

Performance Improvement Quarterly Book Review

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Future Training: A Roadmap for Restructuring the Training Function

By James S. Pepitone

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The audiences for this book are training managers and training practitioners. The purpose of *Future Training* is to put many of the theories, concepts, and practices used to explain work-related aspects of human behavior, learning, performance, and productivity into perspective. This book “offers managers and practitioners a somewhat more integrative alternative that takes up the full complexity of this subject and provides the reader with a guide for better understanding and for taking appropriate action through both a descriptive and prescriptive approach” (p. 14).

Future Training fulfills its purpose. The organization of the book is excellent. Pepitone convincingly leads the reader, almost inductively, to understand and embrace his ideas.

The book is divided into four parts. Part One provides a historical focus on the Training function from the perspective of economic analysis. Part Two outlines a path for moving the training function “back to its roots,”—the goal of improving human performance. Part Three introduces a process for integrating the scientific knowledge that can be accessed for improving human behavior, learning, performance, and productivity in order to develop interventions that maximize the human component of business performance. Part Four focuses on transforming the training function into a source of competitive advantage.

The book’s basic premise is that training’s original purpose was to improve skills. Even from its inception in apprenticeships involving master artisans and their students, training was intended to remain close to the skill areas that it served. When training was removed from these areas and reorganized under a staff function, it became detached from its customers and lost its “connectedness” to the organization.

Training became less performance-based and increasingly more knowledge-based. It lost its ability to impact the “bottom line.” Training departments began to be seen as overhead. Consequently, during times of economic crisis, training departments are often the first to be downsized.

If training still had its original perspective, it would continually demonstrate the value it adds to the organization and would be the last department to be cut. When organizations downsize, the staff that remains must be trained to diversify its skills. A training function that is in touch with the needs of its organization is in the best position to assess these needs and develop interventions to improve performance.

Jim describes his “Humaneering” process for developing organizational competitive advantage. The five components are: (1) picking the right person, (2) placing that person in the right job, (3) preparing the worker to perform the job, (4) enabling the worker to be highly productive, and (5) thereby enabling the company to dominate the market. He believes that you should choose people for jobs who already possess certain required “stable traits.” Some schools of psychology involved with behaviorist theory believe you can change people into anything you want them to be. However, this view is in contrast to most developmental psychology, exemplified by David Merrill, Jean Piaget, and others who embody the premise that traits are pretty much established by adulthood. Once selected for these stable characteristics, employees should be acclimated to the organization and provided with the performance skills to make them competent. When

individuals can perform, the organization is productive, resulting in the company maintaining and increasing its market share.

The major function of the training department today should be to help departments organize their processes. Once this is done, employees will find ways to work more effectively and efficiently. This approach is opposed to the philosophy that employees need to be trained to do their jobs. Training implies that people don't know how to perform their work. If that is the case, companies should devise a better selection process to enable them to hire more-qualified employees and then use coaching and mentoring to acclimate them to the organization. According to Pepitone, we should assume neither that people do not know how to do their jobs nor that training will teach them to do their jobs.

Future Training recommends that training reenter the realm of organizational learning and systems thinking. Like Peter Senge, Jim places the performers at the center of the system, surrounded by the work system, which include their roles, tasks, and resources. Surrounding the work system is the organizational system, surrounded by the culture, then the strategic system. Surrounding the strategic system is the market environment. Influences on the system working inward and outward weave the organization together. Communication passing through each level of the system accounts for organizational learning.

Future Training advocates performance improvement through skills training. The paradigm that people need to be removed from the workplace and sent to a class or course to learn arose within the restrictions placed on people by time and distance, restrictions that reach as far back as the beginning of formal education. This paradigm is outdated. Training departments that structure their training as an extension of the traditional pedagogy model do not understand adult learner characteristics.

The author writes that traditional training adds little value to the organization. Training is an ineffective tool for adult development. Adults need training that is just-in-time, relevant, narrowly focused, and skills-based. "Learning is the goal of training, yet substantial learning—beyond awareness—requires (1) purpose, (2) study, (3) practice, (4) adaptation, and (5) integration" (p. 114). Taking people out of their work environment and sending them to a class in which they learn "about something" is neither practical nor cost-effective considering the relatively small amount of documented retention and transfer to the workplace.

Mary Broad, in her book *The Transfer of Training*, agrees with Jim. She proposes that training that does not bring people to a proficient performance level and then create the conditions for using newly acquired skills on the job is of little use. Mary discourages companies from wasting their money. With the availability and economy of technology in the market today, training can be delivered just-in-time and on site more effectively and economically. Unfortunately, training departments have been slow to change their mental models and adapt to the twenty-first century. They have instead remained entrenched in archaic and expensive systems.

Pepitone concludes his book with a chapter on consulting. Moving training back to its original purpose of improving performance will give training professionals more status when it demonstrates the value it adds to the company. Then trainers will be in a position to work as consultants to their customers, and these customers will come to them for help to determine direction. Becoming and remaining connected to the total organization are both the means and the end for the training function that is attempting to demonstrate value. The main benefit will be the mutual respect between the training function and its customers, a respect that comes from mutual understanding of what each does and contributes.

Future Training is calling for pioneers in the field of training—not to discover new ground but to rediscover the true purpose for which training was intended. Only with the return to its roots will training realize its place of importance within an organization. Training must devise methodologies to measure the value that it adds to the business of the customers it serves.

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