



A Training Journal
pull-out supplement

Issue 2: February 2000
www.trainingjournal.co.uk

If I had a hammer ...

Suppose your car became difficult to handle because the tyres were worn and inflated to the wrong pressure. One solution would be to take an advanced training course and learn how to handle the car in difficult circumstances. Or (and a more obvious solution) you could simply replace the defective tyres. In this example, training is clearly not the solution to the underlying performance problem even though it may help you to become a more accomplished driver.

We are often guilty of throwing training at a problem before we understand what the problem is. Sometimes we even anticipate problems and their solutions by creating a directory of courses for workers to run through like sheep dip. But there is little point in developing a training solution without first asking probably the most important and telling question of all: 'Is training the solution?' Only when you have answered this question can you begin to consider how training can help and how it fits in with the business, its culture and style, its mix of people, mission, working practices and so on.

As trainers, we are not just in the business of training; we need to view things through a different lens, one that offers a wider perspective to the problems of organisational performance. As Abraham Maslow said: 'If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail.'

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Train the Trainer

Phil Green's company is Optimum Learning, a consultancy that has some of the UK's best known organisations to achieve business improvement, and has trained hundreds of trainers in the skills and techniques of analysis, design and delivery. He is a member of the Forum for Technology in Training (www.forumtt.org.uk), a committee member of TACT (The Association for Computer-based Training – www.tact.org.uk), an active training consultant, and a former teacher and shoe salesman.



In this issue **Phil Green** sets us the task of how to approach effective analysis. There's a self-assessment for you to try, plus a look at two principle types of analysis.

How do you approach analysis?

It has been suggested that the first step towards rescuing a struggling training department is to rename it the 'Human Performance Department'. I have some sympathy with this idea. Training is a process, whereas performance is an outcome. Some argue that we should think of training as the last chance saloon, to be used only when there are no faster or cheaper ways of arriving at the desired outcomes. In the corporate world, training is what trainers do and performance is what workers do. If, as trainers, we are to add value we must be aware of what workers do now and what they must do in the future to meet the objectives of the organisation. This implies analysis.

The fable of the performance tuner

In another place and at another time Another Senior Manager (ASM) stood and observed a large crowd that had gathered outside his competitor's workplace. 'I wish I could discover the secret of their success,' he mused aloud. A small man in a big suit overheard and

announced: 'Your wish is granted. I just happen to be a wizard. With magic (I might even throw in some smoke and mirrors), I'll surely tell you the answer you want to hear.'

With that, he presented his business card, silver foiled and embossed. There was no mention of a fee, but ASM knew the rules of engagement ... and wizards don't come cheap. Four months and several invoices later, the wizard unpacked his magic mirror and projected his findings to a stunned board of directors. The presentation lasted for three coffees and a platter of sandwiches (mixed). Then the wizard reached his summary. 'What you need,' he said, 'is a piano.'

Now this did >>>



make some sense, because ASM was urged to recollect the strains of Rachmaninov's Third on the city streets. His competitor had, indeed, bought a Bechstein and employed a concert pianist. That surely was the reason for the large crowd gathered at their premises. ASM did some hasty calculations. He estimated 250 new customers an hour at his competitor's. That must be worth a quarter of a million pounds, taking the lifetime value of a customer into account. With his corporate buying power, he could purchase a Bechstein for £25,000, the latest model, better than his competitor's. And he had no need to employ a concert pianist either. Betty in Accounts played the organ at church, so surely she could tickle the ivories for a mention in the staff magazine.

But no new customers came. In fact, old customers deserted in

droves. ASM called the wizard back to account. 'Well it's obvious,' said the wizard, 'that you need to get Betty trained properly. Your crowd would probably like Beethoven more than Rachmaninov. And you might as well get the piano tuned, too. I'll put you in contact with our Tuning Division.'

