EVALUATING TRAINING – THE MISSING LINK IN PUBLIC SERVICE HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

H.G. van Dijk
School of Public Management and Administration
University of Pretoria

ABSTRACT

The article explores the important evaluation step in the implementation of effective human resource development interventions. Different approaches and types of administration will be highlighted, but the importance of action learning as the most efficient type of adult training is discussed in detail. As part of the training process, evaluation of training interventions should be implemented to inform appropriate future human resource development interventions. The fundamentals of evaluation are discussed and emphasis is placed on the important purpose of evaluation. Different models of evaluation are highlighted and the link between different models of evaluation and approaches to training, is created. The most important model, identified by Critten (1995) is discussed and proposed as the most appropriate model for training evaluation within the current organisational contexts. The article concludes with a brief discussion on the challenge of creating a knowledge intensive organisation – one aimed at achieving optimal individual and organisational development.

INTRODUCTION

People are the most important resource to any organisation. This statement highlights the importance of effective and efficient utilisation of human resources in order to satisfy organisational demands. Human resource development through training cannot be implemented without ensuring appropriate evaluation of those training efforts and human resource development cannot be guaranteed if training programmes and courses are not strategically linked to organisational performance indicators. The following article investigates the missing link in ensuring successful implementation of training efforts, namely training evaluation. Discussions will focus on the
different approaches and types of training as well as determining the most appropriate model for training evaluation.

**APPROACHES TO AND TYPES OF TRAINING**

Two approaches to training are identified by O'Connor et al. (2002:134), namely the behavioural and cognitive approaches. The behavioural approach is based on three basic assumptions. Firstly, observable behaviour rather than ideas or mental activity must occur to confirm that learning has taken place. Secondly, the environment shapes the learners and, not the other way around. Thirdly, how closely in time the teaching and learning bond together and become reinforced is crucial to how successful the training and learning experiences are perceived to be (O'Connor et al. 2002:134).

The cognitive approach to training views learning as changes in mental structures – how one thinks. Training has to be preceded by definite learning objectives, which break down the big picture into smaller mental, problem-solving modes. Learning involves more than just reacting to stimuli. It also involves the reorganisation of experiences in order to make sense of the environmental stimuli. Problems are either solved or unsolved and there is no state of almost being solved (O’Connor et al. 2002:138). The major difference between behavioural and cognitive theorists lies in where the control over the learning activity resides. For a behavioural theorist control resides in the environment or the instructor whereas for the cognitive theorist control lies within the individual learner himself or herself.

Taking into consideration the demands of the current Public Service environment, while attempting to ensure that training contributes to organisational performance – the cognitive approach to learning is essential to successful human resource development. Ensuring that training is informed by performance indicators and not externally supply-driven, is paramount to the increased performance and development of both the organisational and the individual employee.

Even though traditional types of training, such as on-the-job and off-the-job training is still predominant in the human resource development environment, authors including Koo (1999), Thacker (2002) and Drejer (2000) agree that adults learn more effectively through the application of an action learning method.

Koo (1999:1) proposes action learning as the most extensive type of training currently because it distinguishes between doing things oneself and talking about getting things done by others. Action learning is implemented to make managers learn how to manage better by tackling the problems that they experience on a daily basis. Action learning is not the same as academic simulation and should be holistic in the way it views the learner, the management process and the learning experience.

Action learning values collaboration, personal autonomy, active engagement and personal relevance in the learning experience. The test for action learning is whether or not learning can be linked to understanding and action and thus reinforcing application (Thacker 2002:2). Action learning is highly situational, flexible and combines social processes with individual learning needs (Koo 1999:1-2). Learners are being motivated
to learn for themselves, to make more rational decisions because they understand the values, assumptions, actions, rights and prerogatives that affect any given situation.

