

Personnel training and development

- A. **Pre-reading** : Make a list of all the different kinds of work-related training you can think of. Then divide them into different groups: formal and informal; short-term and long-term. Now read the text and compare your answers with the kinds of training mentioned in the text.

Training should be seen as a complement to, rather than a substitute for, careful recruitment. Having said this, all companies have a lot to gain from encouraging informal and incidental learning on the job. Besides encouraging individuals to try new things and thus learn by trial-and-error, it is typical to expose new workers to the skills of experienced performers. This approach is sometimes colloquially referred to as a 'buddy' or 'sit by Nellie' system (based on the expression: 'Sit by Nellie and do what she does'). Alternatively, the direct line manager may play the crucial role of job coach. This may be complemented by some formal on- and/or off-the-job training in technical skills where the expense can be justified by the fact that such skills are needed for acceptable job performance. Much training in the use of new computer software is of this nature.

Informal learning and short-term training are probably the most common approaches among small firms in English-speaking countries. The expense is kept down and the costs of losing good workers through 'poaching' – an ever present risk in tight labour markets – is minimized. The overall approach is often described as a 'deficit model' (simply based on bridging obvious performance gaps). It is wrong, however, to criticize small firms for this kind of pragmatic attitude to training investment. They are acting in an economically rational manner and the problem of under-investing in employee development lies in wider national and industry institutions over which they have no control.

The opportunity to use education and training more powerfully really arises where firms have invested more comprehensively in recruitment, and thus built a labour pool with greater long-term potential (and consequently greater aspirations). Such firms are well placed to consider more ambitious training strategies which involve moving beyond immediate demands in jobs to longer-term employee development. The key principle here is that, in the context of a superior investment in work and employment practices, employee development should not be restricted to a deficit model. Rather, it should aim to build employee potential and the firm's agility over the long run.

Unlike short-term training, long-term development plans involve a balanced mix of formal training and education (typically off-the-job) and informal coaching and team-building (typically on-the-job). Formal learning can be important to enhance the individual's grasp of relevant facts (the template through which they understand their experience) and their ability to tackle abstract problem solving. This kind of development becomes more powerful when individuals also, of subsequently, face a more challenging work environment in which their informal learning is extended. There are stages in careers when a mix of abstract, theory-based learning and more difficult assignments help to extend individual abilities and open up more satisfying work.

Adapted from *Strategy and Human Resource Management* by Peter Boxall and John Purcell, pp. 198-199 © Palgrave Macmillan, 2011

B. Do these statements match the information in the text? Mark each statement true (T) or false (F). The writers think that ...

1. In a 'buddy system', new employees learn from each other's experience.
2. Small companies generally prefer short-term training because it's cheaper.
3. According to the writers, highly trained employees are more likely to be 'stolen' by rival companies.
4. A 'deficit model' of training aims to fill all the gaps in an employee's current performance.
5. The authors believe that all big companies have longer-term, ambitious training programmes.
6. Formal training and education normally don't take place at the workplace.
7. Long-term training and development benefit both companies and employees.
8. A lot of the training that takes place in companies isn't sufficiently relevant to what individual employees actually need.
9. Smaller firms are not to blame if their training is limited in its scale and ambition.
10. Companies that invest more in getting the right people are more likely to have a better approach to training.
11. Big companies are always better at training their employees than smaller ones.

C. Pre-listening: What do you think motivates employees more: money and security, or having an interesting, challenging job? Discuss your ideas in pairs or small groups. Then, listen to the conversation. What motivates Tom?

Laura, a new employee of a company, is talking to Tom, who has been working at the same company for a long time. They are talking about how job satisfaction can change at different times in life.

Laura: What's the matter, Tom? You look unhappy.

Tom: You know, I've been doing the same job for four years now and I'm getting really bored. To be honest, even when I started doing this job, I soon realized it was too easy for me: it wasn't really stretching me. And now I'm feeling more and more aware that my current job isn't using all the skills I have.

Laura: It's interesting you say that. I read an article last week which mentioned some research into the relationship between job skills and job satisfaction.

Tom: What did it say?

Laura: Well, the research was based on the idea of three different categories of employees. First, there are people like you who have more talent and ability than their current job requires. The survey calls people in this category 'under-utilized'.

Tom: Yes, that's me!

Laura: Then there are people whose personal skills broadly match the skills needed for the job they are doing. The survey calls these people 'matched'. Anyway the research shows that the matched employees felt generally happy with their job, whereas the under-utilized employees were generally dissatisfied.

Tom: Well, that isn't a big surprise, is it?

Laura: No you're right, but wait. The survey identified a third group. That group consisted of people whose skills were low – so low that their skills didn't match the requirements of their job. The survey labelled these people as 'under-qualified'. And guess what?

Tom: What?

Laura: It was this last group, the under-qualified, who had the highest levels of job satisfaction of all the three categories.

Tom: That's really funny. The people who are least able to do their job are actually the happiest employees. I suppose it isn't surprising. Perhaps the under-qualified employees are just happy because their managers haven't found out yet how bad they are!

Laura: Maybe you're right. It's funny, but it's a bit scary, too. Anyway, maybe you're feeling restless because of your age.

Tom: Thanks very much!

