

# Effective training in a changing world

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It seems strange that something as ubiquitous as training, a task that all organisations have to manage on an ongoing basis, always appears to be surrounded by debate.

Should it not just run quietly and easily without presenting challenges to managers and business owners? Perhaps it should, but government initiatives, the legal environment, consumer preferences and technology are always driving changes that impact on training.

Ironically, the core content of best practice in food safety and health and safety changes very little, but the framework surrounding it changes all the time. Business context and management requirements dictate how the core content should be used and presented. For companies this creates an ongoing need to review training – especially how it is organised, delivered and measured.

Currently there are several factors that are driving corporate managers to undertake the biggest review of training seen for years.

## Workforce

Migration is happening on an astounding scale and is a global phenomenon. Each region and country sees different groups of people in transit. In Europe many migrants find their first work in food manufacturing, catering and hospitality.

At the CIEH the top selling non-English test papers purchased by trainers in the UK are:

- Cantonese.
- Polish.
- Portuguese.
- Bengali.
- Turkish.

The issues are obvious for employers. Should training be done in English or in the language of their new workers? Most safety specialists I have spoken to believe that English has to be used at some stage because, signs, packaging, equipment, PA announcements, supervisors and production managers all use English. Team culture in the work situation depends on people communicating.

However, in practical terms this is a problem when new arrivals have little or no

English and need to go through their induction. Some trainers now bring in interpreters. Other trainers are experimenting with text-free training (though approaches where new employees can not ask questions or get feedback are of questionable value).

Perhaps the most enlightened approach is where the company identifies intelligent motivated and 'keen' individuals in the new work groups who have some command of English. These individuals are then promoted and sent on fast track training programmes to turn them into training assistants.



Managers who have investigated this have been aware that many of their new workers have high levels of educational achievement in their own countries and given the recognition and opportunity, become highly committed and loyal employees.

Of course, there is always a risk in investing in people but it would seem that given the chance to earn more and do more intellectual work, these people stay put and work hard. There is obviously a potential for some of these people to acquire higher skills and become full time trainers in their own right.

## Other demographic changes

Other workforce changes are also occurring. Some trainers are seeking to target training to meet the needs of different work groups. The learning needs, learning skills and work experiences of large workforces vary widely and it is possible to segment the needs of over 50s against those of young people, or people with special learning needs.

Their key skills, experience and abilities

vary widely and when volume allows, they benefit from training delivered to meet their learning requirements.

There are now many examples where special groups are recruited and trained, for example people with Down's syndrome who prove to be valuable and loyal employees.

Trainers have to consider the training needs of individuals and establish if the volume of potential trainees and the improved outcomes achieved, justify the investment in new approaches and materials. It is obviously a generalisation, but there is truth in the observation that older people find one to one training or workbook self-study preferable to some forms of e-learning.

Instead of establishing just one approach with one set of resources, it may be that better results can be gained by establishing different streams using different methods and resources.

Putting together training solutions based on both languages and learning needs shows that professional trainers are dealing with a complex task.

## Law and litigation

The legal environment never gets easier and this is true in all regions and countries.

Generally, societies are becoming more litigious. Highly visible national or global brands are seen as a 'good' target. This applies to both food safety and health and safety where employees are as likely to sue a company as customers.

The cost of claims, legal representation and insurance (or self-insurance) is a big overhead. But it can look insignificant next to the cost of damage done to brands and share prices in the market if a story appears in the media.

In the UK, this year's Corporate Manslaughter Bill will add even more focus as board directors assess the corporate risk posed by unlimited fines. This affects all sectors as the legislation will apply to nearly all government bodies including the NHS.

Deaths resulting from food contamination or hygiene failure could easily progress all the way through to a Corporate Man-

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slaughter case just as easily as a serious mechanical or health and safety system breakdown.

Law firms like Eversheds are telling employers that they need to re-assess their training programmes. Covering all the bases in terms of content, the essential knowledge and skills topics, is not enough.

In court, companies would be expected to demonstrate that trainees comprehended the learning and understood why it was relevant to them in their work. Testing workers and providing the means for them to ask questions and get feedback is an essential element of this to provide a due diligence defence. Similarly, it would be difficult to demonstrate to a court that training was of an appropriate quality without the ongoing measurement of training effectiveness, results comparisons and external evaluation.

The adoption of international standards like Codex Alimentarius within national or regional (European) legislation should make life easier as integration and harmonisation occurs. But managers say that it doesn't 'feel' like it. Traceability stretches further, documentation and records bind suppliers, distributors, retailers and the final customers into lengthening chains.

