THE ACADEMY APPROACH TO COMPREHENSIVE TRAINING SOLUTIONS (ACTS): ASSESSING, EVALUATING, PLANNING, DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS

Introduction

Regardless of your type of organization (manufacturer, retailer, government agency, defense contractor, law enforcement agency or emergency services department,) training is a part of your DNA. Training is what makes you, your people, and your organization function. The better the training, the better the people. The better the people, the better the organization. The better the organization, the more successful you are. Put simply, training effects your bottom line, whether it's training your employees, or training the people that are going you use your product(s).

So, what constitutes "good training?" How do you discern good training from not-so-good training, or good training from excellent training? How do you ensure that the training programs you put together actually do what you intended them to do? How do you identify what training is needed, how the training should be designed, or what you should expect after training is delivered? And lastly, how do you know if the training is actually working?

The following sections will describe the various aspects of training, for your personnel, and outline the Academy Approach to Comprehensive Training Solutions (ACTS) for Evaluating, Planning, Designing and Implementing a Training Program utilizing the skills of Master Trainers, Facilitators, Coaches and Instructional Designers. This is how we ACT (Assess, Consult, Train,) and it is how National Standards of Training are born.

Go through this outline of the ACADEMY'S APPROACH TO COMPREHENSIVE TRAINING SOLUTIONS, and check the boxes that are most applicable to you and your organization.

STEP ONE: A Training Needs Assessment

The purpose of a **Training Needs Assessment** is to identify performance requirements and the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed by an agency's or organization's workforce to achieve specific requirements and objectives. An effective training needs assessment will help direct resources and effort to areas of greatest demand. The assessment should; 1.) Address resources needed to fulfill organizational mission; 2.) Improve productivity, and; 3.) Provide quality products and/or services as a result of implemented training.

A needs assessment is the process of identifying the "gap" between performance required and current performance, between actual performance and expected performance. When a difference exists, it explores the causes and reasons for the gap and methods for closing or eliminating the gap. A complete needs assessment also considers the consequences for ignoring the gaps.

Situational Analysis of the Organization, the Job, and the People

There are three primary levels of a training needs assessment, and each looks at what is the current situation, focusing on what is observable and factual, rather than what is perceived or opinion. They are;

☐ **Level 1: Organizational assessment** evaluates the level of organizational performance. An assessment of this type will determine what skills, knowledge, and abilities an agency, department or organization needs. It determines what is required to alleviate the problems and weaknesses of the organization as well as to enhance strengths and competencies, especially for Mission Critical Occupation's (MCO). Organizational assessment takes into consideration various additional factors, including changing demographics, political trends, technology, and the economy.

☐ **Level 2: Occupational assessment** examines the skills, knowledge, and abilities required for affected occupational groups. Occupational assessment identifies how and which occupational discrepancies or gaps exist, potentially introduced by the new direction of an agency or new company product line. It also examines new ways to do work that can eliminate the discrepancies or gaps.

☐ **Level 3: Individual assessment** analyzes how well an individual employee is doing a job and determines the individual's capacity to do new or different work. Individual assessment provides information on which employees need training and what kind of training they may need.

The Training Needs Assessment Process

☐ **Determine Agency Benefits of Needs Assessment**- this part of the process will help the decision makers and stakeholders understand the concept of the needs assessment. Needs assessment based on the alignment of critical behaviors with a clear agency mission will account for critical occupational and performance requirements to help your organization: a) eliminate redundant training efforts, b) substantially reduce the unnecessary expenditure of training dollars, and c) assist managers in identifying performance requirements that can best be satisfied by training and other developmental strategies. To go beyond learning and actually achieve critical behaviors, the company, agency or department will also need to consider how required drivers will sustain desired outcomes.

Key steps include:
- o Identify key stakeholders
- o Solicit support
- o Describe desired outcomes that will contribute to mission objectives
- o Clarify critical behaviors needed to achieve desired outcomes
- o Define required drivers essential to sustain the critical behaviors

☐ **Develop a Plan**- The needs assessment is likely to be only as successful as the planning.

