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Performance improvement or training: what is the difference?

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Performance improvement or training: what is the difference?

Abstract

The issue of training or performance improvement in the corporate workplace is of vital importance to trainers, instructional designers, and human resource development specialists. Recent research indicates a need to reach beyond training to performance improvement.

This review provides insight into how training was conducted in the past, focusing on training that was specific to the task, compared to how training is conducted today. Today’s organizations focus on improving the performance of the organization's employees. The use of knowledge management systems has emerged in initiatives that seek to improve an organization's performance.

In the future, it is recommended that training professionals will be more active in organizational change. Organization change is an essential ingredient for knowledge management to succeed in the present and for years to come.
Performance Improvement or Training: What is the Difference?

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By
Travis Kramer
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Titled: Performance Improvement or Training: What is the Difference?

Has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the
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Abstract

The issue of training or performance improvement in the corporate workplace is of vital importance to trainers, instructional designers, and human resource development specialists. These professionals often consider training to be the solution needed to achieve the desired results. Recent research indicates a need to reach beyond training to performance improvement. This movement towards performance improvement is relatively new to professionals already engaged in training. The discussion of training versus performance improvement is needed to seek justification for the best possible route to educating the workforce. Professionals in the field need to be concerned with providing the tools, resources, and knowledge to employees, enabling them to maximize their performance on the job.

Professionals involved in performance improvement may need to rethink how training and development are being delivered to employees of an organization. Instead of viewing training as the only solution to the problem, training can be seen as the opportunity for employee learning that is part of a larger process. Content being delivered is based on the organization's goals, objectives, and end results. In a performance improvement environment, training will not be viewed as something only training professionals do, but will be one of the many opportunities for learning to occur from employee (Reed, 2002). Human resource professionals involved in enhancing the development of employees in a performance improvement environment must consider several important aspects for performance training in the organization.

This review provides insight from how training was conducted in the past, focusing on training that was specific to the task, to how training is conducted today. Today's organization's focusing on improving the performance of an organizations employees. The use of knowledge management systems has emerged in performance
improvement initiatives that seek to improve an organization's performance. Performance professionals must meet the performance improvement expectations from the organization, but they must plan for increasing the amount of information provided to employees in the organization. These professionals will be designing, developing, and managing databases in addition to providing training classes and material. In the future, it is recommended that training professionals will be more active in organizational change. Organization change is an essential ingredient for knowledge management to succeed in the present and for years to come.
Introduction

The issue of training or performance improvement in the corporate workplace is of vital importance to trainers, instructional designers, and human resource development specialists. These professionals often consider training to be the solution needed to achieve the desired results. Recent research indicates a need to reach beyond training to performance improvement. This movement towards performance improvement is relatively new to professionals already engaged in training. Limited understanding about performance improvement leaves professionals frustrated about how to tackle this challenge of providing greater knowledge to employees (Tobin, 1998).

The discussion of training versus performance improvement is needed to seek justification for the best possible route to educating the workforce. Professionals in the field need to be concerned with providing the tools, resources, and knowledge to employees, enabling them to maximize their performance on the job. Consideration needs to be given to linking employee work results to the goals and objectives of the organization (Reed, 2002).

The training or performance improvement issue has executives and organizational leaders searching for the right decision on the training and development of employees. Training of employees has existed for centuries as the method of resolving issues associated with preparing employees with a particular procedure or a rollout of a new product. Leaders within the organization are looking for a return on investment with regards to employee development. Performance improvement may be the answer.

The scope of this review is to first, analyze training at the turn of the Industrial Revolution and its major purposes. Second, to identify the types of training being used in human resource development. Third, expand on the notion of training in a performance
improvement environment. Finally, answer the question, in a performance improvement environment, how does “knowledge management” fit into human resource development?

Results from this literature review may enhance the knowledge of personnel training coordinators concerning the manner in which they deliver information to employees. Instructional designers will have an understanding of what performance improvement means and how they can design instruction to fit into a performance improvement context. Executives and organizational development leaders may push for a performance improvement instructional design model to be the focus for training and development.
Methodology

Several methods were used in identifying and locating sources about performance improvement and training. Scanning through authors in the fields of instructional design, instructional technology, and corporate training and development led to choosing literature relevant to adult education, employee training, and performance improvement. In reading this literature, attention was directed to instructional technologies being used in the training and performance improvement area. Literature was reviewed on technologies that are currently being used by field researchers. From their use of technology, these new insights are providing for the future of performance improvement.

