s, it helped America develop robust defense production. In the 1950s, training became integral to a historic economic expansion.

“Corporate training...needs to be working on a much larger scale to improve organization-wide learning and support members in meeting their performance-improvement objectives.”

Then training veered off course. Because it had been so effective for so long, business leaders automatically turned to it to solve all kinds of employee issues. Training departments received the lion’s share of corporate resources and grew fat and complacent. Fully aware of their power and prestige, training professionals began to lose their connection to their companies’ core business operations. Training for the sake of training became routine, and productivity began to suffer. Workers spent so much time in classrooms that they didn’t get their work done efficiently. That is no longer acceptable. Businesses now demand full value for any investment, including training. Yet training managers find it hard to measure up to that standard because of:

- **“Insufficient business acumen”** – Many trainers don’t know the firms’ business.
- **“Insufficient results”** – Many training programs do not help the bottom line.
- **“Insufficient expertise”** – Many training practitioners are not professionals.
- **“Insufficient commitment to the firm”** – Many trainers ignore corporate goals.
- **“Insufficient loyalty to their customers”** – Often, trainers’ actions, words and attitudes promote an adversarial relationship between management and employees.

“Taylor’s fundamental belief that any person willing to learn could be trained to effectively perform any well-designed task opened the doors of the U.S. workplace to the nation’s diverse population.”

When training lost its direct connection to work, its value declined. Instead of focusing on performance, it became a morale-improvement activity used to promote desirable attitudes and behaviors. Training departments became the bureaucratic realms of directors, assistant directors, instructional designers and instructors. These departments grew as independent domains of “staff support,” running “training-like” programs based on motivational goals that did not directly relate to productivity. Today, most corporate training is not purposeful in business terms and may actually reduce productivity, though task training remains worthwhile. Many firms are closing their training departments. Ironically, “production, distribution, maintenance and some sales units” train their own people and don’t rely on training departments.

Training That Promotes Productivity

However, training does not have to be superfluous or inefficient. Handled correctly, it can spark productivity. In the 1960s, business theorist Chris Argyris and other leaders helped develop a new generation of “instructional technology” that emphasizes workers’ capabilities. Companies using this approach, known as “performance-centered development” or “human performance technology,” measure training’s success in terms of performance improvements, employee development and customers’ praise for quality. Such instructional technology holds great promise for training departments and can help your firm become a learning organization. First, training managers must align their activities with bottom-line business goals. Training should address “market share, innovation, productivity, cash flow, and liquidity [and] profitability.”

“The training function is at a crossroads that will determine its future.”

Since knowledge is now the primary corporate asset, overtaking “capital, labor and natural resources,” staff members must learn to use what they know to benefit their organizations – and companies must prioritize performance. Unfortunately, Taylor’s type of large-scale training programs designed for factory workers don’t help boost knowledge workers’ productivity. Workers cynically refer to each of these efforts as the “program of the month.” Advanced learning technologies based on costly delivery platforms often don’t work as well as standard “paper and pencil” tactics. To be more effective and to provoke less cynicism and more productivity, training must advance “high-performance work systems” in four areas of learning:

1. **“All relevant technologies”** – To stay on the cutting edge, companies must ensure that their employees are always expert in the latest technologies.
2. **“Significant practice skills”** – Workers must master the execution of their disciplines.
3. **“Assessment of current reality”** – Staffers must understand the context of their jobs in terms of helping the company satisfy external demands.
4. **“Creation of new knowledge”** – Information falls out of date rapidly. Keep learning.

“Humaneering”

Training should give employees knowledge they can use to help their firms prosper. To this end, companies should adopt Humaneering, a new way to transform training in six interrelated stages:

1. **“Pick”** – Before anything else, you must select people who have the ideal personal and professional characteristics to become superior employees. Do not choose people based on skills; you can teach them how to do things. Hire people who fit within your company.
2. **“Place”** – Where you situate employees within your firm plays a large part in their success and, consequently, the benefit your company will derive from their work.
3. **“Prepare”** – Your staffers must be ready to meet your firm’s performance objectives.
4. **“Perform”** – Help your employees realize their full potential.
5. **“Produce”** – Employees should be as productive as possible. This may require re-engineering their tasks and your processes.
6. **“Predominate”** – Your competitive ambition should be to rule your market.

“Self-betterment, which must be defined by each individual, has demonstrated itself to be a predominant motivating force.”

