

Effective Training Programmes – a Question of Contents or Approach?

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Poul-Erik Almsøe is an extremely inspiring and competent consultant with many years' experience of management training and education. Special communication skills have made him a sought-after consultant and keynote speaker. In the specific areas of management and employee development, service, quality and organisational development, he has become renowned for his ability to inspire to change the organisational culture and to ensure that the change is implemented and produces the desired result.

Poul-Erik Almsøe was employed by TMI in 1982. Since 1986 he has been a member of the management group and Vice President of TMI. Thanks to his professionalism, cultural understanding and communication skills, he has acquired profound insight into multi-cultural training processes in the markets where TMI operates.

An educational process should contain four phases:

*Investigation –
Inspiration –
Implementation –
Integration.*

Course and training activities provide both inspiration and enthusiasm. Nevertheless, the desired behavioural change often fails to appear. Why is this so? – Why are there often “light years” between idea and action?

Learning has been defined as lasting behavioural change. We should therefore focus on what it takes to ensure this change. Obviously, it is possible to enforce behavioural change through sanction systems, but these only work as long as the sanction systems apply, and this method has long since been rejected in favour of the desired behavioural change.

An educational process should contain four phases:
Investigation – Inspiration – Implementation – Integration.

The first element, *investigation*, is essential to form a prerequisite for inspiration. In order to appeal to both the heart and the mind, the course participant's prerequisites should be the starting point, examples should be used and the kind of language that encourages enthusiasm instead of resistance.

Inspiration mobilises the energy that is required to perform the implementation. *Implementation* means change, and change requires energy. If there is no energy, the change process may stop, in which case the training has failed.

In this context, *Integration* means a fusion between the changed behaviour and the company culture. – The behavioural change should be supported, not opposed.

In spite of the establishment of this ideal model, external factors increase the challenge – to create lasting behavioural change. In our present society, time is a resource in short supply. New generations have grown up as “fast food” generations demanding fast, easy solutions. The wealth of possibilities promotes the need to test everything. – The result must show promptly, otherwise they will move on to the next thing. Impatience prevails, both at school (cheating at exams), in working life (I want to be a boss by the time I am 30), in sports (I need to take some

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steroids to achieve a speedy result) and in family life (we want lots of kids, but we haven't got time to be parents). It is a question of maximum results with a minimum of effort.

However, this lifestyle is a threat to learning. – It easily becomes a choice between understanding and rote learning, because understanding takes time.

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This trend is further increased by the desire for entertainment – the wish to be entertained – i.e. they have an experience of having learnt something, and frustration occurs when the results do not show immediately. An example of this kind of focusing on the experience is the use of the usual programme evaluations, since these are focused on the experience, while they say nothing about the possible results. Such a method may easily tempt the trainer to create an illusion by showing the “brave, new world”, while it is never really achieved.

Another educational problem is the conflict that arises when the programme participant is also a client. The client wants value for money, the client wants service, the client wants to be entertained. – This is a task for the trainer *too*, but not the only one. – It is the trainer's task to move the learner from A to B. But the trainer is not supposed to carry the learner – the trainer must teach them to move their feet themselves. In this process we must carefully consider the use of monologue versus dialogue:

Monologue: Soliloquy – I myself am hearing what I am thinking.

Dialogue: Conversation – I am testing whether my ideas hold good by listening to other people's reactions, and this is a self-affirmation for me.

This can be compared to the definition of sales – the solution (purchase) should come up in the customer's brain – not just in that of the salesperson. So when it becomes the trainer's task to move the learner from “an old to a new world”, we must at the same time recognise that one of the participant's problems is to be willing and able to let the old world go, to change their habits and to be willing and able to enter the new world. The course participant should thus understand the entire educational problem that is described here; similarly in every learning situation, we should ensure that we match the participant's expectations with the benefits that we have planned.

The trip from the old to the new world can be divided into the following five phases:

1. Where am I and what am I doing?

About habits, systems and methods. Internal and external demands, preferences (what I want), but also about things I do not do, but ought to be doing.

2. I become interested in the new possibilities (the new world).

Contains “What's in it for me?” – What does the new world mean to my relationship to other people internally and externally, my salary, career, quality of life, self-esteem, etc.? What is my attitude to change and development, what is the balance between my performance and my gains from the “new and the old world” respectively?

3. I am willing to let go of my old behaviour (the old world).

This is a consequence of the expectations of significant others, systems, procedures and company cultures. How is my risk-taking capacity, my resistance to change, my habits, my self-perception, my identity and subconscious behaviour?

4. I recognise the obstacles and the fear and stress that occur on the way to the new world.

The most difficult part of the journey is the feeling of being in no-man's land, where I need to spend energy on changing my behaviour without being able to see what I get out of it. At this point there is often a lack of understanding that things take time. However, it is not possible to buy on credit here – the effort needs to be made now, but the gains are on the horizon.

5. I understand what it takes to maintain the new behaviour and how to overcome temptations to fall back into my old behaviour.

When I become aware of the obstacles that arise and have studied the consequences (both negative and positive), then I am likely to be able to stick to it.

The training process must thus follow the above model, if the purpose is lasting behavioural change. (But of course there may be situations where the purpose is fully justified in being quite different).

Another way to “prove” the value of the model is to pinpoint what happens when one element at a time is eliminated:

- If point 1 is missing, the result will be a waste of resources. The reason may be lack of self-awareness.
- If point 2 is missing, the result will be resistance to change. The reason may be insufficient ability to see the value.
- If point 3 is missing, the result will be conservatism. The reason may be insufficient ability to change and rigidity.
- If point 4 is missing, the result will be frustration. The reason may be insufficient self-discipline, a lack of courage and impatience about achieving a quick result.
- If point 5 is missing, the result will be irritation with subsequent accusations of other people. – “That was poor training”.

New theories keep turning up, but deep down they are more or less paraphrases of the existing ones. The same basic principles need to be learned, whether it is a matter of management, effectiveness, sales, human relations or quality. But unfortunately, not only the subjects are stable – the contents and the amount of mistakes made are too.

The need for education and improvement is still present, but in order to achieve success, we need to move focus from contents to method – from didactics to pedagogy, and the conscious training client who focuses more on methods and approach than on contents is well aware of that.

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