SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TO TRAINING

INTRODUCTION

A consequence of change is the need to learn. Changes may be the result of the introduction of new technology, changes in policy, new working practices, or redesigning organisations. We can show these changes graphically, below in Figure 1.
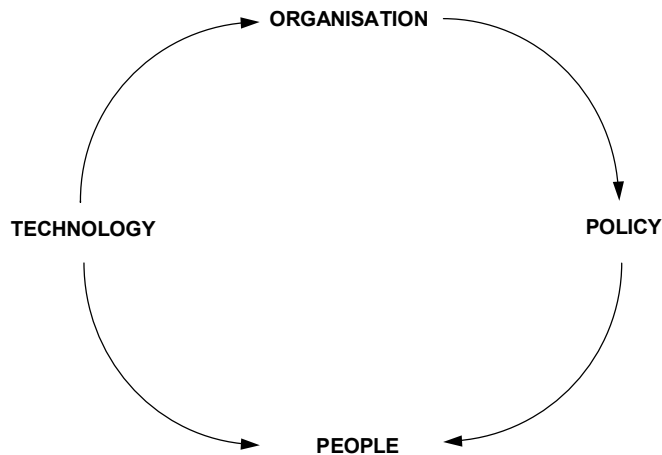

Fig.1

Such changes often require people to learn new knowledge and skills, and accompany this with changes in attitudes. Also, people often have to unlearn redundant knowledge, skills and make consequential modification in attitude that is inappropriate to the changed working environment. This might be an unnerving experience for people accustomed to established practices learned over a working life.

Factors to consider when dealing with 'change' in relation to work include:

- The kind of change(s) being introduced

- The demands these change(s) will make on people's performance

- The precise details of the knowledge, skills and attitudes people will need to learn to enable them to cope with change(s)

- The time needed for people to learn

- The cost consequences of people failing to learn

The list uses the term 'learning', but not 'training'. Both are often used without any clear distinction being made between. Is there any difference between 'training' people, and helping them 'learn'?

DEFINITION OF LEARNING

The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'to learn' as:

a)   *'Get knowledge or skill, or ability to do - by study, experience or being taught'*

b)   *'Commit to memory'*

c)   'Become aware of information, or from observation'

d)   'Receive instruction, get knowledge or skill, become informed'

It is observed normally that young men, particularly teenagers, have a tendency to board running buses or trains. They do not desist from this practice even when warned by the elders. However, when one slips and falls and sustains injury, he afterwards thinks twice before again indulging in this adventure. His friends who see him undergoing this painful experience are also likely to desist from this act. Thus some learn from their own experiences, while others learn from others. Learning, that is doing something differently, is often a painful and difficult process.

Learning can be based on formal study, or on everyday experiences at home or at work. The accumulation of these experiences enables us to carry out certain activities or tasks. So what is the difference between 'learning' and 'training'? Let us return to the example of boarding a running bus or train.

COMPARING 'LEARNING' TO 'TRAINING'

The reason for getting injured while boarding a running bus or train was that in some way you made a mistake. You injured yourself, learning by chance as a consequence of getting into a moving bus or train. Sometimes learning takes place without necessarily being planned.

Training is different. It is done for a specific purpose; it is concerned with helping someone to learn - quickly and effectively. Training requires a clearly defined outcome - for example, imparting training to the personnel deployed for VIP security - how to get into a moving vehicle. It also requires that we provide effective learning conditions. For example, we demonstrate the task, we explain how it should be done and the standard of performance required. We give the trainee an opportunity to practice under supervision.

DEFINITION OF TRAINING

We call learning directed towards a specified performance 'training'. Training is defined in the Glossary of Training Terms as:

"A planned process to modify attitude, knowledge or skill behaviour through learning experience to achieve effective performance in an activity or range of activities. Its purpose in the work situation, is to develop the abilities of the individual and to satisfy current and future manpower needs of the organisation"

The distinction between 'learning' and 'training' is that learning refers to a naturally occurring process that may, or may not, contribute to a person's job performance. Training is a planned process that directs learning towards achieving specific outcomes, leading to achieving performance objectives. The Systematic Approach to Training infers that training and therefore learning, is done in a planned, systematic way, and that it is directed towards improving job performance.

