

# How to conduct a Business Skills Needs Analysis?

At the core of any effective training program is correctly identifying (1) who needs to be trained and (2) what content needs to be trained. Poorly conducted needs analyses can lead to expensive training solutions that train:

- The wrong competencies;
- The wrong people; and
- The wrong learning methods.

The results of a skills needs analysis provides L&D personnel with answers to the following questions:

- What is the business objective?
- What skills are needed to meet those objectives?
- Who needs it?
- How will it be provided?
- How much will it cost?
- Which trainer is qualified to deliver the training?

Before any training programme is implemented, L&D must conduct a needs analysis by following the steps below.

## Step 1: Determine the Desired Business Objectives

Before a skills needs analysis can begin, L&D personnel need to articulate the goal of the training. That is, what are the expected business outcomes of the training?

The training goal should correspond to a business objective. This can be specific to an individual solicitor, SRA continuing competency, department or the entire organization.

The ultimate goal of the training should be clearly articulated and kept in the forefront to ensure that the entire needs analysis process keeps the desired outcomes in sight. It is best for L&D to answer the question: "What objectives/targets/goals do we need to achieve for the business?"

Examples of ultimate goals are:

- Improve client service representatives'
- Increase the close rates on business proposals or bids by teams and/or individuals;
- Improve employee morale through better supervision by supervisory management;
- Improve billable hours and/or client acquisition of all fee earners
- Improve the bottomline, topline or revenue for the year.

## Step 2: Identify Trainable Competencies

Not every competency can be improved through training. For example, a sales job may require sales people to be outgoing and initiate conversations with total strangers. It is more effective, then, for HR or Graduate Recruiters to hire people that are already extroverts than to attempt to train introverts to be more outgoing. Similarly, it may be more effective to hire people with specialized knowledge than to educate and train them.

## Step 3: Determine Performance Gaps

Regardless of the methods used to evaluate competencies, individual solicitor results are then combined to assess how many solicitors are in need of improvement in particular competencies.

To do this, L&D first needs to establish what constitutes a performance gap. That standard will vary from law firm to law firm.

Setting that standard will provide the law firm, department, team with an understanding of how many solicitors fall above or below that standard. Those falling below would be considered to be in critical need of training.

#### **Step 4: Prioritize Training Needs**

L&D personnel should total how many, or what percentage, of the targeted workforce needs the training, and it this training data that will save training time and money because not everyone will need training but key training will be given to those in critical need for their careers and the company.

#### **Step 5: Determine How to Train**

Using the training priority list from Step 4, L&D should now consider how best to train their workforce. Typical training methods include:

- Mentoring and coaching;
- Classroom;
- Web-based;
- Books;
- Conferences; and
- University programs.

It is recommended that L&D personnel consult a professional who is well versed in adult learning to help determine the best ways solicitors can acquire a business competency.

Some learning methods will work better than others. Although no two people learn or retain information in the same way, studies show that individuals retain information much better if they actually perform the skill or task. This type of retention is about 75 percent.

Compare that to listening to a lecture, where retention is only five percent. Other forms of learning retention are as follows:

- Reading, 10 percent;
- Audio-visual, 20 percent;
- Demonstration, 30 percent; and
- Discussion group, 50 percent.

L&D should keep this in mind and strive for the training method that will not only be suitable for the material, but also have the best chance for retention by solicitors.

#### **Step 6: Conduct a Cost Benefit Analysis**

At this point, L&D need to consider the costs associated with a particular training method and the extent to which performance gaps can be combined into the same training experience.

Costs factors include:

- Required training time;
- Training content development if designed in-house;
- Training evaluation and acquisition if purchased from vendor;
- Training content delivery;
- Lost productivity from time spent in training; and
- Travel and logistical expenses.

On the benefit side, different training methods will have varying degrees of effectiveness (see Step 5). For example, while e-learning may be the least costly, this may not be the best way for solicitors to develop a particular skill. L&D personnel need to strike a balance between the cost of a particular training method and its ability to achieve the desired results.

## Step 7: Plan for Training Evaluation

The penultimate step in this process is for L&D personnel to decide how they will know whether the training worked. Training is only effective if the material is retained and used on the job. Questions the evaluation process should answer are:

- How much did the training improve the competencies targeted in the training?
- How much did the training improve solicitors' actual job performance?
- How much did the training improve the meeting of business objectives?
- How much did the training result in a positive return on its investment?

The questions L&D personnel want answers to will determine the method and components of the evaluation process.

## Step 8: Qualified Trainer for Training

As we know not all trainers are created equally. The best trainers will have training qualifications and ideally will have worked in the sector. A trainer at this level accelerates the learning as he/she is able to relate to the attendees, understanding their business needs, challenges and is better able to understand exactly what the training is meant to achieve.

**Should you require us to consult with you regarding any skills gap that may be affecting your law firm and lawyers then please feel free to email [jannette@skillssanctuary.com](mailto:jannette@skillssanctuary.com) for more information.**