It is a challenge to set up the systems and the technology, but it is an ongoing challenge to provide training – especially when it may mean educating business partners further down the line. This is certainly the case for the food service industry where companies can not divorce themselves from the consequences of small caterers misunderstanding their responsibilities following this year's revised European Regulations.

Misunderstandings about deliveries left on doorsteps, temperature measurement, damaged packaging or 'lost' documents may result in disputes and disgruntled customers where the customers are panicked by the FSA's local campaigns.

## Specific to the UK

There are some particular issues affecting the UK where government policy is impacting on established training practices in companies.

As a matter of policy, the Department for Education and Skills has decided to shift the cost of providing workplace skills training back to employers. Where the government was happy to increase the skills base of UK PLC by funding basic skills, some of this will disappear. So local colleges that were able to provide basic food safety training funded by the Learning and Skills Council, may no longer have access to funds.

There is sense in this strategy, as the provision of funds was always regional and created a kind of postcode lottery where employers in one region got low cost training, whereas employers in other regions could not. National companies with multiple sites around the country also had issues in

trying to establish a consistent approach.

The result of this was confusing and gave some employers the 'unfair' advantage of getting heavily subsidised training.

For the government, the new strategy shifts the focus onto 14-19 year olds, seeking to introduce valuable work skills to school leavers who do not want to follow the academic route into higher education.

A key component in this is the Government's desire to see all skills learning as 'units' that an individual can carry forward wherever their working life takes them.

Under the new 'Framework for Achievement', the national curriculum will count all units as a success so long as they are a QCA recognised academic or vocational qualification.



This has resulted in two major changes. First, the shift of funding towards school leavers as preparation for work.

Secondly, the addition of a new Level 1 into the national framework to sit under the current Level 1 known by most training managers as 'Foundation'. This means that all the previous levels shift up. So what used to be Level 2 'Intermediate' (supervisory) is now Level 3 and what was Level 3 'Advanced' (management) is now Level 4.

This is important to employers, even if they do not use QCA accredited qualifications, because it will eventually mean that young workers from the UK education system will be presenting themselves with an awareness of safety in the workplace and, in some cases, the fundamentals of food safety.

The same will apply to employees coming from the armed forces or ex-offenders recruited from prisons.

This should have a big impact on the content of induction training and may be another example of why training may need to be 'unitised' and targeted.

All this means that HR and training specialists should stop and assess how their company training programmes interface with skills training organised outside the workplace.

Instead of each company doing its own thing and starting from scratch, it is possible to make better use of employees' existing skills, especially when these skills have come from a quality-assessed and accredited source.

Every year, companies in the food sector waste large amounts of money putting people through training they have probably received half a dozen times before. As an industry, the food sector could benefit greatly by an acknowledgement that quality

training can follow set standards, be quality assessed by an independent awarding body and shared as employees move around the country and between employers.

## Awarding bodies

For big companies with large workforces, there are many ways of using awarding bodies. The Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH) maintains high standards, examines trainers' credentials and carries out regular audits because it sets a recognised national standard that employees, employers and the enforcement community can all trust. But this does not mean that the qualifications system has to be inflexible and burdensome.

The unitisation of learning makes it easy for employers to add extra topics and match their training programmes to the curriculum checklist for CIEH awards.

A common misunderstanding is that a long established, high quality in-company training programme has to be abandoned. This is not the case. One or two extra topics may be required just to broaden the learning, or timings adjusted to balance the emphasis between topics, but these adjustments are easy for professionals to handle.

Trainers can use a blended learning approach and use any materials or examples to demonstrate their points. Manuals and any workbooks that employees use during, or take away after, the course can all be produced by the CIEH to reflect the employer's brand or house style.

Official certificates can also be produced that carry the employer's logo to reinforce the importance attached to safe working in that business and to help support a corporate culture based on quality. The development of e-learning and online marking by CIEH will also support the long term needs of employers.

The new Level 1 qualification may provide an ideal way for big companies to take advantage of simplified and lower cost induction learning. At the CIEH we are looking to this to provide an escalator that employers can use to meet their business needs in a more progressive way. Starting from a simple induction, employees can be scheduled small units of learning and, when they have taken sufficient units pass through a Level, then they can opt to take an assessment which (if they pass) will generate an award and certificate. Dependent on the duration of employment, their work areas and progression to supervisor or team leader status, some employees may travel to the top of the escalator over a period of years. Or, employees can be fast tracked to gain qualifications more quickly.

The spotlight is back on training and it should be a concern of senior managers. It is certainly time to review the options and to formulate a plan that will manage corporate risk in the future as well as provide better business benefits. ■