

Training in the Team-Based Organization

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Team-based organizations are growing at a rapid pace. Recent research estimates that '40 to 50 percent of the workforce could be in some kind of empowered work team environment by the turn of the century' (Manz et al. 1997, 4). In addition, as global competition forces organizations to become more productive 'there is growing consensus that training must be at the forefront of their attempts to do so' (Martocchio and Baldwin 1997, 7). It has been suggested that the way forward for individuals, organizations and economies through all the changes and enormous skill gaps is through training (Bentley 1990, 7). It has been found that in successful team-based organizations, new team members or leaders spend 20 percent of their first year in the team involved in training activities (Fisher 1993; Wellins 1992). A 1994 study found that high-performance organizations

- emphasize the integrative role of training,
- recognize the strategic value in training for employees, customers and suppliers, and
- tend to invest more money in training than do other companies. (Vander Linde, Homey, and Koonce 1997, 21)

Motorola, for example, establishes goals for team member training. These goals help the organization understand that training is part of the work to be done, rather than something that takes place away from work (Fisher 1993, 153). It is clear that training is taking on a new role in high-performance organizations:

In high-performance organizations, training is emerging to play a critical, integrative role as a driver of cultural change, process alignment, job redesign, and continuous improvement. In a very real sense, it is serving as a change engine to help generate an organization's resilience and core competencies. Those are success traits an organization needs to compete effectively in a constantly changing, often-turbulent business environment. (Vander Linde, Homey, and Koonce 1997, 28)

Similarly, it has been proposed that the new role of training involve 'ensuring that the organization has the people with the correct mix of attributes, through providing appropriate learning opportunities, and motivating people to learn, and thus enabling them to perform to the highest levels of quality and service' (Bentley 1990, 29).

Traditionally, the training department was seen as having separate goals, space and staff within the organization. Training would be provided to employees on specific skills and important information useful for the employee's jobs. This way of conducting training was successful in the traditional organization because generally employees would stay in their jobs for a long period of time,

products and services remained relatively constant, and the tasks performed were clear and repetitious (Gill 1995). The fast pace of the work environment today, however, requires employees to be flexible and adaptable. Consequently, the role of training must be integrated into the business of the organization so it can respond competitively to the ever changing environment and fill the existing skills gap. The role of training should no longer be considered a separate entity. The above figure summarizes the key differences between the traditional role and the new role of training in organizations.

To be successful, then, team-based organizations must incorporate learning or training into their infrastructure, and they must

- link training events and outcomes clearly and explicitly to business needs and strategic goals;
- maintain a strong customer focus in the design, development and implementation of all training activities;
- manage training with a systems view of performance in the organization; and
- measure the training process for the purpose of continuous improvement. (Gill 1995, 30-31)

TRADITIONAL vs. NEW ROLE OF TRAINING IN ORGANIZATIONS

Traditional Training Role

- Compartmentalizes business functions
- Looks at isolated programs as the locus of change
- Is about quick fixes to problems
- Looks for short-term results
- Accepts costly changes
- Looks for ways to blame the system for problems

New Training Role

- Integrates all business functions
- Sees all activities as part of a process that can be continually improved
- Assumes that there are no quick fixes and that significant problems require analytic solutions
- Assumes that a long-term view is needed to bring about meaningful results.
- Emphasizes leveraged change.
- Views all employees as responsible for the systems in which they work

Source: Adapted from Gill (1995, 28).

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