The rationale for selecting these sources came as result of an interest in the topic of performance improvement. Due to the vast amount of literature that is encompassed on the field of training and development, the review of training versus performance improvement was chosen as a specific area of study within training and development.

The procedures used for analyzing resources on training and development were quite extensive. First, the plan for research was to locate resources on training and development; organizational learning was considered a subtopic. Second, to locate authors in books and journals noted for their credentials on the topic of training and development. Finally, search the web sites of training and development professional organizations for new ideas and theories on training and development. The criteria used to evaluate these resources were: the publication or research date, a professional currently in the field of training and development, the credibility of the journal or author, and the recognition these individuals may have received in the field of training and development.
Analysis and Discussion

Brief History of Employee Training and Development

Methods of training employees can be traced back nearly three centuries where education of the workforce was vital to success. The education or training of America's workforce started in the late 1700's as a result of rapid, innovative, and competitive manufacturing. Eurich (1985) found, "...innovations such John Fitch's steamboat, Slater's spinning mill, and Whitney's cotton gin required the nature of work and workers to fundamentally change" (p.25). Technological advancements, such as these and others that followed, made it necessary for industry to employ thousands of workers.

As industrialization progressed in the nineteenth century, preparation of those doing the work began to change. Training that was specific to the task was now required of employees before the job could be accomplished. The work activity and responsibility shifted from the individual or family perspective to a much larger organization, the industrial community (Eurich, 1985).

The Industrial Revolution movement was the start of educating employees for a specific task to work in the emerging corporate organization. Throughout the Industrial Revolution social changes took place, enabling employees to establish new methods by which they learned their role at work. Factory systems and apprenticeships were means of hiring the masses and training employees for a trade. However, with the demands of the Industrial Revolution and a labor shortage, new ways of educating employees had to be redirected (Eurich, 1985).

As industry became the focus for an employee's lifestyle, the employee needed to expand his/her skills with the industry. Industries needed to provide training. The employee's need for diverse experiences and education began to take focus. Industry supporters rallied around the idea of a public education format to prepare citizens to earn
a productive living in industry or agriculture by teaching the elements of the mechanical arts and natural sciences (Eurich, 1985).

Around 1870, industry leaders were searching to develop a more diverse employee. This began the emergence of the corporate school. Corporate schools provided a non-uniform and flexible environment for human resource development. These schools designed full-time programs and work-study formats for employees. Classes taught in these corporate schools were both basic “cultural education” and training for specific occupations. Those attending classes at the corporate schools were English and non-English speaking workers who specialized in advertising, sales, accounting, and management theory (Clark & Sloan, 1958). The development of these corporate schools provided training professionals and organizational leaders to analyze what training is and the process it takes on with the development of employees.

What is Training?

In order to identify how training is involved in human resource development, a working definition of training is needed. According to Rossett and Sheldon (2001), “Training is what the organization provides to help its people become more effective and satisfied individuals and employees” (p.9). These experiences can be lengthy and elaborate or short, sweet, and to the point. Training can be formal or informal. Finally, training may focus on accomplishing the task at hand or be more for an educational purpose (Rossett & Sheldon, 2001).

Training sessions are often perceived as a group of employees gathered in a classroom for the purpose of learning to do their jobs more effectively; the instructor, behind the podium, delivers information to employees leading their training session. While this is true and is how training occurs in most organizations, more is expected from the training environment and the professionals conducting the training (Rossett and
Sheldon, 2001). Training may not reach the end result for employees and the organization. Hardy (2000) notes, "...training of the past may be recalled as the game called "telephone"- one person tells another something ... it is passed around the circle; the end result being a far cry from the original statement." Table 1 illustrates the purposes for how training is typically designed and its future intentions in the area of performance improvement.

Is Training Important. Training is the one aspect that remains stable for all the changes that are happening within the organization. Organizations value training and development. A recent study by the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) led by Bassie and McMurren (1998) notes that, "...companies that invest more heavily in training are more profitable" (cited in Rossett & Sheldon, 2001). This statistic is based on a sample of forty publicly traded firms across many industries.

