TRAINING IN DISTANCE EDUCATION FOR NEW NEEDS AND TASKS

M. VENKAT REDDY

Associate Professor, SDLCE, Kakatiya University, Warangal

Abstract

There is a need to democratize the existing educational programmes in terms of their structure and accessibility. The theoretical possibilities offered by the distance mode of education in this context need to be translated into political reality by effectively implementing the educational. Innovative educational programmes and degree of professionalism is the need of a hour in the changing context of tasks in the new millenium for distance education. This training has to develop / improve the skills of an individual to perform such function. The task for such changes calls for induction of new training programmes. As this system of educational marks a significant departure from the conventional one, new norms need to be established. The implication is that for distance education to become a more dynamic system, i..e responsive to research finding, changing technology is essential. The systematic training for distance educators was essential implying that the skills, knowledge and attitudes that go into the making of a distance educator can best be learnt on the job. The education currently is on the quality of training. This clearly indicates the shift in focus from need for training towards distance education to make training effective for the purpose intended.

INTRODUCTION

On the basis of Maslow's need-analysis theory, we make a claim that the ultimate is client satisfaction in educational context it is self-direction, training courses and trainees should therefore, attempt to satisfy those upper level needs. Different thinkers define the process of training differently. It is defined as a systematic development of the training attitude / knowledge / skills or behaviour patterns required by an individual to perform adequately a given task. This definition underlines the following: 'Systematic development, which implies planning and control of individual which excludes group and team development job or task performance which is the criterion of success.'

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Hinriches views training as 'any organisationally initiated procedures which are intended to foster learning among organisational members in a direction continuing to organisation effectiveness'. This definition allows the inclusion of many institutional development activities as well as technical training and firmly plants training in its institutional context. The training, besides helping individuals grow, helps them contribute to the growth of their institutions.

Now training is a life-time affair for serious professionalism. Obviously, first and foremost, training in this field should provide expertise and practice to the personnel to carryout their own specific tasks of duties. Secondly, the personnel should learn to function effectively along and within their role-chains and task-networks. So the training should provide them with the understanding of an appreciation for now their work and tasks are related with those of owners. What the means and ways of making the co-operative effort successful are, thirdly, this training should provide for the building blocks of commitment on the part of trainees. They should get committed to distance education in their thoughts, words and deeds. These are the underlying principles the content of training should be based on. Put it differently that the training should provide adequate and appropriate content in all the domains namely cognitive, psychomotor and effective to build effective human resources for establishing, developing, maintaining and expanding the system and the sources to identify these training needs.

Identifying various Training Needs : The various means and ways of identifying training needs are :

i.   generalisation from the available literature on distance education in general;

ii.   analysis of the tasks, the problems therein, anticipated tasks and the problems expected therein;

iii.   critical incident analysis, i.e. an analysis of individual's behaviour in various situation, its consequences in terms of productivity of the tasks concerned, such exercises to identify problems which suggest training needs;

iv.   case studies of successful distance educators help in identifying those characteristics which contribute to their success. These characteristics may then be pointed and the trainees encouraged to develop them through training; and

v.   pooling the views and opinions of experienced people helps in preparing an inventory of possible needs. Where from, after further analysis dependable training needs can be identified.

Selection of the Type of Training Programme:

To list a few basic principles and specific activities that may be used to differentiate various types and the corresponding activities according to the needs of the specific groups of the personnel are :

i)   **Scaling the scope of project :** First and foremost, the trainees for whom training is to be arranged. The training programme should suit that scope adequately and appropriately.

ii)   **Short and long-term advantages of the programme :** The second consideration is the short-term and long-term advantages of a training programme. It may be that the scale and scope of a training programme imposes limited objective and activities on it.

iii)   **Catering to both institutional and individual needs :** Both the needs of the individual participants and those of the institute should be catered to. Though a trianing programme always aims at achieving an objective for an institution to reinforce an existing distance education system or modify and improve such a system. The overall objective continues to be the needs of the institute or the country.

iv)   **Linking past activities / events with future :** As stated above, training should not be 'once-in-a life-time affair', it should build links with the training events that have gone before it. They create scope for other training events that may be linked to it in the future. Each training programme must have built-in evaluation mechanisms and extensions. The ultimate result of such an approach is that the rewards of training turn to be cumulative.

Providing Models of Acceptable and Desirable Behaviour :

To cover the affective domain, training should modify the behaviour of the trainees by providing models of distance educators. This objective can be achieved by practising what is

preached about the characteristic efficiently managed well proportioned with regard to its components. The trainer should conduct himself admirably to set living examples for the trainees.

The academics, the administrators and the non-teaching staff have significant role to play in making distance education programmes a success. Without proper awareness and a general understanding of the distance mode of teaching-learning and sensitivity to the problems of the learners, it is not possible to make distance teaching a meaningful activity. There is need for management information system for top-management to guide the staff properly and profitably. In the concept of distance education itself relatively, training is in the process of being acknowledged as a necessary component. The identification of trainees is not an easy task. The trainer-training context identifying the potential trainee-groups and their felt needs is also another problem to be surmounted.

Training Needs for all Categories of Staff to Assess them :

A staff development council consisting of teaching and non-teaching staff, can assess the current required skills and knowledge of the staff, once in every years, to develop individual training plans to enable the staff to carryout their present and future duties effectively and efficiently in the specific areas of teaching. The individual training plans will be integrated and a total staff development plan can be made available. The staff development council can develop norms, once in three years, for designing staff members plans of the distance education. Trainees may need to convince clients that those who possess seemingly opposite qualities are in reality, compatible and integratable.