Use superior internal development strategically to attain every possible market edge, including employee growth. Developing a “strategy for organizational advantage” can greatly increase competitiveness. Professors Gary Hansen and Birger Wernerfelt, who studied 60 firms on the *Fortune* 1000 list, found that becoming an “effective,

directed human organization” is a competitive linchpin.

“Management that looks with antipathy at an oversized and uninspired organization has only itself to blame.”

To begin building workers’ achievement levels, issue a policy statement calling for productivity improvements. Create a manifesto your employees can support. In 1776, economist Adam Smith wrote in *The Wealth of Nations* that all workers have a primal urge for self-betterment. This is still true. Tell your employees that you expect them to be consistently more productive and that they have your support. Enable people to improve their performance and they will. Companies can measure overall productivity by assessing results – for example, by counting units produced during a certain period at a certain cost. Measuring individual productivity is harder, but meaningful, since individual achievement is the building block of organizational achievement. Guide your employees to undertake these three aspects of increased productivity:

1. **“Accept responsibility for results”** – Staff members must feel personally responsible for how the company progresses and moves ahead.
2. **“Maintain high performance”** – Employees must work at their optimum level.
3. **“Support continuous improvement”** – Workers and managers should engage in the constant refinement and improvement of tasks, processes and operations.

Using Systems to Boost Performance and Productivity

For best results, focus training on enhancing performance. If you adopt a “systems approach” to improve your work systems and subsystems and to foster performance, you will increase productivity. Quality pioneer William Edwards Deming taught that employee improvement rests far more on “work design and changing the system” than on motivational efforts.

“The major paradox in business today is that everyone is expected to do more (i.e., to add more value), do it better, faster and cheaper, and do it with fewer resources.”

To ensure that workers operate at maximum efficiency, provide hands-on task training, which is more valuable than “general development training.” Training makes its most meaningful contribution by meeting defined needs and supporting specific business goals. If you are creating a training agenda, find out what your executives want the company to accomplish. Stay on course by fully aligning your training activities with management’s objectives. Design your development activities accordingly. For example, mentoring is one of the most effective – and least expensive – training techniques for pursuing very particular goals. Make your training department a “performance improvement unit.” This name is appropriate because improving performance is training’s *raison d’être*.

Training Redesign

Turn learning challenges into opportunities to revitalize your workplace. Reorganize training with a focus on its primary goal: improving performance. Make training “on target, just enough and just in time,” plus cost-effective. This will give employees needed support and restore management’s confidence in training. Your revamped training should:

- **“Meet today’s new performance standards”** – Quality has never been more important. Employees must achieve optimum performance routinely, efficiently and economically.
- **“Create improvements and savings”** – Streamlined training often reduces instructional and classroom time by 50% and costs by 50%.
- **“Support organizations of specialists”** – The lawyers, doctors, accountants, teachers and other professionals who staff many contemporary firms must consistently enhance their knowledge by participating in continuing education and superior training.
- **“Expand performance capability”** – Ever-changing postindustrial technology requires superbly trained, credentialed employees who know the latest tools, techniques and procedures. Thus, constant performance-related training is essential.
- **“Improve professional competence”** – Trainers need to upgrade their skills just as employees do. Redesigning training enables practitioners to hone their capabilities.

“Learning Efficiency”

As you revamp your training activities, focus on compact learning. Provide “expert subject matter” that will motivate your employees. Aim for the “shortest cycle time to performance,” that is, try to reduce the time from the onset of training to the day that employees can meet your performance goals. Be mindful of all costs – including employees’ time away from work, which results in “lost productivity” and “lost capacity.” Leverage technology for efficiency and keep your operating systems polished. Structure your training redesign in four distinct stages:

1. **“Preparation”** – First, determine why you want to redesign your training function. What are your goals? How good are your existing programs? Select a specific training program to improve. Develop a team and make sure everyone shares the same basic perspective. Outline the process you plan to follow.
2. **“Diagnosis”** – Identify and establish your current training needs. Collect opinions from all those involved to pinpoint your ideal training goals and activities. Determine what works in your current programs – and what doesn’t. What could better, more efficient and less costly training achieve? Develop a formal training redesign proposal.
3. **“Redesign”** – Conceptualize a new design for training in the context of your current organizational systems. Refine your training program’s concepts and plans. Establish and activate a prototype. Set goals for future training activities.
4. **“Conversion”** – Launch your fully developed new training program. Adjust organizational systems accordingly. Measure results. Report to management on the productivity and performance goals that the program has achieved.

About the Author

James S. Pepitone is a performance-improvement business consultant in Dallas, Texas.

