

Team Training: A Brief Look at the Options

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Training is increasingly being recognized as integral to the effectiveness and performance of teams and to the satisfaction of team members. While the methods of team training vary depending on the developmental stage of the team and the reason for the training, most team training falls within the following types: in-house, off-site, simulation/role playing, peer-to-peer, and multi-team training, as well as self-directed learning.

In-house Training

In-house training can be effective (Varney 1990, 125); managers can learn the skills to become facilitators and use them to train and coach their teams without the use of a third party. However, Varney also recommends that an external facilitator may be effective initially. Similarly, Harrington-Mackin agrees that in-house training can be effective, especially 'for mid-sized organizations that cannot afford outside professional training for all levels of employees and that do not have an in-house training staff, and for people who enjoy being trained by their peers who can relate to their needs and concerns' (1994, 155). However, Harrington-Mackin argues that before conducting any training session, in-house trainers should themselves be trained on: adult learning theory; training design and content; presentation skills; and how to handle specific difficult situations.

Off-site Training

A popular type of team training is off-site training conducted by a facilitator. In this type of training the facilitator aids the team in analyzing problems and developing action plans (Varney 1990, 126).

Simulation/Role Playing Activities

Often linked to off-site training are simulation/ role playing team activities. Similarly, Fossum (1990, 142) agrees that off-site training is a key development for team building especially for management and executive training. One example of off-site team training involves role playing in a simulated company. In such an activity participants are given structured information about a company and they need to make decisions and take action to respond to the situation and solve problems (Fossum 1990, 142). The participants then apply what they have learned to a second role playing simulation, after they receive feedback from the trainers. Another example of off-site training involves wilderness training. Fossum (1990, 143) describes such training as one where teams go into the wilderness where they confront challenges with the aid of trainers. Such activities may include mountain climbing, rappelling off cliffs, etc. These activities initiate team building because the participants must work

together as a team to overcome obstacles. It is argued that if a team learns to work together on such physical tasks, that learning will be transferred to their work situation (Fossum 1990, 143).

Peer-to-peer Training

Peer-to-peer training is a type of team learning and teambuilding. Peer-to-peer training within an organization is developed by first training a few key employees on how to become facilitators. Then these employees train their peers and so on. Depending on the subject matter of the training, videos may accompany the trained facilitator to help in explaining technical issues. The important aspect of this training is to get peers to train each other, to facilitate each other's development, to eventually lead to cross-functional brainstorming and the exploration and exchange of ideas. Cusimano (1996, 32) proposes to begin peer-to-peer training within an organization at the management level, because once managers have experienced the power of such training and its effectiveness, it becomes a driving force within the organization. The following is an example of anecdotal evidence that supports the impact of peer-to-peer learning:

At Orkin Exterminating Company, 24 sales managers were trained to be facilitators in a three-day seminar. Then, they trained 2,000 sales representatives. Larry Spruill, vice-president of sales, says that the training led to a 10 percent improvement in sales-staff retention, number of contracts, and sales closing. (Cusimano 1996, 32)

Multi-team Training

Multi-team training is the gathering of several teams from the same organization in a conference-like setting, where there are general training sessions given collectively to all the teams and then the teams break up into their separate teams to practice the development of the new skills presented (Varney 1990, 126). Varney suggests that multi-team training within an organization can be effective because 'the collective training can promote mutual understanding, a shared vocabulary, and a common direction, thereby enhancing and reinforcing the culture when teams return to their work environment' (1990, 127). Furthermore, he argues that it demonstrates to the employees the strong commitment the organization has to aid the employees in improving their performance as teams.

Self-directed Learning

Self-directed learning is another method of training for teams. Hatcher defines self-directed learning as 'a process in which trainees take responsibility for their own learning, including diagnosing needs, developing objectives, designing learning experiences, finding resources, and evaluating learning outcomes' (1997, 36). In the context of a team, self-directed learning is built into the team process with a series of learning objectives that are performed by the team. This method of team learning is believed to enhance the acquisition of skills, as well as strengthen the team. Although

self-directed learning can offer a deep level of learning by building on an individual's knowledge and skills, Hatcher (1997, 36) recognizes its challenges and limitations; not all individuals are comfortable with this type of learning and just because goals and objectives are set it does not mean that the individual will reach them. As a result, the role of the trainer is still vital to the success of the learning. With self-directed learning the trainer must take on more of a facilitator role rather than a teacher role (Hatcher 1997, 36). Some examples of what facilitators must know and gain as competencies, as suggested by Hatcher (1997, 38), include: 'how adults acquire and use skills, knowledge and attitudes; how to apply different learning styles; how to offer feedback on a timely basis; how to establish positive, workable relationships across a broad spectrum of people and groups; how to build cohesive, viable work teams and self-directed groups; how to coach individuals and groups.'

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