Table 1. Expanding the purposes for training

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training, Typically</th>
<th>Training, into the Future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual growth and development</td>
<td>Individual and organizational growth and development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>Skills, knowledge, and perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know-how</td>
<td>Know-how and know how to learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>Learning, performance, and strategic results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The right way to do it</td>
<td>The right ways to do it, including understanding about several possible and acceptable ways of approaching the work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training has immediate impact</td>
<td>Impact is immediate and continues on into the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trainees are prepared for the next task and the current job</td>
<td>Immediate implications and as preparation for the unforeseen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants learn by heart (memorize)</td>
<td>Knowledge bases are key references</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The mind is and impenetrable black box</td>
<td>We educate the mind to learn, learn faster, and learn better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills for the work</td>
<td>Work related skills and those with implications for a lifelong career trajectory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Training professionals are beginning to see that "training" is not just providing the basic information to employees; "training" encompasses a much broader point of view.

One tool that is widely used by professionals is performance analysis. Rossett (1999) defines performance analysis as "...a process that identifies sweet spots and then seeks out information that will help to tailor a system targeting these opportunities" (p.5). Performance analysis provides a scope for determining what to do. It provides the training professional with greater insights into the problem or opportunity along with defining multi-functional solution systems (Rossett, 1999).

*What makes up the process of great training.* Rossett and Sheldon (2001) describe several factors that make up the process of training. Training must begin with a purpose. Each training session must be clearly stated with goals and objectives related to employee outcomes. Training must grasp the affective side of the individual as well as meet the cognitive needs. To reach both of these areas, employees must be actively engaged in the training process (p.64). Professionals designing active training
environments need to allow employees time to engage their brain in studying new ideas, solving problems and time for applying new information learned, in a variety of situations within the organization (Silberman, 1995). A part of active engagement in training and development is motivating the employee to perform to the highest level of his/her ability.

Motivation is crucial for successful employee development. Keller (1983) defines motivation "as learner choices that move individuals toward or away from a topic or learning experience" (cited in Rossett & Sheldon, 2001, 126). Keller developed suggestions to foster motivation to enable the individual to succeed though his ARCS model, Attention, Relevance, Confidence, and Satisfaction:

1. Attention. Attention can be grabbed by providing the learner with stimulating and varied events. Stories and interactions will likely keep the training session engaging for participants.

2. Relevance. Real world experiences provide learners with a process they can use when returning to the job. They are more likely to become part of the training session when they are provided with concrete examples of how the information is used on a regular basis.

3. Confidence. Instilling confidence in employees is key to effective outcomes. Participants need to be reminded of prior knowledge about the subject while training professionals provide the link of new material to what is familiar.

4. Satisfaction. Experiences in which users have a chance to use their knowledge on a problem rather than have to wait provide meaning to the training experience (p.127).

Using Keller's ARCS model, training professionals are more likely to achieve buy-in from employees. As a result of this buy-in, executives and organizational leaders find successful employees contributing to the goals and vision of the organization.
Evaluating Training. Another key component of training is measuring the effectiveness of the training session for employee and organizational success. Components involved in the evaluation process are the assessments of the learner outcomes, the program, and the instructor/mentor. Kirkpatrick’s Evaluation Model is used to identify the hierarchy of levels, standards, and measures associated with each level in the evaluation process (cited in Rossett & Sheldon, 2001). Table 2 reflects Kirkpatrick’s levels of evaluation in human resource development.

Shift from Training to Performance Improvement.

Attention can be directed toward performance improvement, which is the new phrase associated with human resource development. Stolovich and Keeps (1992) define human performance improvement as “the process of analysis, design, development, and implementation of programs to most cost-effectively influence human behavior and accomplishment” (p.8). Employees are aware that their work results in satisfying the goals and outcomes of the organization. Performance improvement professionals are focusing on the desired behaviors of employees and closing the gap between actual and desired performance when traditional training may not be the solution (Hardy, 2000). These professionals, who are emerging into a performance mindset, are capable of providing organizations with a variety of strategies to achieve their solution to the problem. Employee training and development may be one of many solutions that the professional considers (Rossett & Sheldon, 2001).
Table 2. Kirkpatrick's Four Levels of Evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Possible Measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>Did they like it?</td>
<td>Post or during training &quot;smile&quot; surveys; interviews; repetitive &quot;hits&quot; on pages of a web site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Did they learn what they were supposed to?</td>
<td>Practices throughout, pre- and post-tests to measure achievement of objectives, end of module scenarios to be solved by participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Did they apply what they had learned?</td>
<td>Improved job performance, such as reduced errors, more sales of a particular product, reduced accidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>Did the training translate into strategic results?</td>
<td>Increased market share, better products, repeat customers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


