

## back...how do you evaluate training or any organizational change?

Look at what you pay for. Look at what you measure. THAT is what you get. THAT is what you can improve.

## Chapter 7

# The trouble with training is training

Let's play free association.

I say training.. you think????

Waste of time?

Boredom?

Dark room with someone droning on and on?

**When you are faced with a crisis, do you EVER think of the people in the training department?  
Of course not!**

**But things shouldn't be this way.**

Think about it. Most of the problems teams face are **information** problems. We either need information we don't have or need to make sure that everyone has the same information.

The residents of Zuban walked everywhere. It was slow, hard, inefficient work. One day a man came to town with a new invention that everyone in the next town had been raving about - the wheel. It was wonderful...round.. sleek. So, the Zubanites bought wheels, strapped them flat against their feet, and continued the process of walking...wondering what was so great about these new inventions.. they just made walking all the more difficult.

Most companies have a group within the company that **should be enchanted with the challenges of effectively communicating information.** However, instead of being founts of inspiration and innovation, **they have become a bog of mind numbing wheel walkers.**

### **This should not be!**

**Success in the information age will depend upon your ability to get the right information to the right people at the right time AND to share the innovations developed by your company.**

The fields of instructional systems and educational psychology as well as the practice of supporting learning and performance is *exactly* the right place to turn to for information access considerations. **The folks who build information systems are the WRONG place to turn!**

The focus in information systems design is on the **systems** (go figure). The focus of learning/training people is on **people...the user** (at least it should be).

**The people in the training department *should* the right place to turn to.. but something has gone horribly wrong. What keeps this tool for success away?**

## **The culprits are small minds, tradition and compensation.**

**Training is an invention of the industrial age. It is an industrial age solution. This is a new age.**

Before the industrial age, most learning happened through apprenticeships (if you want to be cutting edge with this ancient concept say “situated cognition”). Every sword was different. Every book was different. Every thing was hand made by a craftsman who had spent years learning from another expert. One on one work and one-on-one learning.

Enter the industrial age with machines churning out piles of stuff. The quality was not as good, but things were cheaper and there were more of them, because things were built by a machine that was merely *operated* by a person.

Learning to operate a machine was not as hard or time consuming as learning a craft. Enter training and the instructional design model. (some people get all tingly when you say “systems design” - further removing the idea of training from any hope of craftsmanship.)

Designing training with the instructional design model worked because the **jobs stayed the same and the people were fit into those jobs like cogs** in a wheel.

Every job could be broken down into its **component parts** and those parts could be taught, measured and tested. B. F. Skinner's behaviorist view of learning, Taylor's scientific management.. all **viewed work and working as made up of the building blocks of tasks** (can we say task analysis?).

Make the pieces efficient, teach the pieces, make sure the workers were twisting their nut onto the bolts in the fastest, most efficient manner... and by gum... you've got a smoothly working machine. **It didn't matter if there were 5 people or 500**, they learned to do the same thing and did it and everything was great.

**Enter a new age.** Welcome to the information age. Just as guilds and apprenticeships didn't work in the industrial age and the very nature of work changed from craftsmen to operators on assembly lines, **industrial age solutions don't work in a new age.**

**In the information age, teams come together to solve problems and then disband and reform with different people. Jobs change quickly.**

**Training is too slow for the information age.** It takes time to develop training. It takes time to recognize a problem, advocate for a training solution, design that solution, deploy it, and assess the efficacy

of the intervention. In today's new world, by the time training is used as an intervention, often the need has passed.

**Training is by its very nature *reactive*, lagging behind the problem.**

It, by its very nature, must be that way. So, **as a strategy for innovation or supporting communication or learning, it is fundamentally flawed.**

In addition, as there has been an investment of time and money in the development of the training, **it is also inherently conservative - not wanting to address new problems.**

If your company has just spent 3 months and several thousand dollars buying a hammer, you want to whack a few nails with it. Even if you discover that the nails are *actually* threaded bolts, the temptation will be great to just give em a good whack.

**Training, as a primary intervention is fundamentally flawed theoretically, strategically and tactically in supporting learning and innovation in a fast changing workplace.**

Turn back the page and Re-read that sentence.