Action learning benefits the learner because he or she learns to learn. Since the learner manages the learning experience himself or herself, self-awareness of own and group performance is enhanced. The social aspects of the learning experience will be reinforced due to the fact that the learner learns through himself or herself as well as through the others in the group. Koo (1999:3-4) identifies specific process objectives, which should be followed in order to make action learning successful, including to:

- help each other define the purpose, time scale and desired end results
- help each other test and clarify training ideas
- help motivate each other to take action
- share ideas on how to resolve difficulties encountered by others
- share information from own experiences
- monitor learning progress
- manage themselves and review the effectiveness of management
- take charge of individual and group learning and
- review and improve individual and group learning.

Action learning can also be categorised as competency based training and education. According to Drejer (2000:1-3), competence is a way of explaining an organisation's competitiveness – why some organisations perform better than others with similar functional characteristics. Competence comprises specific generic elements, namely that technology is often the most visible part of competence, since it represents the tools that human beings use to implement their functions. Human beings are the most obvious part of competence because if a human being does not use the technology, nothing will happen. Organisation refers to the formal managerial systems under which human beings operate and the culture refers to the informal structure of the organisation. The organisational culture influences human beings with regards to the norms and values that guide daily functioning. Thus, competitiveness manifests itself in an organisation's ability to use technology by appropriately skilled employees, within the formal and informal organisational context, which is supported by the organisational culture.

The competency based type of training should comprise the following six steps in its design. Spencer & Spencer (1993:290-291) state that the first step involves recognition, through which learners are able to convince themselves that the competencies being taught do exist and are important to being able to do their jobs effectively and efficiently. The second step is understanding – explaining the new competency concept in order to facilitate correct application of new competencies in current job positions. The third step entails self-assessment, which would provide learners with feedback on their own levels of competence measured against the levels that predict ideal performance, thus, indicating the skills gap between what is available and what is needed. The fourth step contains the practice of the taught skill in realistic job simulations in order to obtain coaching feedback on what is needed to raise the current performance standard. The fifth step encompasses the actual job application through which learners should set goals and
develop action plans for how the new competency will be applied in their current positions. The last step describes the follow-up support that encompasses activities such as sharing competency goals and plans with managers, rewarding initial experimentation with the use of new competency behaviours and holding regular goal progress review meetings in which trainees support and encourage one another in the application of new competencies.

The competency based training method support a cognitive approach to learning – through individual recognition and demand organisational learning and development can successfully take place.

Training and learning will not automatically result in competence being built or increased. Drejer (2000:5) maintains that learning takes place as a result of a critical reflection of one’s own experiences rather than as a result of formal training and remembering theories. Competency based learning reflects the principles important in the implementation of the learning organisation, including self-assessment, feedback, support and reflection.

**FUNDAMENTALS OF EVALUATION**

Critten (1995:157-158) states that defining evaluation can be equated with trying to define quality – you can recognise the outcome, but defining it is not an easy task. Evaluation deals with determining the total value of a training course. It does not validate the implementation of a training course in terms of its deliverables. Evaluation draws attention to the judgement about the effect of putting the training objectives into practice. Validation becomes part of evaluation in terms of determining the appropriateness and practical applicability of a chosen training course.

Lewis & Thornhill (1994:25) based on the work of Kennedy & Reid (1986) propose the five levels of evaluation emphasising organisational value, including:

- level 1 – reactions to the training regarding its use, interest and value
- level 2 – learning effected by training
- level 3 – change in job behaviour caused by training
- level 4 – effects on the department/unit
- level 5 – effects on the whole organisation