A variety of topics are brought to the attention of the training professional when looking at moving from a training session to performance-based environment. Table 3 briefly illustrates the process training professionals engage in moving an organization from training to performance improvement.

Table 3. Training and Performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Training</th>
<th>Performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Target</td>
<td>Individuals</td>
<td>Individuals and the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals</td>
<td>Individual learning</td>
<td>Individual learning and organizational results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source of Pride</td>
<td>&quot;I build great classes.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;I solve problems and realize opportunities.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People</td>
<td>Instructional designers, instructional technologists, production specialists, trainers, experts, developers</td>
<td>Analysts, relationship managers, process engineers, instruction and information designers, quality specialists, compensation experts, line supervisors, organizational developers—and trainers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interventions</td>
<td>Classes, learning products, new media training, job aids, documentation, on-line help systems</td>
<td>Reengineered processes, job redesign, classes, coaching, employee participation, sponsorship, goal setting, recognition, incentives, policies, technology, and all the training and information resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>Have they learned? Did they like their learning experience?</td>
<td>What has changed? Is the problem solved? Has the opportunity been realized? Does the effort matter in light</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The process that training professionals engage in when moving an organization from training to performance improvement requires individuals consult with organizational leaders. Together they will identify a plan and the resources to be used in moving the organization from a training perspective to a performance improvement perspective.

Moving from training to performance improvement requires human resource professionals to be aware of organizational goals and results. Professionals must pass this knowledge to employees for development in the organization. A performance improvement approach will allow companies to manage knowledge within the organization. For example, Crayola, Inc. decides to expand into a new market. The first priority in terms of training and development is to determine what knowledge and skills employees must have to launch into the market. Before hiring new employees for these tasks or retraining employees, Crayola, Inc. would check with its employees first. This process of knowledge management is an important component of performance improvement (Hardy, 2000).

**Knowledge management as a part of performance improvement**

Access to information can be a productive tool for training professionals to use in performance improvement analysis. Performance improvement analysis is the process individuals use to identify weaknesses for improvement in all areas of the organization. Once these weaknesses are identified, information can be gathered to tailor a system for
targeting these opportunities (Rossett, 1999). A way an organization provides for performance improvement analysis is to equip the organization with a knowledge management system. A knowledge management system is composed of a variety of resources that deliver the right knowledge, to the right people, at the right time (Tobin, 1998). Schwen, Kalman, Hara, and Kisling (1998, as cited in Rossett & Sheldon 2001) offer two important perspectives on knowledge management systems. The first perspective, knowledge management, views knowledge in knowledge management systems as content information that can be captured, developed, and transferred to clients. For example, an automobile database may be consulted when providing information to customers' color, parts, manufacturer, etc. This information is tailored to the specific outcome the customer requests. The second perspective, knowledge management systems, provides employees with the opportunity to engage in the construction of knowledge in a social environment based on conversations with other members in the organization. For example, online forums would be available to the employee to share successes, concerns, and other interests within the organization (p.242). Both perspectives are concerned with performance expectations that a performance improvement professional can use to work with the organization to come up with a weakness' solution.

A key part to a knowledge management system is to understand that the system is not one application or initiative working alone. A knowledge management system is composed of many integrated applications to ensure that knowledge is created and shared throughout the organization as well as other organizations (Rossett & Marshall, 1999). Knowledge management systems have been considered and established in many organizations because their goals are to improve the revenue of the organization, improve the efficiency of employees during task analysis, and improve the quality and
service that is provided to clients of the organization (Hildebrand, 1999). Training and performance improvement professionals who advocate for the use of a knowledge management system need to share with organizational leaders the components of a knowledge management system and how these components will improve performance.

Table 4 provides the applications that are involved with a knowledge management system and the performance expectations that organizations expect to receive from employees once a system is in place.