REASONS FOR TRAINING

Why bother about 'training'? Why not rely on people simply learning for themselves? Here are some reasons why training is to be preferred to a naturally occurring learning process:

*   People may never learn how to perform the task properly

*   If they do learn, they will do so much more slowly without training

*   They are likely to learn a way that is wrong

*   Consequences of poor performance results in poor quality, customer complaints, etc.

*   Once they learn wrongly it is very difficult to 'unlearn' and then relearn correctly

The final reason for training is the high hidden costs to the organisation. Diminishing profits, customer complaints, failure to complete projects and errors in communication can be everyday occurrence in an organisation. Often we can attribute them to a lack of training, which are also likely to have non-training implications.

The distinction is important for organisations because learning is a critical factor for success. However, if the organisation relies solely on the naturally occurring process of learning, it may never achieve success, because such learning may take too long, or be wrongly directed. This is where **training** becomes more appropriate; it is a systematic process directed at improving performance - through **organised learning**.

Why should an organisation bother to train its employees and officials? Some organisations do not ask the question and simply provide training as an act of faith or to comply with legislation. Other organisations give some of the following benefits and examples of the returns that we can expect from an investment of in systematic training:

-      More rapid development to full job / duties / performance

-      Increased output

-      Improved quality

-      Less waste of time, materials, people, equipment and money

-      Better use of personnel

-      Fewer accidents, breakdowns or errors

-      Reduced costs

-      Better identification of employee potential

-      Boost morale

Low productivity, poor quality of services, ineffective service, high costs and low employee morale are typical problems encountered by organisations. We might resolve some of these problems if people learned how to do their jobs or duties better - in other words, we trained them in a systematic way.

A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TO TRAINING

We have described the possible benefits of training generally. Line management has, however, to contend with many problems every day, and training is only one option they may choose to use to solve these problems. Instead of the training option they could choose to send for work study experts, or systems analysts, or they might invest in new plant and machinery, or they may hire newly fully trained staff. The training option and the four steps in the systematic approach to training must be closely associated with real and not imaginary performance problems. Fig. 2, below, illustrates the relationship.
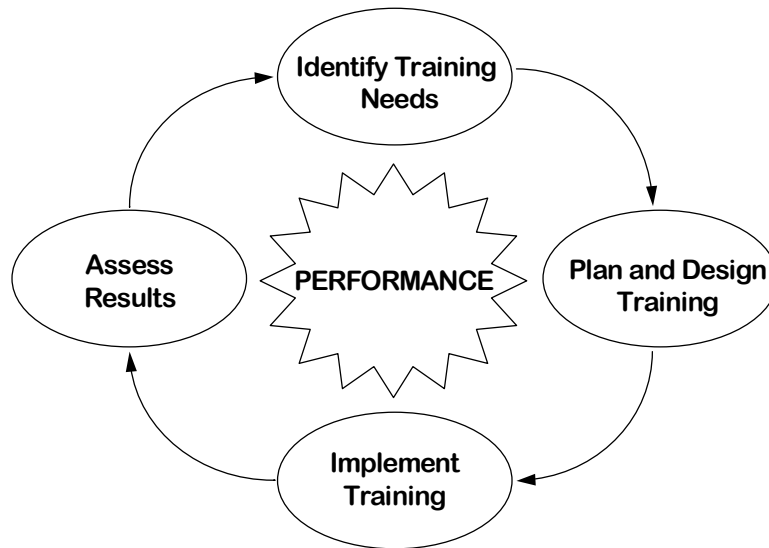
We can recall this concept through the following acronym:

I	-	Identified
N	-	Need
D	-	Design
I	-	Implement
A	-	Assess

IDENTIFY TRAINING NEEDS:

Improving performance or overcoming performance problems may occur in organisations, departmental, or with individuals. The first stage of the Systematic Approach Training is therefore to use various types of analysis to identify the nature of the problems, as precisely as possible. Techniques used for identifying training needs range from the general to the specific:

a) **Organisational Training Needs Analysis** is used to consider such questions as policy, productivity, new technology and cost escalation. Rarely can these issues be dealt with in isolation. This type of analysis will identify performance problems and how training can contribute to improvement.

b) **Job Analysis** takes the analytical process a stage further by investigating in more detail the jobs people do. This will provide information, for example, about tasks they perform, areas of responsibilities and relationships with others. Other disciplines also use job analysis (e.g. job evaluation, and recruitment and selection).

c) **Task Analysis** investigates the procedures, knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to ensure satisfactory performance of a job's key tasks. The products of this analysis provide the basis for training activities.

For systematic training to be effective in meeting performance problems, it is essential that all three types of analysis, as illustrated below in Fig. 3, are either done, or considered. Using them with a degree of discretion is equally important, recognising the contribution each can make, but balancing this against the time and costs incurred.

Organisational Analysis

Job Analysis

Task Analysis
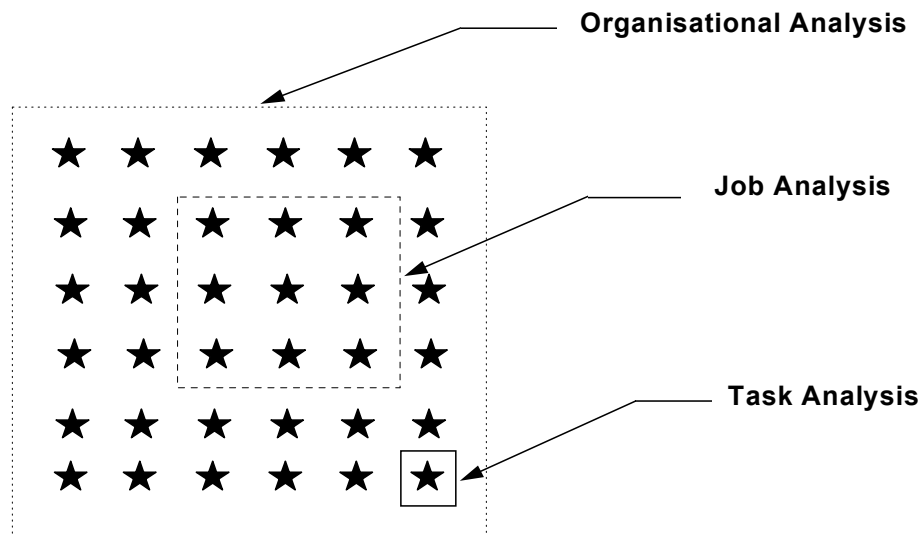
PLAN AND DESIGN TRAINING

Once we have identified training needs, we can plan and design appropriate training. Some problems and needs may fall within existing training provision. Others require special attention. A training intervention takes account of the full extent of training needed to help people to improve their performance.. All training interventions should have one feature in common, which is that they have not been completed until satisfactory performance has been attained.

This stage of the systematic approach to training is concerned with planning the best use of available training resources and using them to design training activities. These have to be planned within constraints such as budgets, operational demands, facilities, availability of personnel and so on.

IMPLEMENT TRAINING

Within the systematic approach to training, this is the stage where people undertake learning activities. This requires the active, wholehearted participation of the trainee, supported by skilled instruction. The degree to which the trainee is willing to participate in training activities depends on such factors as whether:

- The trainee recognises the need for training

- The trainee is sufficiently motivated to want to learn

- During implementation this motivation is maintained or increased

- The design of learning events is realistic within the context of the organisation

- Clearly defined objectives are used to direct learning activities

- The trainers possess sufficient technical and instructional skills

- Personnel in the organisation who are associated with the training activities, (management, supervisors and colleagues) support the application and development of newly acquired knowledge, skills and attitudes.

The success of the implementation stage relies on these and many other factors. It is the often fragile process by which learning is organised and the means by which performance problems are resolved.