**Of course, there are still times that training is fine as an intervention.** (Even during the industrial age, there were areas where apprenticeships and craftwork continued.) Two areas where training is useful are for skills that remain stable over time, giving one the opportunity to implement and use the training. The other is when the intention is to give an introductory view of some topic - for example, using training to teach software is fine to give a general feel for the topic, but notoriously ineffective for advanced training. Another example is “Welcome to the company training” that tells where the bathrooms are, how to use the copy machine and coffee maker and who to talk to in personnel are useful for orientation, but --- Training is also *tactically* flawed as an intervention.

**Strategy concerned with what war to fight.**

**Tactics** focus on how to fight each “battle”.

As a **tactic** to improve end results, **training is inefficient and expensive.** Most training is instructor led in a classroom of some kind. This type of training I call the **“bucket of water” approach.** Take some knowledge, stick it in a bucket and throw it over some poor sap.

### What’s the result?

Most misses the target.

Most of the rest quickly evaporates.

The end result a rather miffed employee who **may** be a little more clean and is slightly damp 'round the creases.

### A larger problem is cost.

Hal Chistensen, a leader in the field of performance points out that the **real cost of training is not in developing the training.** It is the **COST of taking employees away from productive work** to sit through something that they probably won't remember when they actually *need* the information.

### So, building training faster just provides a cheaper and faster way of delivering the wrong medicine to a sick person.

If it's the wrong medicine, it really doesn't matter how fast and cheap the delivery service is.

**Your success depends on having the information you need,**

when you need it,

easy to find,

easy to understand.

If knowledge is the interaction in time with people and information, **it is very improbable that a classroom will be *the* time when a person is ready to interact.**

This problem is much the same as the one underlying knowledge management systems. KM systems gather huge hunks of information, hoping you can find it when you need it. Training is, on a smaller scale, trying to fill up the employees' brains with lots of information - turning each one into a little KM system.

WHY?

**Let computers do that.** They do a better job of it. **We are better at putting together different ideas to create solutions.**

Think back on the last training you endured. **What can you remember?**

Typically, it is less than 10% unless you put the information to use right away. This is called transfer - does the information, even if it gets into your head in the first place, stay in your head so that you can do something with it when it would be useful? Or...as is usually the case...does it dribble out your ears so, like a flat tire, at the moment of need, you have only a vague memory of what you need?

I worked on a performance support project with a group who developed training for military munitions people. They knew they had a problematic situation. Training usually took place several months before a soldier was facing a box of munitions that needed to be armed/disarmed/analyzed or something else. If they didn't remember the finer points of the training ... well, it was not a job that often allowed one to switch to "plan B". Retention and transfer - two very important and nearly impossible requirements if you want training to work.

In a fast, changing world (like the world today), it is **doubly costly to try to develop training**, because to design training, an expert needs

to identify the information that must be delivered. That means that the expert must take time away from doing the work they do in order to be a subject matter expert. Then employees must take time away to go through the training. All this pulling required people off the job, away from the fast changing world, so that your **best talent has fallen behind** and your new talent has spent a lot of time away from learning by doing. All this for a result that is...a little moisture in the creases.

The answer one often hears now is to throw **new media** (like CD or web based delivery or satellite broadcast) or **rapid development of training** at the problem or buying complete libraries of training and making a **corporate university**.

## Wrong!

**This is making a tactical blunder more quickly or delivering it in a new, sexier package.**

When I went to the University of Texas many moons ago, I had a housemate who came from a small farm town, where, he always said, animal husbandry was a lifestyle choice, not an occupation. When I would come up with a *great new Idea*, he would often drawl, **"If you're dating a hog, it don't matter if you buy her a purty new dress... she's still a hog."**

As I said before, there *are* times when training is a good thing. In

particular, when being introduced to a topic, new employee orientations, and **times when the intangibles of being together amount to more than the information** learned (building esprit de corps or group identity ... sensemaking and other good things) are **excellent** times for training. Training that can be **chewed in one's spare time** or **easily accessed at time of need** – these are all good things.

And remember, the skill set that is hiding in most training departments. This **ability to find out what your people need to solve problems** - what kind of information, how it should be “served”, ways to access it - all these abilities that **focus on what people need to be able to more effectively do their job** - has the potential for significantly improving your company’s continued growth and innovation.

**Stop thinking of them as a training department and think of them as performance enhancers and innovation spreaders.**

**YOU HAVE THE WHEELS!**

**You just have to take them OFF your feet, turn them on their sides and let em roll!**