The purpose of evaluation is three-fold. Firstly, to gather information that would provide a framework for the improvement of future training courses regarding the same training needs (formative role). Secondly, judgements will be made based on the training course’s value in terms of its total effects (summative role) and thirdly, a learning role, in order to ensure that challenges identified during the implementation of a training course are not duplicated (Critten 1995:158). Rowe (2001:17-18) calls this double-loop learning, where the emphasis is on determining whether the original objectives are still the objectives in order to review its applicability and implementation. Thus, refocusing on the fundamental questions regarding training and development – what is it trying to achieve? What is the organisational philosophy behind it? Should it be taking place and at what cost and
what value? Rowe (2001:19-22) maintains that the size of a budget usually indicates how important training and development is perceived. Training evaluation provides a ‘feel good’ factor to managers but does not greatly influence future decisions regarding similar training interventions. Thus, evaluation determines the total value of the training intervention. However, determining the value of training courses has not been a central concern with either trainers or trainees. Evaluation is described as the fourth step in the training cycle, illustrated in Figure 1. Without evaluation, determining appropriate performance standards will not be possible and the reciprocal relationship between performance management and appropriate training and development initiatives will not be applied.

**Figure 1: Human resource management cycle in terms of training**

Evaluation has become synonymous with collecting information about training courses that have been implemented. The gathering of information will however, not provide the organisation with an evaluation of the training course. The information has to be articulated in order to add value to decisions regarding future training and development initiatives.

Due to a lack of evaluation of training courses, employees might be sent on training that does not satisfy their training needs and thus, cause a non-alignment with organisational training needs. A clear link has been identified by DPSA through its *Performance Management and Development System* (PMDS) between training, evaluation and performance management. Section 10 of Chapter 5 of the Senior Management Services Handbook (DPSA 2001) states that performance management and development systems need to be integrated with all other organisational processes to be effective. The purpose of the PDMS is to provide policy measures and guidelines for opti-
mising the potential and current employee output in terms of quality and quantity. The PMDS, thus, not only links the importance of human resource training and development with individual development, but also with an increase in organisational performance. The objectives of the PMDS are to establish a performance culture that would reward and recognise good performance while facilitating continuous performance improvement and organisational development (DPSA 2001:6-7).

MODELS FOR EVALUATION

Critten (1995:159-187) identified various models and schools of thought on evaluation as illustrated in Figure 2.

**Figure 2 Models and schools of evaluation**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research</th>
<th>Scientific</th>
<th>Naturalistic</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Experimental research</td>
<td>3. Goal directed</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Cost-effective/benefit</td>
<td>4. System</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Goal free</td>
<td>3. Inventionist</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Illuminative</td>
<td>5. Level</td>
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Dividing up the various schools of thought on evaluation, two dimensions, were identified including methodology and style. Methodology ranged from scientific comprising quantitative methods to naturalistic describing qualitative methods. The style of the schools of thought ranged from research based on a guiding theory containing rigorous procedures to a pragmatic style based on practical interest and operational decisions. Thus, based on the intention of the training intervention, a specific approach to evaluation can be chosen. Important to remember and understand is that during the onset of training, the purpose of evaluation needs to be determined. The more evaluation is seen as a tool for improving human resource development, the more resources should be invested and the more comprehensive the evaluation process should be.

An integrated model of training evaluation has been proposed by a number of exponents including Brinkerhoff (1988), Buckley & Caple (1990) and Lewis & Thornhill (1994). The basic premise of the integrated model is to ensure that the evaluation of train-
Evaluation is effected before the delivery of training and related to the training outcomes. Thus evaluation is as important as training identification, prioritization and implementation.

Evaluation, according to Critten (1995:188-198), will be influenced by the following six primary principles, namely that:

- evaluation is a dynamic process which generates value
- the schools of thought on evaluation can only provide perspectives from which to examine and describe the training data
- training data are complex and diverse and should be comprehensively described in order to have any meaning to the evaluator
- the evaluation in itself will have no meaning or value if it is not given value by the stakeholder
- value given to the evaluation will be based on the personal judgement of the stakeholder and
- the ultimate value of the evaluation is when more than one stakeholder is able to reach consensus on the value of the training course.

The model developed from these principles is divided into six stages, namely contracting, describing, focusing, confronting, consolidating and disseminating (Critten 1995:195-198). The basis for the successful implementation of this model, include that everyone is a learner, that every one should act as a resource to each other, that everyone details his or her competencies to be achieved and resources to achieve them with and that every manager sees his or her role as increasing the value of their employees in terms of increasing the range of organisational skills and competencies.