Table 4. Components of a Knowledge Management System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Application</th>
<th>Performance Expectations</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Product/ Process Knowledge</td>
<td>• Enable new knowledge to be captured and disseminated as it is created.</td>
<td>Product knowledge-base (software, technology, manufacturing).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repository</td>
<td>• Link related content or process knowledge housed in different documents, databases, or servers to the user desktop seamlessly.</td>
<td>Process knowledge-base (system integration, healthcare, hospitality, management consulting, and other service industries).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative Work Space</td>
<td>• Provide a virtual meeting space in which project team members (company and client) can meet to exchange textual, visual</td>
<td>Component applications which can be configured and integrated include:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• NetMeeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Millennium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competency/ Skill/ Experience Database (&quot;People Pointer&quot;)</td>
<td>• Provide desktop search and location of experts throughout an organization for advice or collaboration.</td>
<td>Many enterprise learning management system applications and environments contain searchable skill/experience database functions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated Web Agent Search Systems</td>
<td>• Search public and subscription web databases for new or changed information to add to or update an internal knowledge repository.</td>
<td>Can be built using commercially available search agents or are bundled in portal packages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert Advisors</td>
<td>• Leverage deep expertise in tightly-scoped domains</td>
<td>Generic shells which can be tailored to a variety of contexts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
to provide problem-solving advice across an enterprise.

Include, among others:

- D3 Expert
- Expert Advisor 3.0


Expectations are clearly defined for employee performance based on the content and targeted area in a knowledge management system.

Krasner and Stevens (2001) note that many technological applications make up a knowledge management system (p.19). While these applications are an important resource involved in a knowledge management system, executives see the greatest asset to a knowledge management system as an organization’s personnel. Executives want to tap into the resources and allow these resources to remain in place as the structure of the organization and its personnel change (Rossett & Marshall, 1999).

Performance improvement analysis is the foundation of this process. Knowledge management systems are the vehicles for the needed change.
Conclusion and Recommendations

Professionals involved in performance improvement may need to rethink how training and development are being delivered to employees of an organization. Instead of viewing training as the only solution to the problem, training can be seen as the opportunity for employee learning that is part of a larger process. Content being delivered is based on the organization's goals, objectives, and end results. In a performance improvement environment, training will not be viewed as something only training professionals do, but will be one of the many opportunities for learning to occur from employees (Reed, 2002). Human resource professionals involved in enhancing the development of employees in a performance improvement environment must consider several important aspects for performance training in the organization.

First, training must be viewed by employees and organizational leaders as a process of change, rather than a one-time event that happens on a monthly basis (Chalofsky, 1996). This process of change shifts the focus toward which training is directed in the organization. Given the importance of teams in the organization, it would make sense that training must enhance the performance of the team in the organization, not just the individual. "The team, not individual focus, is the fundamental learning unit in the organization" (Kasl, Marsick, and Dechant, 1997, p.231). Teams are composed of a variety of individuals. Each individual in this diverse group has a different learning style and method or approach to learning that works with his or her understanding of new material taken in from the training session (Lengnick-Hall & Sanders, 1997). These considerations from training professionals and others involved in the organization will provide the role training and learning has within the organization.

The role of the trainer will move from teacher to a facilitator, mentor, or coach (Bassi & Van Buren, 1999). Managers within the organization will increase their time in
the role of the trainer, resulting in employees receiving organizational goals and strategies for increased performance from their superior (Reed, 2002). The role of the learner in the organization shifts from a passive participant to an individual who is actively engaged in the learning of the task. She/he will move from a recipient of information to a participant constructing new knowledge; from a consumer of knowledge to co producer of knowledge (Lengnick-Hall & Sanders, 1997; Silberman, 1995). The learner will take an active role in making sure the training works for her/himself and with the organization.

The emergence of knowledge management systems in performance improvement initiatives takes on a variety of new roles for training professionals. Performance professionals must meet the performance improvement expectations from the organization, but they must plan for increasing the amount of information provided to employees in the organization. These professionals will be designing, developing, and managing databases in addition to providing training classes and material. In the future, it is recommended that training professionals will be more active in organizational change. Organization change is an essential ingredient for knowledge management to succeed in the present and for years to come (Rossett & Marshall, 1999; Tobin, 1998).
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