Training perhaps intends to make the participants more competent than they were at entry. Therefore, assessment of their competence in the target areas of training is an important step in evaluation. The process involved will be in finding out where, how with who to apply appropriately the knowledge learned, the attitude or value that underlie participant - acceptance or enthusiasm for the training context assumes importance and the trainees can assess their own behaviour. Peers can observe and comment upon what they see or the trainer can note that what is being done and identify instance of competent functions and approaches that could be improved.

The final domain requiring evaluation is the trainee's attitudes or values about the training content. It usually is not enough for them simply to know the ideas of a programme

that is intended to the taught to them. They also must believe that those ideas are worthwhile and be predisposed or even enthusiastic, about putting those ideas into practice. The simplest way to evaluate the attitudes with which learners emerge from a workshop is to include self-assessment. If evaluation data indicate that trainees have fulfilled the programmes learning objectives one can be assured that they actually will transfer or apply these new penitence in their work roles. The comprehensive information about how trainees are performing, rending on trainees on the job behaviour and simultaneously to learn about the environment in which they work, is to ask people whom they contact to report their observations and opinions of the trainees behaviour.

Most training programmes are directly or indirectly financed by the organisations that employ the people who participate in them. A fundamental issue in evaluation therefore is assessing the degree to which the functioning of the sponsoring organisation has been affected by the training. When we shift from looking at the behaviour of specific individuals to looking for evidence that quantifies their impact on the organisation in which they work, we face an increasingly demanding challenge. The most important step is identifying indices that reveal now effectively an organisation is operating the impact of training on a sponsoring organisation differes depending on the purposes that the organisation is intended to fulfill.

The process of training itself can have effects that extend well beyond the learning objectives consciously intended for it. Those include its impact on the trainees, the trainer, sponsoring organisation and even people not directly associated with the training programme at all.

Trainees can gain increased satisfaction, stimulation and pride in the work that they do. The experience of learning new ideas and methods can be an inherently gratifying event, which enhance one's morale and reaps a job feeling fresh and invigorating. In an era in which worker alienation is increasing, training experience offers a countervailing force. They can give an employee a sense of being recognised, affirmed and supported. Often, new learning that is useful on the job also has relevance in situations elsewhere.

Trainers can benefit from their own training experiences, as well. Learning events in which all parties feels stimulated, surprised and personally expanded generally are the most successful. There is an inherent liveliness and an underlying validation of the trainees self-worth when they sense that the trainees are learning from their contact with them. The

process of professional growth can continue at every training event if trainees consciously seek input from the people they face. This process is more likely to provide honest and thorough information if a systematic approach is taken.

Organisation also reaps several extracurricular gains from the training programmes that they sponsor. Recruitment of personnel, particularly those who perceive themselves to be upwardly mobile in technical and academic positions is facilitated for an organisation that has an outstanding training programme. Appropriate career counselling can also be provided by a trainer who has an opportunity to see what employees can do in tasks unrelated to their current positions. A training programme also builds loyalty and productivity among personnel.

The society at large is enriched by people who can do their jobs well and who enjoy them. These people contribute their skills to the professional, religious, political and service groups they join in that they are more mentally and physically healthy and they carryout a share of nation's economic performance. We are all interdependent and to that extent worthwhile training benefits everyone.

Focus Groups : These are small groups of trainees which meet before and after the training. A trained facilitator is required to assist the group. The change in the groups performance before and after training is recorded.

Self-Reflection : The trainees may keep a diary to reflect and make notes on how he or she is progressing with the implementation of the action plan which he / she makes at the end of a training programme.

Case Study: A particular department or location is monitored over time to study the effect of all training.

Comments from Attitude Surveys and Training Surveys : These are particularly useful to assess in a qualitative way the value of training to meet a corporate need. The follow up after training has is impact on quality throughout an organisation. The importance of quality and the impact of getting it right first time may be reflected in the way employees complete subsequent questionnaire. There are some of the qualitative methods that can be used in the evaluation of training.

The Indira Gandhi National Open University, India organised a workshop to train those who would train others in matters to do with course development and delivery. The

overall aim was that in the long-term, the university would acquire in-house self-sufficiency to conduct such training as would be necessary for part-time coordinators, course writers, counsellors and editors, new full-time faculty members, and those offices who join the various academic schools and service divisions of IGNOU.

The purpose of this task was to identify the gaps and the mismatch between the training available and the needs. The participants of the workshop identified their trainee group as -

i.   Full-time academic faculty in various schools

ii. Full-time non-academics / technical staff in various divisions and schools.

iii. Members in expert committees

iv. Part-time faculty (Coordinators / Counsellors of various study centres, script writers and editors) and

v.   Students of various programme / courses.

The coordinators and counsellors felt that they should be given upto date knowledge about distance education in general training in what counselling session should involve to make it academically fruitful, the knowledge of how counselling sessions should be different from lecturers, time-management and scheduling, the input of coordinators and counsellors, how to evolve feedback mechanism and obtain the feedback training programmes.

The system of distance education consists of networks and chains of diverse tasks. The foremost training in this field should provide expertise and practice to the personnel to carryout their own specific tasks and duties. The personnel should learn to function effectively along and within their role-chains and task-networks. So, the training should provide them with the understanding of an appreciation for how their own work and tasks are related with those of others. This training should provide for the building blocks of commitment on the part of trainees. In this fast changing world 'training once-in-a life-time is an absolute concept'. Now training is a life-time affair for serious professionalism. An effective training programme will have to take care of all the change and the corresponding activities.

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