- Set goals/objectives for the needs assessment
- Evaluate organizational/agency/department readiness and identify key roles
- Evaluate prior/other needs assessments
- Prepare project plan
- Inventory the capacity of staff and technology to conduct a meaningful training skills assessment and analysis
- Clarify success measures and program milestones

☐ **Conduct Needs Assessment**

- Obtain needs assessment data (e.g., review strategic plans, assess HR metrics, review job descriptions, conduct surveys, review performance appraisals)
- Analyze data
- Define performance problems/issues: occupational group/individuals
- Describe critical behaviors needed to affect problems/issues
- Determine and clarify why critical behaviors do not currently exist
- Research integrated performance solutions
- If training is the best solution, determine best training and development approach(es)
- Assess cost/benefit of training and development approach(es); build a "business case"
- Include organizational drivers needed to reinforce the critical behaviors that will affect problems/issues

- Describe how the critical behaviors will be monitored and assessed after implementation of the improvement plan

- The results of the needs assessment allows the training manager to set the training objectives by answering two very basic questions: **what needs to be done, and why is it not being done now?** Then, it is more likely that an accurate identification of whom, if anyone, needs training and what training is needed. Sometimes training is not the best solution, and it is virtually never the only solution. Some performance gaps can be reduced or eliminated through other management solutions, such as communicating expectations, providing a supportive work environment, and checking job fit. These interventions also are needed if training is to result in sustained new behaviors needed to achieve new performance levels, for an individual, an occupation, or an entire organization.

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> The Academy can help you assess your current situation through an in-depth and focused needs assessment.

STEP TWO: A Training Audit

A training audit is a systematic assessment of the efficiency and effectiveness of the design and delivery of a classroom training event. **This step can be taken to evaluate existing training, or used to evaluate programs after the design and implementation of a program**. Through a review of the lesson plan and the related participant materials, and an observation of classroom activities and outcomes, the audit attempts to answer the question: "Is there a high probability of learning through sound adult learning and trainer practices, principles and execution?" The process seeks to answer another question relative to the organization: "Does it meet or exceed our mission and our strategic goals and objectives as an organization?"

Audit Framework

Using the Classroom Training Audit outline provided by the American Society of Training and Development (ASTD), the Auditor will follow these steps in a collaborative process;

- ☐ **Step 1**: Review all lesson plans and related materials prior to the audit. (Does the content seem appropriate and sufficient?)
- ☐ **Step 2**: Speak with the trainers, prior to the audit and during breaks as time permits, regarding their objectives, training decisions, concerns and recommendations.
- ☐ **Step 3**: Observe the training process and methodology. (If two or more trainers are present, observe their interactions and management of the class.)

☐ **Step 4**: Observe the classroom activities. (Do the activities support the learning objectives? Are enough activities conducted, and in a timely manner related to the instruction? Does/do the instructor/instructors manage the classroom well, using appropriate techniques to facilitate learning?)

☐ **Step 5**: Speak with the learners, as appropriate, to determine their degree of learning and retention.

☐ **Step 6**: Review the handout materials and any examinations.

☐ **Step 7**: Review the examination results, if exams are given.

☐ **Step 8:** Check out concerns and discuss possible modifications with the trainers to get the benefit of their perceptions and recommendations.

The Audit Report Outline

Just as it is important that the learning objectives be specific, observable, and measurable, so must be the findings and recommendations of an audit. For the audit to have real value, it must emphasize the training's strengths and provide detailed recommendations for addressing weaknesses.

The Audit Report will have six sections and contain the following;

☐ *Section 1: Executive Summary:* The executive summary or introduction provides a summary statement of the audit findings and recommendations, presented in very general terms.

☐ *Section 2: Audit Scope:* This section lists the audit activities conducted, and outlines the extent of the auditor's involvement. This can include pre-course review was conducted of what materials, how much training was attended, what determination the auditor was seeking to make.

☐ *Section 3: Process:* This section looks at Philosophy (this section states the major focus of the training audit (content, learner activities and learning facilitation) and Methodology (this section lists all the steps taken in the audit process, including discussion of the findings and recommendations with the trainers.)

- ☐ *Section 4: General Findings:* This is the core of the report, defining the strengths, deficiencies and recommendations.

- ☐ *Section 5: Summary:* This section provides a general statement of the major strengths of the training program and a statement of the deficiencies of the program, coupled with constructive recommendations and their underlying rationale.

- ☐ *Section 6: Conclusion:* If the course is found to be essentially sound and meeting the standards as defined, it will be stated here. If not, that will also be stated with the specific reasons, and what actions need to be taken to close those deficiencies.

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The NMLEA can ensure your training it is doing what it was designed to do through the Audit Process.

Step Three: Course and Program Design

Instructional Design involves purposeful and systematic planning of a course (or components of a course/program). It is a process that begins with an analysis of the intended student learning outcomes (see Step One,) identifies teaching strategies and student activities to enable students' achievement of the outcomes, and ends with the development of multiple methods to assess whether and to what extent the outcomes were achieved. As noted, the process includes the development of instructional materials, activities, assessments, and evaluation of the effectiveness of the design and delivery. The process utilizes research on how students learn, best practices in teaching and learning, and guiding principles of instructional design practice. Faculty, trainers, subject matter experts and instructional designers collaborate in building a course or components of a course that will affect deep and positive student learning.

