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ABSTRACT

This report analyzes the employee training program at the Outdoor Program Centre (OPC) of the University of Calgary and offers recommendations that may be of benefit to other outdoor recreation centers. The OPC offers products and services such as facility access, equipment rentals, instructional and recreational programs, and repair services for outdoor equipment. Employees are trained as recreation service workers to carry out such duties as equipment booking and cash responsibilities. An interview with the training supervisor provided information on the OPC training strategy and mission, ongoing development of the training program, lecture and on-the-job training methods, length of training period, and use of full-time staff and senior managers as training facilitators. Recommendations for on-the-job training focus on training steps and training program design based on adult learning theory. Other recommendations address coaching and mentoring, updates to the training manual, and development of learning standards and objectives. Appendixes list steps in instructional design and principles of adult learning theory. (SV)

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# TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT THROUGH ADULT LEARNING THEORY

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper is the result of a study of the Outdoor Program Centre (OPC) at the University of Calgary. An analysis of the training program in this organization offers recommendations that can be of benefit to other outdoor recreation centres. Due to space limitations the full methodology and results will not be presented here. Several training issues were identified. Information overload during training sessions is a common problem identified by employees. Training is perceived as giving employees an overview of how to do their job rather than teaching important skills and knowledge. Recommendations to improve the training program are outlined. Specifically, on-the-job training, coaching and mentoring, updates to training manuals and documents, changes to the training program design and structure, performance measurement standardization, and organizational culture are discussed.

## Introduction

The Outdoor Program Centre offers products and services such as facility access, equipment rentals, instructional and recreational programs, and repair services for outdoor equipment. Employees are trained as recreation service workers to carry out various job duties such as equipment booking and cash responsibilities. Employee training is affected by a number of environmental and cultural variables.

The organization's training strategy is designed to ensure accuracy in details and elimination of errors to assist in revenue generation. Training needs are derived through examination, review and analysis of successful and unsuccessful interactions between customers and staff. Training objectives focus on the correct identification of equipment, proper rental and return of equipment, effective and efficient work order procedures, and accurate cash balancing. The lecture format is emphasized with training sessions facilitated by senior full-time managers. Due to fluctuations in employee availability and business cycle, employee

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training processes varies in length. Training success is measured through staff performance, turnover statistics and workforce utilization.

### **OPC Training System**

Information included in this section is compiled from an interview conducted with the training supervisor. The position of Recreation Service Worker (RSW) is analyzed.

### **Strategy and Purpose**

The OPC training strategy is designed to ensure accuracy in details by focusing on eliminating errors as well as emphasizing revenue generation. Alignment of business objectives and training objectives is believed to exist because of the continued viability of the organization's profit capabilities, but the relationship is not actually cognitively planned and is very indirect. The purpose of the training program is to teach employees organizational processes and skills specific to the OPC.

Training is seen as a means to accomplish the mission statement. Through teaching employees about the equipment and what OPC can offer, employees should possess the technical knowledge, attitude and skills they need to effectively and efficiently serve customers. Training on soft skills such as interpersonal and communication skills are not specifically provided since management focuses on hiring individuals with previous training and experience in these areas.

### **Development & Objectives**

The development of the training program begins with annual meetings to discuss training initiatives. From these meetings, training needs are identified. Training needs are derived through examination, review and analysis of successful and unsuccessful interactions between customers and staff. Data from these interactions is not formally collected. Informal feedback from trainers allows senior staff to assess critical service incidents that require employee training and retraining. Occasionally, qualitative data provided by equipment report forms and the counter supervisor daily log serve to validate training needs. Although the main training strategy is designed to be proactive, the system appears to be reactive to internal and external environmental variables. Therefore, the training program is ad hoc, needs driven and excessively responsive to change.

Objectives of OPC's training strategy include correct identification of equipment, proper rental and return of equipment, effective and efficient work order procedures, and accurate cash balancing. The goal of training is to change for the better by striving to reduce common employee errors. The training program is constantly being adapted through yearly reviews. Training changes as new equipment and new courses are offered. After undergoing training, employees should be able to give advice on matters of equipment rental and course registration.

## **Training Methods**

Various training methods are used at the OPC. The lecture format is primarily used for the introduction of new information. The trainer engages participants in discussion and encourages as much action learning as possible. A small amount of technology training is included. Senior staff facilitate training sessions. An emphasis on active forms of training such as on-the-job training and behavioral modeling is prevalent. These are important to ensure trainee involvement in the learning process. Learning by doing is heavily emphasized as a means to train employees. Specifically, this would focus on familiarizing employees with the U of C computer system. The computer system is accessed through assigned password sign-ons and initials. Levels of access can be set which allow staff to perform tasks related to the five functions of the RSW position.