Laura: No, I'm not saying you're old. It's just that people often change their attitude to work depending on how old they are, or perhaps according to what stage of life they're at. I mean, until you're about 30, you're still really finding out about your preferences at work: the kind of things you like doing and don't like doing, what you're good at and bad at, and so on. So you tend to change jobs and employers more than you do later in life.

Tom: OK, so are you saying that after 30, you stop being ambitious?

Laura: No, not at all. But it is true that, for a lot of people over 30, stability becomes more important. And so a lot of people focus on the need for work to provide them with a regular income, and less on finding something that really motivates them. And that's especially true if you have children or financial commitments.

Tom: Yes, I can see that.

Laura: And the opposite is also true. People who don't have those financial commitments often have a different attitude. And often people actually have fewer commitments when they get older, say at around 50. For example, your children have finished university now, haven't they?

Tom: Yes, they have.

Laura: And you've paid off your mortgage, haven't you?

- Tom: Well, yes I have.
- Laura: So while I'm sure you still want to earn a good income, money isn't the be all and end all for you. You want to feel fulfilled as well, and that's starting to feel more important for you. Am I right?
- Tom: Yes, I agree with all that. But I'm not sure it depends entirely on how old you are or on your financial commitments.
- Laura: What do you mean?
- Tom: Well, if I look back at my career, I can see a sort of pattern. Every three or four years, I start to feel restless – in need of a change. Even if the job is going quite well, I just get bored. Do you know what I mean?
- Laura: Yes, I do. And that feeling is very common – it happens to me, too. But I suppose it isn't always easy for companies to deal with this. I mean, everybody's life cycles and attitudes are different. And it isn't always possible for employers to give somebody a new job as soon as they feel they are ready for one.
- Tom: So what's the answer, then? How can a company keep an employee motivated when it can't offer them a promotion or a new job straight away?
- Laura: Hmm. That isn't easy to answer. I think that ... [fade]

D. Look at these texts, and decide what each person is talking about. Choose the answers from the box.

action learning • adventure training • assertiveness training • carousel training
 continuous personal development • experiential learning
 an induction course • in-tray learning • modern apprenticeship • off-the-job training
 online learning • open learning • sales training • team-building
 total quality management • training needs analysis

1. This company is committed to helping its employees learn about their jobs and develop their skills for the whole period they are working here, and not just at the beginning of their contract. We run regular courses and workshops in order to achieve this, both inside and outside the company premises.
2. Our employees have to deal with a lot of difficult situations, and they often come in contact with people who can be difficult to work with and do business with. We train them to have more confidence in themselves so that they can deal effectively with any problems and difficulties they encounter.
3. We believe that the best way of learning a skill is through practice. We don't waste time on courses and workshops. We show the employee his duties, give him an outline

of how the company operates, and then we just say 'Get on with it, and good luck'. It's a remarkably effective method.

4. It's very important that our employees develop skills in leadership, problem solving, decision-making and interpersonal communication. The best way to achieve this is to get them involved in group games and physically demanding outdoor activities like sailing and climbing. These also help to build team spirit.
5. When we promote somebody to a management position, the first thing we do is to give them a lot of typical management paperwork and tell them to deal with it. We set them a time limit for this, and monitor them carefully to see how they get on. We then review their performance and show them where they went right or wrong.
6. Our company understands how important it is that our employees work well together in order for the company to be effective. Our training sessions are designed to instil co-operation and solidarity in a group of employees who have to work together.
7. It is our company policy to make sure that our employees know how all the jobs in the company work, not just their own. We find the best way of doing this is to move them from job to job and department to department. They meet colleagues who they might not normally meet, and learn about their jobs and how they operate.
8. New employees in our company need to learn about our products and how they work, how the distribution system operates, how to deal with both suppliers and customers and how to handle complaints. They also study trade and retail laws, and are accompanied on their first customer visits by their trainer.
9. I've been interested in photography since I was very young, so when I finished school I started learning how to be a photographer. I spend my week working with a professional, who teaches me about all the different aspects of photography. At the same time, I receive training in areas such as numeracy, problem-solving and interpersonal skills.
10. First of all I was given a tour of the factory and then I was introduced to my colleagues and was given an outline of the company and its products. After that I was guided through the company's code of practice, taken to my department and was shown my duties.
11. My company can't hold training workshops in the office because we don't have enough space, and of course while we are learning, we aren't actually making money, so the company feels it wouldn't be making the best use of its employees. Instead, they send us to a college in the evening where we develop our skills and knowledge.
12. This company believes that personal development and training should be more flexible. As a result, we have developed a system of flexible training courses that a trainee or employee can start at any time, and which does not require a teacher.
13. Once a year we look at the different skills and abilities of our staff, and we decide if they are enough to help the company fulfil its aims and operate effectively. We then develop a series of classes and workshops to help the staff learn more about their job and how they can operate more effectively.
14. This company has a policy that our managers should be committed to maintaining and improving the quality of their work, and also their skills and knowledge. We run

courses, classes and workshops on a regular basis, and ensure that they are kept up to date with all the latest developments.

15. We are a very forward-looking company and we use the most up-to-date methods, so of course all our training is delivered over the Internet or through our company intranet. This means that our trainees and employees can learn during their breaks, at home and even when they are on holiday.
16. Our company trains its management staff by giving them a series of problem-solving activities. The managers from our office work together with those from other departments around the country to solve real or imaginary problems, and their findings are then applied to the overall successful running of the company.

E. In no more than 10 lines discuss the personnel training and development