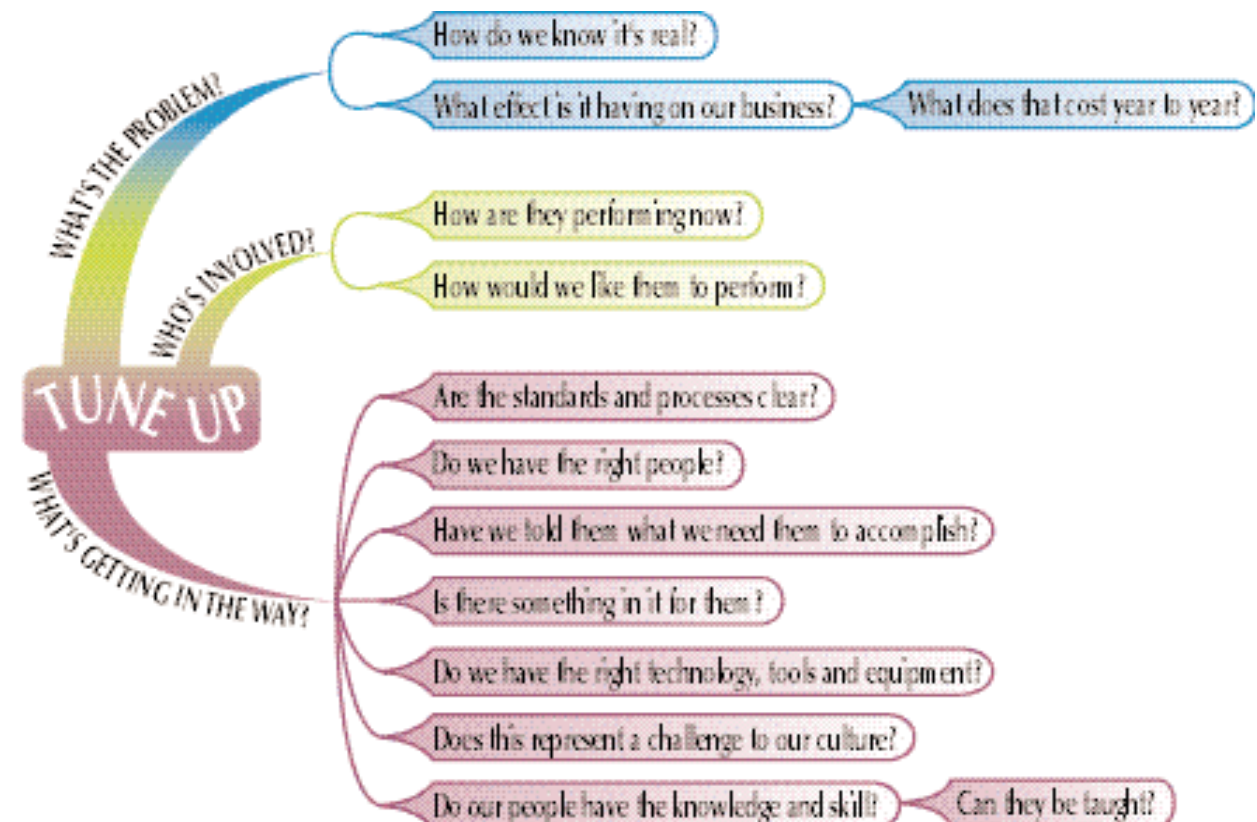
But in the shadows, someone was listening. He had been a loyal employee grade 3 (LE-G3) for generations, and he was not about to stand by until the last customer left the firm and the lights went out. Stepping forward, he announced: 'Mr ASM, Sir, I'm a tuner. Let me help.' ASM looked up in surprise. 'Wilkins, I didn't know you had this talent,' he replied. 'When did you learn to tune pianos?' The wizard broke in with a sour smile: 'I think this is a job for a specialist, don't you?' But Wilkins went on: 'Many here have

talents you wouldn't dream of.' Always cost conscious, ASM slapped his loyal employee (grade 3) on the shoulder, smiling: 'Go on then Wilkins; get on with it!'

ASM moved towards the piano and the wizard followed. But Wilkins turned in the direction of ASM's office. Before anyone could object, he explained: 'I'm not a piano tuner, I'm a performance tuner. And before we get started on anything, there are one or two questions I'd like to ask.'

After three hours and innumerable plastic cups of tea, ASM and Wilkins stood before a whiteboard that resembled a map of the metro. But the mood was light, the two were on Ted and Gerry terms, and the Wizard had studied his timesheet and left. Transferred to ASM's blotter was a diagram and various doodled questions, some with answers.

The Performance Tuner's model



Epilogue

You can't always see what you're closest to. At the end of the month, Ted and Gerry visited their competitor's store. The crowd was no longer there, so the signs on the windows and doors were now clearly visible. They read: 'Bankruptcy sale – no reasonable offer refused.' The piano had been sold to the liquidator. The concert pianist's last invoice lay with the unopened mail on the mat.

Antidote to solutioneering

For sure the wizard had fallen in to the trap of solutioneering. Let's do a little self-assessment exercise. Use the table on page iv to indicate each type of activity you have run or resourced in the past 12 months. (Newcomers to training should mark those they think they might run in the next 12 months.) Try to show what proportion of your time you have spent or will spend. Put a percentage in each box (the whole should total 100 per cent). We'll look at each of these activities in turn over the next two 'Train the Trainer' supplements. (Incidentally, I wonder how much time you devote to the final three activities in the list.)

Observing, thinking and planning

We are often too busy to stop, look and listen. Sad, isn't it? The most influential and charismatic managers are those who are said to walk the talk. They know what is

going on, not because they have read it in a textbook, but because they have stood shoulder to shoulder with workers and seen it first hand. They have also truly understood the obstacles that might be getting in the way of the goal.

