

Are You Sure You're Training the Right Things?

Don't waste resources on training that nobody wants or needs.

By Dan Black

It's common for people to dread training and avoid it if they can. It's not that they don't want to learn. The problem is that the training is often for skills they'll never use and in which they have no interest.

There's a proven technique to solve this problem. You need to find out what people's jobs really entail and what training they actually need. To do so, it's effective to use a modified version of DACUM (which stands for Developing a Curriculum). It was created by educators to design courses by first analyzing people's needs. Here are the steps:

1. Get Real Information from the Right People

First, you need to glean information about the role at hand. You'll use this information to design training for the person in that role. The best way to gain this knowledge is to convene a group of people who are familiar with the role. Diversity of perspective is key here, so seek a mix of people. Here's a sample group:

The new person. To gain fresh perspectives, include those who've been in their jobs for less than a year.

The person who has been there forever. Such people can provide historical knowledge about how the role has changed over the years.

An adjacent collaborator. Don't be afraid to bring in someone who isn't in the role but is "close" to it. This individual can provide an outsider's perspective and at the same time bring knowledge and experience to the role at hand.

Key stakeholders. This group is essential because they need the results. They're your champions who need to understand the process and who often support your budget.

“Use a technique created by educators to design courses.”

2. Create an Occupational Definition

Get everyone in the room focused on the role. Document the following:

Reporting lines. Who does the person in this role report to – up, down, and laterally?

Critical knowledge. What specific skills are essential to doing the job well?

“Nice to have” abilities and traits. What type of person tends to perform well?

Information that was learned but wasn't taught. What were those “aha moments” people had on the job?

3. Define the Body of Knowledge for Peak Performance

Use a duty/task matrix to define the body of knowledge necessary to perform in the role. All you need are some sharpies and big post-it notes. Put the information on the wall so everyone can see it. Put duties down the left of the matrix and tasks going across left to right. Here are the definitions and some examples:

Duties are top-of-mind for the role. They don't have a beginning or an end. They're ever-present while on the job. Their descriptions usually end in -ing. Some examples:

- **Development director:** Gaining support for the organization
- **Volunteer coordinator:** Matching volunteers with the right jobs.

Tasks are processes or procedures that have a beginning and end. They usually can have a metric associated with them. People fulfill duties by repeatedly completing a series of tasks, usually four or more. The description of a defined task requires an object, verb, and qualifier (adverb or adjective). For example:

- **Development director:** Use social media daily to connect with supporters.
- **Volunteer Coordinator:** Arrange an annual dinner to thank volunteers for their work.

When you identify the duties and the required tasks, you've documented the entire body of knowledge needed for the role at hand.



“What were those
“aha moments” people
had on the job?”

Now you're armed with an analysis and potential for results based on empirical data and not simply feelings. You can develop a plan that justifies a budget and will deliver results. Oh, and you've done it all in two days. 

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4. Understand the Gaps

Go through your matrix task by task, and draft a gap analysis. Ask: Where is it documented how to perform this task? Or has it been passed down over time rather than written down? If it's the latter, it's a gap.

5. Consider Criticality

Everything in your duty/task matrix is important. But what's most critical? Again, go task by task, and describe what the impact would be if that task weren't accomplished.

Ask: If the worker fails to perform this task, what happens? Does anyone notice? Does it create some rework – possibly a lot? Will you lose a customer? Will someone get hurt?

6. Build Your Plan

You now have all the information you need to build your learning plan. You know what gaps need to be filled and what information is critical to performance. You can now design training that will truly impact performance. You can map these duties and tasks to competencies, leverage them in cross-team training interactions, and make decisions on the right method for delivery.

Create Your Learning Plan

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Motivate Workers with Training Opportunities (Vol. 33, No. 3)

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Using Training Strategically to Build Organizational Capacity (Vol. 14, No. 4)

Training Programs Need More than Good Information (Vol. 21, No. 2)

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