ASSESS RESULTS

Training is only as good as the results it achieves and the benefits derived from it by individuals and their organisations. The fourth and final stage is therefore to assess and evaluate the results obtained from training activities. This may depend upon the terms of reference and data being used for measurement, and the extent to which this is common to the people involved - trainers, trainees, line management, general management, government training agencies, etc.

Assessment needs to answer three basic questions:

1.   Did the training achieve what it tried to achieve?

2.   Did the training improve performance or solve the problem?

3.   Was the training worthwhile?

THE LEARNING UNIT

The competence of an individual to perform a task is determined by their ability to use an appropriate combination of knowledge, skill and attitude. We can call this combination **Behaviour.**

*   **Knowledge** - information required to perform a task or duty

*   **Skill** - the physical and mental abilities required actual performance of the task or duty

*   **Attitude** - the willingness and diligence of the person to comply with procedures, regulations and standards.

The competence of a person to perform a task is therefore determined by using an appropriate combination of knowledge, skill and attitude. We can call this combination **Behaviour**

The Learning Unit that we will now introduce provides a means of taking account of these factors.

DESCRIBING A LEARNING UNIT

*   There is a purpose in undergoing training. We shall call this the **'OBJECTIVE'**.

*   The trainee has certain capabilities that need to be taken into account. We shall call these capabilities the trainee's **'ENTRY BEHAVIOUR'**.

*   Learning activities have to be provided to cause change. We shall call this process of change the **'LEARNING EVENT'**.

*   We need to measure in some way whether people have achieved the objective. We shall call this **'PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT'**.

MODEL OF A LEARNING UNIT
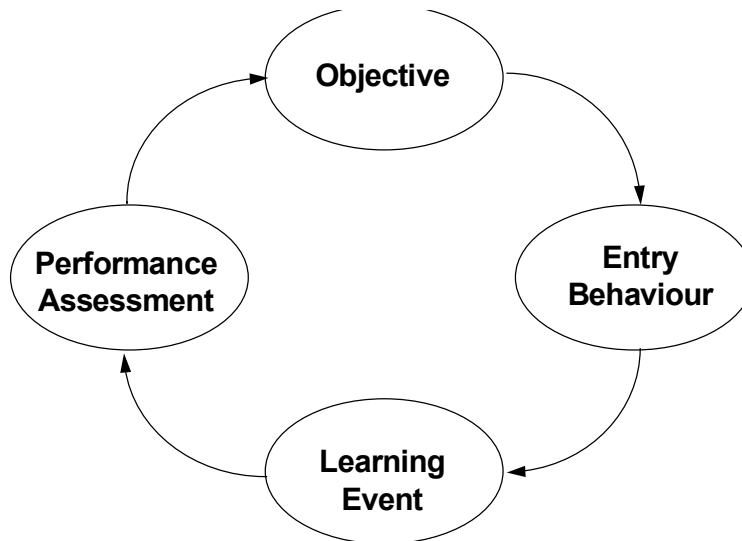
The model shown above has four principal stages. We arrange these stages in a circular format to show that they are interrelated. The model's circular format is also used to suggest that the starting point for the Learning Unit may vary. For example:

-       We have established a clear purpose (e.g. the need to learn how to perform a task) and been expressed as an objective. The starting point for developing the Learning Unit is therefore the **OBJECTIVE**.

-       There is a trainee or a group of trainees to train. The starting point for developing the Learning Unit would be to consider their present capabilities, the task they have to learn, and to plan the rest of the Unit accordingly. In other words, the starting point would be **ENTRY BEHAVIOUR**.

-       Restrictions on training resources might force the trainer to consider the **LEARNING EVENT** first, simply because it will influence the objective that can realistically be set, and the number of trainees that we can accept.

-       Management might state quite specifically how they intend to assess performance of the task. The Learning Unit would therefore have to be developed from the starting point of **PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT**.

The Model of the Learning Unit shows it as having four principal stages. However, knowledge of results, and feedback generally, is an essential feature of the learning process. This knowledge is required by both the trainees and the trainers:

*   Trainees can get information about their progress

*   Trainers can learn about the effectiveness and the efficiency of the Learning Unit they have designed and implemented.