## **Training Period**

The entire training process varies in length and is ongoing. It is dependent on employee availability and scheduling. Ideally, formal training sessions for the five functions would consist of a maximum of 14 hours, which is approximately 2.5 hrs per function. On-the-job training is dependent on an employee's actual work experience (number of hours per week) at the OPC. An individual who works 3-10 hours per week would have less practice than someone who works 14-20 hours per week. Therefore, those individuals with less on-the-job experience have a longer training period.

In addition to variable working hours, many employees follow a cyclical pattern of employment. The trend is for students to accumulate many hours during the spring and summer and fewer hours during the fall and winter. Usually, an individual can be fully trained to handle all aspects of the job in approximately 8-10 months.

## **Training Facilitators**

Full-time staff and senior managers conduct all training sessions. Before an individual is given responsibility for training, they need to demonstrate that they have the experience and interest to handle these important duties. There is no formal "train-the-trainer" program in place. Experienced full time staff express their interest in training new staff to the supervisor. No assessment of their knowledge and ability to train new staff is completed. The abilities of training staff are informally assessed by the supervisor. The informal assessment may consist of a review of their performance on the tasks associated with the RSW position. New trainers work with senior staff observing training sessions and sharing facilitation responsibilities in these sessions.

## **Survey Methods**

Four employees from the Outdoor Program Centre were interviewed. Three of the employees were employed as part-time staff in the Recreation Service Worker position. The fourth employee holds a full-time position as the OPC Customer Service Supervisor. Employee A was trained to the facility access function. Employee B was trained to the booking attendant function. Employee C is trained to the head cashier function.

## **Recommendations**

Given the best case scenario and an unlimited budget, the following recommendations can be considered. Certain recommendations have cost implications that might make them difficult to implement. After considering financial constraints, I believe that development of employee training manuals and train-the-trainer manuals, incorporating the training design recommendations as well as quantifying employee performance would have the most cost-effective benefits for the training system at OPC.

## **On-The-Job Training**

This training method is used extensively at the OPC, several observations and suggestions are noted. First, a true on the job system should be developed which includes a mix of formal training and support systems (Belcourt & Wright, 1996). Special diligence must be applied to ensure that employees are not abandoned after their formal training. In determining who will do the training, the prime prerequisite is that potential instructors are trained and qualified to teach. As the OPC relies on full-time supervisors for this important function it is important that these individuals must want to be trainers, possess excellent communication skills, and be experts in their skill area. To effectively promote an environment that is conducive to learning, trainers must show patience and respect for differences in individuals abilities to learn.

As adapted from Belcourt and Wright (1996, pg. 216), the following steps should be implemented:

1. *Show the trainee how to perform the job.* It will be important to break the job into manageable tasks. A common complaint expressed by training participants was the great deal of information presented in training sessions. Therefore, to reduce the intensity of training sessions, present only as much as can be absorbed at one time. Employees should know the why as well as the how for the task. As a result, the trainer needs to encourage questions from trainees. Time should also be taken to illustrate how the job fits into the organization and why the job is important to the organization.
2. *Allow the trainee to see the whole job again.* In addition to seeking questions from employees, the trainer should ask questions to determine comprehension level.
3. *Gradually involve the trainee by asking him/her to perform less difficult parts of the job.* The purpose of this step is to build some confidence in the participant by trying to ensure initial success. The goal is to minimize the trainee's frustration level.
4. *Allow the trainee to perform the entire job.* During this step, positive feedback is very important. Improvements should be suggested where necessary.
5. *Leave the trainee to work alone.* Clearly, explain to employees when and where to find help if necessary. While the employee should be closely supervised initially, supervision can be reduced once the employee gains confidence and skill and begins to feel comfortable with doing the job.

Throughout the entire process, each step should be repeated as necessary, with the trainer showing understanding for the learning that is taking place.

## **Coaching and Mentoring**

The implementation of a formal, structured process will allow for more stringent monitoring of an employee's training. For example, coaches could be scheduled on the same shifts as the employees they are coaching. A mutually developed plan and set



of objectives agreed on by employee and coach will ensure accountability in the training system. If objectives are not met after effective training has occurred, and this is due to poor employee performance then the employee can be held accountable. The plan must also include an evaluation or measurement procedure to determine the success of training

Assignment of mentors can also be used to facilitate learning and training development. An individual's motivation level for the mentoring program, his/her time availability and their knowledge about how the organization really works are important criteria that must be assessed. Once mentors are identified, they should meet with their assigned employee as soon as possible. The mentor and his protégé need to be in frequent contact with each other to ensure problems are addressed and issues resolved.

1. Strict monitoring of employee training records is needed. This can be accomplished by developing a training schedule or calendar to track employee training.