The six stages of the evaluation model are contracting, describing, focusing, confronting, consolidating and disseminating. Through this model it can be proven that evaluation is a dynamic process that everyone is capable of implementing. However, the evaluation should be done in the organisation in order to have the desired result and should, thus, be driven by senior management to achieve maximum value. Applying the model within any given training programme would imply the following:

- Contracting, should comprise a meeting convened by the senior management to brief the trainees on the goals to be achieved. The evaluator should ensure that the group, to undergo training, is clear on their vision so that the benefits and process can be visualised to portray the desired results.
- Description aims to help trainees become fully aware of the aims that have to be achieved and the range of resources available to them. Thus, a full description of what the illuminative school of thought called the learning environment.
- Focusing involves the evaluator helping the trainee to draw together the common themes from the description stage and focus on the meaning for the trainee. Individual development planning characterises this stage.
- There is a very fine line to be drawn between focusing and confronting and the evaluator needs to facilitate this stage to ensure that the trainee draws as much knowledge as possible from the learning experience. The trainee should be able to make the personal breakthrough of achieving a new competence and mastering a
new skill. Thus, during this stage the trainee obtains the ultimate value for himself or herself personally.

- Consolidation means that the evaluator takes charge of the process. All the different individual values now have to be put together to that the total picture of change can be visualised.
- Dissemination of information should take place back to everyone in the organisation that was involved in putting the training course together. Reflection will be given of the extent to which predetermined objectives were reached, the amount of resources used and the individual, group and organisational value derived from the training course.

Probably the most significant aspect of this model is that it will inform future training courses as to the applicability and the framework for evaluation. The use of this model, for the purpose of this article, lies in the link created between individual and organisational performance. Training is not only strategically linked to organisational goals and objectives but the evaluation of the training courses will also focus on benefiting and realising not only organisational training needs but individual training needs as well.

**WHY IS EVALUATION NOT A PRIORITY?**

Wexley & Latham (2002:161-162) and Lewis & Thornhill (1994:26-27) identify reasons why the evaluation of training courses is contested. Most often, training evaluation is not required by senior management. If employees stay abreast of new developments and are able to adapt to changes in the environment, then the training must have served its purpose and a formal evaluation is perceived as being not necessary. Training results are also not easily quantifiable. Senior managers might not want to indicate that they have no idea as to how to conduct the evaluation of training courses and they, thus, ignore the issue and hope that the training serves an organisational purpose.

When evaluation does take place, determining exactly what needs to be evaluated could also be perceived as challenging. Thus, senior management might not know if a cost analysis is sufficient, or if the achievement of training objectives should also have been considered. Lewis & Thornhill (1994:26) state that when costs outweigh a possible benefit, it becomes doubtful that evaluation will be undertaken. Evaluation is perceived as being a costly and risky exercise and as such, should not be implemented if it will consume additional resources in an already overextended budget.

It could be argued that the perception exists that money would rather be spent on identifying new training courses than on realising that money already spent was wasted on a training course that did not add value to the effective and efficient functioning of the organisation. Lewis & Thornhill (1994:26-27) identify a number of other reasons, including:
- the ‘act of faith effect’ stating that training must be good, irrespective of the outcome
- that evaluation might point towards the ineffectiveness of training and possibly also the trainers and
the training not shown in a positive light and, thus, meaning that a decision taken by a senior manager results in ‘political suicide’.

