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In-house trainer or outside expert: *which one's for you?*

More and more organisations are aware of the need for training, whether for technical needs or for interpersonal skills. Many are asking themselves if they should hire in-house trainers rather than calling on outside consultants.

The trainer's role is multi-faceted. Functions include research, project conception, the actual training, evaluation, coaching and counselling. If s/he works alone, the trainer must undertake many tasks in order to conceive, develop and give training sessions. S/he must be a generalist qualified to teach diversified subjects and all their associated tasks.

First off, the employee pool must be sufficiently large to merit one or more trainers being hired full time solely to instruct.

The in-house trainer acts as counsel to an internal clientele. Employees may need to seek out this person to meet for post-training follow-up. S/he maintains personal contact with the trainees and may even be called upon to coach individuals as required.

This privileged relationship between employees and an in-house trainer is a two-edged sword: the trainer may feel caught between a rock and a hard place if employee-employer relations are strained and if the employer demands to know what transpired in the meetings.

The in-house trainer may evaluate needs with managers of the company and can formulate training materials to help teams become more productive. S/he may even choose external trainers to develop content, instruct the class and 'train the trainers' internally.

An in-house trainer must be an expert in each subject, understand clearly the needs of each group and know how, or be able to obtain the knowledge, to subsequently structure

the course content in an engaging, professional and balanced manner -- all the while keeping in mind the time allocated to training. S/he also must be part conceptual and graphic artist to further develop the training materials, as well!

An in-house trainer is a resource person who must also be able to validate whether an employee has the ability to further improve performance or not. S/he can work in tandem with the human resources department or directors without having to incur additional fees charged to the company.

Another factor to take into account is the vulnerability of a company if the trainer is the only person available to instruct employees in the event s/he were to quit the company. If a training continuity plan is not in place, the organization would be unable to continue teaching, and even risks seeing important information and investments lost.

External trainers

When an enterprise opts to hire external experts in specific domains to accomplish the task, these consultants can usually quickly develop courses in their specialties, while being under contract.

An organisation that hires externally must still provide an internal contact who is able to ensure follow-ups to the training sessions and who can establish a long-term relationship with the external trainer.

The in-house contact must keep strict control over the courses developed externally to ensure that they match the corporate culture, maintain quality, and that they are able to measure the training's impact on employee productivity.

An external consultant's experience brings important knowledge of multiple corporate environments in diverse arenas that can be shared with other trainers. Therefore it can be advantageous for an internal trainer to work with an external trainer, thereby benefiting from this experience to offer high-quality courses to their internal clientele.

Here is some advice for organisations that have a training staff or want to develop one:

- 1) Ensure that internal trainers have the necessary maturity/experience to know when to call upon external consultants. They can't be experts in everything!
- 2) Ensure that clear confidentiality agreements are signed with internal and external trainers to govern their behaviour in the event they leave the company. Trainers not only know the weakness of a company but often are privy to confidences from employees that the competition would love to get their hands on!
- 3) Ensure that internal trainers have the necessary competencies for both the subject matter to be taught as well as the proper teaching techniques.
- 4) Ensure that the internal trainer can be objective and possesses the flexibility to react intelligently to confidences. As such, without giving up details to managers, a trainer can help an employee living through a difficult situation by working together with the human resources department.
- 5) Ensure all the factors that can influence your choice between an internal trainer or an external consultant are properly evaluated.