How Does It Work? Instructional design focuses on the integration of three key elements:

- ☐ **Learning Outcomes** – defines what the students will know or be able to do. It establishes the goals and objectives of the course, and incorporates Terminal Learning Objectives or Performance Objectives that state what a learner should be able to do after training, under what conditions, and to what standards or criteria. Enabling Objectives are also utilized, and describe the learning steps that lead to terminal objectives.

- ☐ **Instructional Strategies** – defines teaching methods and student activities that will support the students' achievement of the learning outcomes. This is where the Science of Learning and pedagogical adult learning principles are applied and incorporated to ensure the greatest student experience. Things considered and applied are presentation strategy, materials,
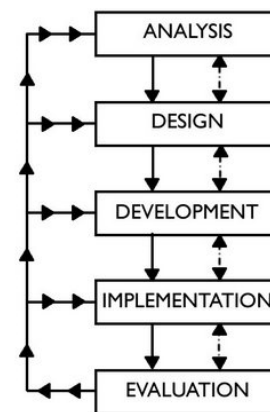
guidebooks, handouts, classroom set-up, use of technology, ice breakers, gamification, student engagement exercises and application of skills and knowledge are all built into the delivery framework. And lastly, Instructional Strategies most also examine and take into account who will be delivering the training. Noting that "Telling Ain't Training," the best designed courses will be ineffective if the instructors aren't examined under the same light.

☐ **Assessment** – defines methods that will determine whether and to what extent students' achieved the learning outcomes. This should be done using Kirkpatrick model of assessment and address/identify incoming knowledge or skills, outgoing abilities, and assessment of the application of those skills when back on the work site and after training concludes.
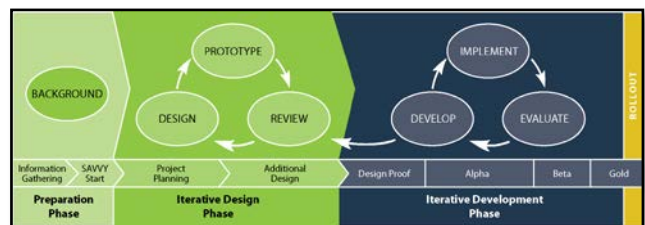
Instruction Systems Development (ISD) Models

There are two models that show slightly different approaches to Instructional Systems Development or ISD. The ADDIE model (shown below) is an acronym for the five-phase courseware development program of analysis, design, development, implementation and evaluation. It outlines the basic phases of ISD and the relationship of each of the phases to one another. The lines and arrows in the picture show that phases interrelate and may be changed during development. Lines and arrows leading back to each phase from the evaluation phase show that evaluation may turn up some problems that make it necessary to go back to a particular phase and make changes.

The ADDIE Model is an approach used by instructional designers and content developers to create instructional course materials. The model has been adopted as the standard method by many instructional designers because of its flexibility. It was first developed for the U.S. Army during the 1970s by Florida State University's Center for Educational Technology.

The Successive Approximation Model (SAM) is an Agile Instructional Systems Design model that has been introduced as an alternative to ADDIE that also emphasizes collaboration, efficiency and repetition.

Utilizing Subject Matter Experts in Course Design

Course design has two major components: the technical side and the people side. While the technical side can be rigorous, there are at least well-defined processes to guide us through. The people component of course design is not as clear-cut and can be difficult to navigate, as it requires SMEs and instructional designers to work together to produce a result. SMEs know their area of expertise very well, but are not always familiar with the learning process. Likewise, instructional designers are well versed in the science of learning, but often are not familiar with the subject matter for which they are designing a course. Creating a common language between SMEs and instructional designers is possible if you have the right techniques for combating some of the issues that arise.

Utilizing Subject Matter Experts as Instructors

As described in the book "Telling Ain't Training" by Dr. Harold D. Stolovitch, **telling ain't training**. Often organizations employ their SMEs as instructors, thinking that their knowledge of the material or subject will make them the best trainers. Not usually the case. Standing in front of a group and delivering information doesn't equate to teaching anything.

A trainer is first and foremost, a learning facilitator rather than a disseminator of information. Research has shown that training sessions that truly help people learn include active participation by learners, and therefore a good trainer has to understand how to manage a classroom, facilitate enabling objectives, and ensure a memorable learning transfer.

> ☐ The NMLEA can help you develop training programs for your trainers, to ensure they master the adult learning process

The Academy utilizes all of the tools and techniques described in this document to prepare the best solution for you and your agency. We draw upon best practices from around the country to assess your training, design the best curriculum, and deliver a course that is customized to your unique needs and requirements.

Contact the Academy today, and learn how you can take your training, your people and your organization to the next level of success.

You'll learn how to "Ready the Guardians."