The solution to the barriers to obtaining sound evaluation lies in educating senior management on the importance of evaluation and highlighting the organisational benefits that would be gained through the process. Thus, senior managers need to be taught on how to evaluate, what to evaluate and how to determine the degree to which the training goals and objectives of the organisation have been realised. Evaluation needs to be included in the budget so that the financial allocation is specified from the beginning. Continuous evaluation throughout the course would also alleviate the burden of trying to find the right information after the training course has already been implemented. The importance and benefits to be gained from evaluation should not be underestimated and commitment on behalf of senior management, would strengthen the process considerably. Training should enhance organisational capability, which would lead to organisational learning and the Public Service learning from its own experience – the true characteristics of a learning organisation.

Tobin (1993:162-163) identifies possible reasons why training may not take place. Lack of knowledge of available resources, is the first challenge highlighted in the discussion. Training providers and the organisation meet on a regular basis to discuss current training trends. However, it does happen that the management then fails to inform employees of existing training courses as well as the organisational resources available for the implementation of those training courses. It could also happen that new technologies are applied in the organisation without proper training of employees. This could lead to a situation where the infrastructure exists but it cannot be implemented due to a lack of skills and knowledge.

A further challenge is the lack of permission to apply what has been learned (Tobin 1993:165). Especially, in situations where training might not be linked to performance targets, implementing a new skill would not benefit the day-to-day functions of an employee and thus permission will not be granted by managers to apply a new skill. The situation could deteriorate and then cause a serious lack of morale and motivation among employees. They might, themselves, then decide that training is not worth the effort and thus the whole organisation could become stagnant.

In order to address the challenges, managers need to focus on the optimal ways of introducing training to employees’ regular work routines – one of the core principles of the learning organisation. Du Toit et al. (2000:41) identified several additional reasons for some constraints being experienced by the current training system. The first constraint has to do with budgets. Limited funds are available for training and development especially when measured against the high costs of training providers and private institutions. Secondly, most human resource directorates or units prove inadequate in terms of providing training courses. Employees who are supposed to train others have no real qualification themselves or human resource development practitioners are used ineffectively. It was also mentioned that training courses were not always well planned and the most important challenge was that individual training needs were not aligned with organisa-
tional training needs and thus the training provided by the organisation was not really significant to the individual. Thus, the concern has been raised that not enough training courses are being offered to cope with the need to ensure better performance. The lack of formal policy and guidelines for training hinders the organisation in terms of trying to align their strategic organisational goals and objectives with training goals and objectives.

**STRENGTHS OF THE TRAINING SYSTEM**

Using a competency based approach to training makes provision for the possible establishment of a link between individual performance and organisational effectiveness and efficiency. Du Toit et al. (2000:42) maintain that competency based training also promotes employees’ interest in training in order to develop individually and enforce a learning environment within an organisation. The focus on career development through training should be enhanced with appropriate career counselling services so that the product of training and development could be further improved upon.

The most significant strength reported by employees during the Training Review conducted in 1998/1999 (Du Toit et al. 2000:42), is the support of senior management with respect to the importance of training and development for the Public Service. Although it may seem to be a conflicting statement, the emphasis that government places on human resource development and training within the Public Service is communicated by senior management. However, individual managers may, because of reasons discussed in previous paragraphs, restrict employee access to training. Herein lies the challenge – to effectively and efficiently communicate senior management intentions to all managers on all levels within the organisation, thereby ensuring the fulfillment of organisational training priorities.

Robbins (1995:265-266) suggests that specific signals identify a need for training in organisations. Such signals include any time when new processes or equipment will be introduced affecting employee performance, an increase in the number of errors, an increase in the number of complaints received from customers and a drop in individual or group productivity. In order to strengthen a training system the trainers always need to keep in mind that learning will be enhanced when the learner is motivated and that learning requires feedback. The learning process will further be improved if the training content is enforced through practiced and transferred (Robbins 1995:268-269).

From the above it could be concluded that evaluation is an important and integral part of successful training and development. Evaluation could be facilitated through the use of appropriate models, as has been suggested earlier in the article. Also, the fundamentals of evaluation need to be understood in order to communicate the importance of evaluation to senior management. Performance management is a process that could ensure that evaluation adds value to continued training and development. Performance management is based on a participative decision making process where individual employees are able to explain their training and development needs whilst allowing managers to incorporate individual needs into organisational training priorities and thus
aligning individual development with organisational effectiveness and efficiency. The whole principle of the evaluation of training and development initiatives is important to the implementation and management of the learning organisation, and its ability to adapt to new challenges.