## Manuals and Documents

1. Updates to the existing training manual must be completed. This will ensure a common guide for all employees and facilitate a certain degree of standardization in the training process, see Appendix 1 for instructional design recommendations.
2. Development of learning standards and objectives will make the observation and measurement of training results easier. Training participants should know what is expected of them after completing each training session.

## Training Program Design

Elements of adult learning theory should be included in the development of the training program and all instructional materials. Appendix 2 presents basic information for adult education situations.

1. The amount of time per training session should be extended by incorporating actual monitored on-the-job training. Training participants should be given more time to absorb and gradually integrate their learning with actual work experience. If possible, employees should be trained in a classroom environment during the morning and then apply learning through interacting with customers or observing trained staff in the afternoon. This must be done under the supervision of one of the senior training staff.
2. Implementation of a specific training program dealing with interpersonal and communication skills needs to be considered for those employees who feel they lack these skills. With the heavy emphasis on customer service and satisfaction, all employees should be given an opportunity to improve their skills in these areas. Moreover, including a role playing component or case incident method in an employee's training will enhance skill development in dealing with critical service encounters. Employee empowerment is critical to improved customer service.
3. All training participants should be given the chance to practice on the computer system before actually using it on the job. For instance, they should be able to work through a mock work order on the computer. Another multi-media application would be to create training sessions on video. This would decrease the amount of trainer time and cost. Flexibility gained with this method would offset difficulties in scheduling training sessions and employee availability.

4. The training process should focus more on the higher levels of the domains of learning. More emphasis needs to be placed on comprehension and application of learning. In developing the training curriculum, the training sequence should consist of four basic activities (Belcourt and Wright, 1996; White, 1997):

- a) *Experience* - present an experience or situation that demonstrates a problem that participants would be experiencing at work, such as having to deal with an irate customer.
- b) *Information* - present theoretical information and concepts that explain why the problem occurred and that lead to discussion of alternative approaches.
- c) *Analysis* - analyze the demonstrated situation to illustrate the effectiveness of the concepts or material to be taught.
- d) *Practice* - practice the new concepts in order to solve the problem. This recommendation, by allowing for analysis and problem solving, addresses the cultural expectations of autonomy and individualism, which are prevalent amongst OPC staff.

### **Cultural Change**

Implementation of new systems or processes will require some cultural change. Cultural change must be supported by management. In this instance, training supervisory staff on accepted business practices could produce recognition of their benefits and acceptance of change. Some business practices that could be trained are information management, job design, employee appraisal systems, or qualitative analysis. Without cultural recognition and acceptance of the need for change, good recommendations can fail.

### **Conclusion**

The effectiveness of any training system is determined by the successful job performance of training participants. Training should facilitate both learning and performance. During training, employees are undergoing a process of learning where they are acquiring new skills, knowledge, and attitudes. Performance, which is the application of these new skills, knowledge and attitudes is dependent on the quality of training, feedback received and the opportunity to practice. When quality training, feedback and practice are provided, employee development can progress. By following these principles, OPC can ensure that the training strategy employed will facilitate organizational performance and excellence.

## REFERENCES

1. Belcourt, M., Wright, P. C., 1996 *Managing Performance through Training & Development*. An International Publishing Company, Toronto
2. White, A., J. 1997 *Train- the- Trainer, Adult Learning Theory*. Innovative Training Communications Inc. Toronto p.5-37



## Appendix 1 Instructional Design

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### **1. Assess the need for training.**

45 caliber question  
Look for performance gap  
Needs analysis

### **2. Analyze the target population**

Attitude  
Background  
Interests  
Expectations

### **3. Establish the Learning Objectives**

S.M.A.R.T. Specific, measurable, attainable,  
Realistic, timely  
Observable Behaviors  
The video test

### **4. Determine the Training Content**

List the Actions  
Identify the Knowledge  
Sequence the content  
Think then do

### **5. Develop the Training Modules**

Introduction  
Overview  
Presentation  
Exercise  
Review and Summary

### **6. Design the Participant Materials**

Introduction  
State Objectives  
Groupings  
Intra-organizational  
Illustrations  
Text layout  
Memory Triggers

### **7. Evaluate the Training Effectiveness**

Reactions- at the time  
Learning- pre and post test  
Behavior- on the job  
Results- quantify

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<sup>1</sup> Reference: A. J. White 1997 Train-the-Trainer, Adult Learning Theory

## Appendix 2 Adult Learning Theory

Malcom Knowles is a highly respected and knowledgeable expert on adult learning theory. Knowles suggests that the following principles be applied in teaching adult learners new skills and knowledge.

1. Identify why the training is needed.
2. Focus on "real world" issues.
3. Allow learners to challenge ideas and make decisions.
4. Relate training to experience.
5. Respect individual differences.
6. Make the learning action oriented.

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