I believe you will notice the same behaviour – stop, look, listen, think – in the most successful of trainers and training managers. Of course, the product of a training department is seen to be training: how much you do, how much it costs, how much new knowledge we can measure. And if that is your reality, then you clearly have to do much internal selling and influencing upwards before you can wield the power to make a difference.

Two principle types of analysis

The trainer's business often starts when someone says: 'What we need is a course or workshop on ...' Through analysis we answer questions such as the ones that follow.

- Will training solve this problem?
- What are the goals of training?
- What are the attributes of the learner?
- What organisational issues have prompted this request?
- What are the learner's needs?

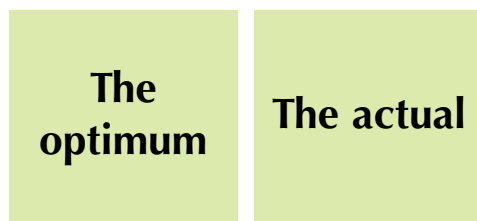
We hear trainers refer to TNA (Training Needs Analysis). But if training is to be effective, used when appropriate and successfully rolled out, there is another form of analysis to undertake first that sets training on one side as just one possible solution to consider among others.

Performance analysis

Performance analysis looks at the whole system first, then selects a range of solutions to optimise performance. I am not arguing against training, but don't fall into the trap of assuming that training is the only solution for an organisation's problems. If training is a magic bullet and the magic bullet doesn't work, then it's obvious who must accept the blame!

The Performance Engineering model

Step 1: Analysis



Gap

Step 2: Selection

- Gap
- Causes
- Goals
- Opportunities

Step 3: A cocktail of solutions


- | | | |
|----------------|-------------------------------|------------|
| EPSS | Documentation | Motivation |
| Training | Career development | |
| Incentives | Education | Job design |
| | Team building | |
| | Organisational transformation | |
| Culture change | | Job/person |
| Leadership | | Job aids |
| Supervision | | Selection |

Performance analysis tells us when and how to use training and information resources. It happens when we get together with clients to identify and respond to opportunities and problems. It involves taking a close-up snapshot of individuals and the organisation, to tease out appropriate cross-functional methods of raising and maintaining performance. It's not only trainers and HR people who do it; in the best of organisations, it is a tool at everyone's disposal.

In the past, we have built fences to keep operational training, management development, HR management, performance management and so on apart. These are unhelpful boundaries that exist primarily in the mind.

There are a number of enthusiastic role models for whom performance engineering is a way of life. They regularly scan the business to check how things are (now) and probe into how they ought to be (in the future). This is front-end analysis and expresses clearly the gap between the two. They have good open channels of communication with strategic and operational managers, and all jobholders.

The temptation in business is for managers to look for a place to shift the blame, if things are not as they ought to be. Unless you protect yourself, training takes the blame. 'Your course was a failure; they are still making the same mistakes as before.'

You will recognise in the performance tuner's approach the same process that Mager and Pipe (see 'Recommended reading') have championed for generations. If you want to develop and run courses, then so be it. But if you want to make a difference to the business you're in, then I recommend you start here. 

WEBLINKS

- For further information on front-end analysis and performance engineering, you might like to visit the following two websites.
www.bso.com/ispi
www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/sat2.html

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE:

Activities run or resourced in the past 12 months

| Activity | Proportion of time spent on activity (%) |
|---|--|
| Product knowledge training | |
| Developing job aids | |
| Training in operational practices and procedures | |
| Training to do with ethics, compliance and legislation | |
| Training 'soft skills' | |
| Team building | |
| Outdoor bound | |
| Training in core skills such as language and numeracy | |
| Overcoming resistance to change in attitudes towards training | |
| Walking about and observing the business | |
| 'Blue sky' thinking and planning | |
| Other | |

RECOMMENDED READING

- Fournies, FF, *Why employees don't do what they're supposed to do ... and what to do about it*, McGraw Hill, 1988. (Sixteen common reasons why people don't, can't or won't perform. This is an easy-to-read, one-sitting book with many practical suggestions.)
- Gilbert, T, *Human competence: Engineering worthy performance*, McGraw Hill, 1978. (Gilbert is the founding father of the concept of performance engineering.)
- Mager, R and Pipe, P, *Analyzing performance problems*, Lake Publishing Company, 1984 (ISBN 1-879618-17-6). (An outstandingly useful and easy-to-read book, flow diagram and worksheet to hand-hold you through the process. The book also has lots of examples to illustrate the process at work. If you have only one book on your training bookshelf, let it be this one.)
- Stolovich and EJ Keeps (eds), *Handbook of human performance technology*, Jossey-Bass, 1992. (A comprehensive guide to who's who and what's what in the field of performance technology.)

In next month's 'Train the Trainer' ...

In the March issue we will examine Training Needs Analysis, which will set you on the road towards the design, development and delivery of successful training activities.

'Train the Trainer' is a supplement to *Training Journal*, a Fenman publication.
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