THE KNOWLEDGE INTENSIVE ORGANISATION: A NEW CHALLENGE

The knowledge intensive organisation is based on the assumption that information, knowledge and learning are central to any organisation operating in a technologically advanced environment. While Grieves (2000:8) maintains that the nature of knowledge work can mostly be observed in high technology environments, the importance of applying the knowledge intensive/learning phenomenon to all organisations should not be underestimated, since all organisations, and especially the public service, operates in an increasingly complex environment. Knowledge management reflects on the primary role of the organisation and thus the essence of the organisational capability that manifests itself in the creation, integration and dissemination of knowledge (Beeby & Booth 2000:3). This process is called knowledge conversion and can be divided into four types, including:

- socialisation referring to the sharing of implicit knowledge between individuals either through formal or informal communication channels
- externalisation referring to the conversion of implicit knowledge into explicit knowledge through a process of codification to ensure formal conversion and widespread dissemination
- combination referring to the spread of explicit knowledge to all individuals and teams mainly through the use of information systems and
- internalisation depicting the reinforcement of explicit knowledge.

The attention focused on the knowledge-intensive organisation stems from the fact that the important factor of production in any organisation, is no longer capital, but intellectual labour (skilled employees). Knowledge is seen as the primary source of the competitive advantage while employees are no longer satisfied with the traditional command and control management styles. Knowledge is incorporated into an organisation’s knowledge assets comprising its core competencies, technology, value-adding activities, processes, systems, procedures and structures. The embodied knowledge constitutes the assets through which an organisation can maintain its competitive advantage. The role of organisational learning is to continuously create new knowledge that would lead to the more effective and efficient handling of the organisational assets. The matrix structure (organisational structure) is the only structure that would accommodate a knowledge-intensive organisation, but if the learning processes to facilitate a learning organisation have not yet been implemented, the creation of a knowledge-intensive organisation would not be possible.

Organisations, responding to the demands of a knowledge intensive/learning environment should adhere to ensuring an adequate supply of knowledge workers. The
knowledge workers should, continuously, be identified, developed and evaluated. Knowledge workers should be motivated and rewarded in order to guarantee maximum productivity and quality service delivery. Attention also has to be paid to the fact that knowledge workers operate in a less bureaucratic organisational structure and, thus, the organisation should be able to adapt itself (Grieves 2000:8).

Knowledge and the management thereof have been equated by Heaton & Harung (1999:2) with a stream. ‘A stream has an impressive ability to adapt, to shift the configurations, to let the power balance move, to create new structures. But driving this adaptability, making it all happen, is the water’s need to flow. Water answers to gravity, to downhill, to the call of the ocean. The forms change, but the mission remains clear. Structures emerge, but only as temporary solutions that facilitate rather than interfere. There is none of the rigid reliance on single forms’. This indicates that, in order to establish a knowledge-intensive organisation, all sense of power, control, command and internal prejudice should be replaced by a structure, ever changing as the environment demands.

CONCLUSION

Only through appropriate evaluation of training efforts can human resource development take place. However, one should consider that training does not take place in a vacuum and that organisational priorities and demands should influence the content and presentation of training programmes. In the implementation of evaluation, the role of the manager cannot be emphasised enough. Managers should understand the importance of the individual within the organisation in order to understand the importance of appropriate human resource development. Evaluation should never be seen as merely an extension of a current training initiative but should be part-and-parcel of the original framework for training implementation and executed in order to ensure successful implementation. Through training an organisation will be able to adapt to environmental demands, become a learning organisation that treats its human resources as providing the competitive edge in maintaining organisational excellence.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


