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Selecting a Training Provider

We could be more careful in the way we pick organisations to train our staff. We could negotiate more proactively with prospective trainers, becoming a contributor to the design and delivery of the programme rather than merely an end-buyer. A leading consultant from a reputable training organisation commented recently that " having sat on both sides of the desk, as a buyer and a provider of training, I realise that, as a buyer, I was far too unclear on my requirements, objectives, measurables, etc - and now, as a training provider, I see many of my clients inclined to fall into just the same trap!

You cannot choose the training provider that is the best fit with your needs unless you have a clear idea of your training objectives. So, time-consuming though they may be, a Training Needs Analysis will certainly assist you in clarifying your training goals and evaluate possible solutions. Remember that training might not be the best solution to closing competency gaps: don't overlook other possible actions. Consider changing processes or procedures, job rotation, outsourcing or recruiting fully-trained people.

Two methods for choosing a training provider seem to be gaining in popularity at the moment:

- 1 - throwing the gauntlet down with an invitation for tenders to a group of training companies
- 2 - allocating budget up-front to a discrete number of providers via a preferred supplier system

Whereas both approaches might work for other procurement projects, we could be more careful in the way we pick organisations to train our staff. We could negotiate more proactively with prospective trainers, becoming a contributor to the design and delivery of the programme rather than merely an end-buyer.

In choosing a training provider, the decision essentially comes down to assessing the quality of the training offered and the competence of the provider. In doing this, you could look at all, or some, of the following factors:

1 Look Beyond Existing Suppliers

It is often very difficult to identify a truly good trainer who can provide innovative and effective training solutions. This leads many organisations to stick rigidly with existing suppliers, even when these are expensive or when other suppliers could potentially add something new. So, check with colleagues in other companies – or staff who might have received training during periods with past employers – and actively look for recommendations. The internet is an excellent source for identifying possible providers for inclusion in your trainer shortlists.

2 Avoid the Generic

Ensure that you find a specialist. Avoid the generics who walk in, plunk down a binder, and present an answer before asking, "What's your problem?" Most often, they have a general solution to a broad problem. When they talk about customisation, there is a danger that it might entail a global search and replace of "company name" in the contents of the training binder. Review the course objectives of the trainer and ensure that they match your own.

3 Custom Fit

The most effective is training often the programme that's carefully customised. Look for a training provider that can offer insight and support in refining your own organisation's training goals, researches your particular needs, and applies the findings to proven methodologies. With a specialist, the chances are greater that your training will be relevant and successful. Again, ensure that the programme is truly customised and not just a rejigged version of a programme delivered to another company last year. You need to negotiate content with the training provider.

4 Reputation of Provider

Ensure that the reputation of the training provider is still current – that they are "as good as they used to be" and that you are not dazzled by their marketing presentation. Ask for, and follow up, references for both the organisation and the training facilitator who will be looking after your training project. In taking up references, look for evaluation of effectiveness in terms of 'the Five Rs':

Reaction: What was the reaction of the participants?

Retention: What learning has taken place?

Relevance: Have the participants applied what they learned?

Rating: Has their job performance improved?

Results: Did the application of the training produce the desired results?

Many buyers of group training either attend another programme given by the prospective trainer, to get a feel for that organisation, or send another employee, as a 'scout', on such a programme.

Be clear as to which training organisation is the 'best fit' with your company – in terms of goals, culture and values – as well as the people in it.

5 Facilitator

Insist on profiles of all training facilitators who will be delivering the training. You could even ask the training provider for an opportunity to meet their facilitator. Check if the facilitator has trained with similar groups in the past and with similar learning objectives and delivery tools as the programme you are seeking to have delivered.

Match the style and values of the facilitator with the prospective participants.

6 Cost

Clearly, you need to know the exact 'per person cost' of the training. Don't accept any open-ended quotations and look out for extras such as materials, overnight expenses for trainers and refreshments for participants. Often, a carefully chosen trainer can not only prove more effective in terms of skills enhancement but also more cost effective. Best is definitely not the most expensive.

7 Materials/Training Style

Make sure that you have an opportunity to look at all of the materials to be used by participants during the training programme. Are the materials available on CD-Rom or on-line? Be clear as to the level of participant involvement in terms of things such as experiential learning, project work and assessment. "Culture-proof" the materials against the values and culture of your own organisation.

8 Currency of Training

Be clear as to any risk that the training might quickly become out-of-date, in terms of legislation, technological developments or your own organisational change.

9 Certification

If the training course is needed for employee certification – or you believe that participant motivation will be enhanced by external certification – ensure that the course offered by the training provider is properly accredited by a relevant and respected awarding body.

10 Follow Up

The effectiveness of many training programmes are enhanced by follow-up sessions. Look for these, and check that they are included in the cost.

Training is important. Its effectiveness can be hindered by a hurried, or sloppy, decision-making process as to which organisation will deliver the training. Take care.

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http://www.corporatetraining.ie/articles/choosing_a_training_supplier.html