**CONTRACT EDUCATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT TOOL KIT**

Prepared by the Learning Resources Network (LERN), the leading association in continuing and contract education. Founded in 1974 as a non-profit, LERN annually shares how-to practical *“Information That Works!”®* to over 7,500 continuing and contract education professionals. For more information about LERN go to [www.lern.org](http://www.lern.org).

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**Section I: Purpose of Contract Education Needs Assessment Tool Kit**

The Contract Education Needs Assessment Tool Kit is for seasoned and new to contract education staff, desiring to better understand what needs assessment is and how to utilize needs assessment best practices and resources to better serve present and potential clients.

Including XI Sections, the Contract Education Needs Assessment Tool Kit covers the definition of needs assessment, types of needs assessments, needs assessments best practices, the costing of needs assessment, project management, change management in needs assessment, examples, and additional resources.

Most important to understand is the Contract Education Needs Assessment Tool Kit includes two levels of needs assessment.

1. 8-Phase Needs Assessment Model to support more complex and sophisticated needs assessment.
2. Organizational, Occupational and Individual Needs Assessment to support training needs assessment.

After reviewing the Contract Education Needs Assessment Tool Kit, you will better understand the role of needs assessment in contract education and have a tool kit you can access as needed to help improve your needs assessment efforts.

Terminology

Contract education terminology differs throughout North America. Understanding the following terms will help you navigate the Contract Education Tool Kit.

Organization: Business or company, government agency or local group. The organization is for whom you would be performing the needs assessment.

Assessment: The evaluation or estimation of the nature, quality or ability of someone or something. Sometimes analysis is used in place of assessment.

**Section II: Definition of Contract Education Needs Assessment**

Needs assessment in contract education is a process designed to identify challenges or opportunities in business and to assess whether training (or some other service) will help organizations and their employees achieve success.

Generally, a needs assessment clarifies the gap between the level of performance an organization (or an occupation or individual employee) has and the level it wants.

Many of your needs assessments will be simple ques­tion-and-answer sessions where you ferret out client problems and requests. But some situations will call for a more sophisticated needs assessment and it’s good to understand something about the needs assessment process before you commit to including more sophisticated needs assessment in your portfolio of services.

Why Are Needs Assessments Done and When?

When an organization sets out to make a decision, they may have the sense that they already know what they need. And in one sense, they probably do. There are plenty of indicators of need and the organization may already know one or more. In the case of fairly common organizational needs, there are probably plenty of general proposals floating around for resolving them. But it’s also likely to be the case that an organization will sometimes perceive that its needs are unique enough to warrant a separate needs assessment to ensure a truly customized approach to a solution.

Needs assessments can be done to lay the groundwork for a transformation. They provide insight into complex problems of all kinds and suggest blueprints for solutions. Well-executed needs assessments can help determine appropriate allocation of resources – where to add, enrich, and cut back, for example.

Needs assessments can also be done to craft solutions for special groups (such as handicapped workers or foreign workers), to gather research data, and to deter­mine what drives the perception of those needs. They’re valuable for discovering factors that perpetuate, alleviate or ameliorate needs. A needs assessment can even be done cart-after-the-horse to justify a decision, though we don’t recommend that approach.

The needs assessments should focus on the ends to be attained, though it will naturally include suggestions for the criteria or the guidelines for selecting the means to attain those ends. One of the benefits of a good needs assess­ment is that it will include multiple perspectives of input, creating a broad base of stakeholders in the intervention process, instead of supporting a more unilateral process of decision making. This will benefit the contract education staff who are supporting the client, because it will clarify all the ways you can benefit the client, potentially leading to more sales. It also creates the foundation for a great proposal.

Needs assessments are generally done to explore

• performance problems

• the implementation of a new technology, work practice, or system

• how an organization can best take advantage of an up­coming opportunity

In many cases, the needs assessments will uncover a need for training. This is especially true when the per­formance gap is a result of a lack of skill or information necessary to accomplish the change they want.

In some cases, the needs assessment will show that train­ing is not an appropriate intervention – that people already have the skills or information they need and that something else stands in the way. When this is the case, your recommendation will tell the client not to waste time and money on training, but to instead focus on fixing the root cause of the problem or the best sources of support for the change.

Five Examples of Why a Client Might Need Training or Some Other Solution

*1. The client has a need for new knowledge.*

More than ever before, most of your clients are ex­periencing an increase in the amount of information with which they are expected to keep current. The pace of change is blinding and not likely to let up any time soon. You can help clients keep one step ahead of their training needs by conversing often with them about their long-range goals and what training might be associated with realizing those goals.

*2. The client has a need for new or specialized skills.*

As processes, equipment and materials change, your clients will experience a need for training. Ask clients what changes they see on the horizon and what gaps might exist between what employees know and what they might need to know.

*3. The client has business problems.*

Albert Einstein is said to have said that we cannot solve problems with the same thinking that gener­ated the problems. When your client has a business problem, your contract education unit – through training or consulting – can offer a fresh or unbiased profes­sional opinion or exploration, evaluation or critique. The organization’s employees can confide in consultants and share concerns that they may usually hide – if your consultant can communicate a sense of reliability and confidentiality.

Your consultant can see opportunities that employ­ees inside the organization might fail to see. Since your consultants work with many organizations a year, they are in a position to have a larger context view of the issues.

*4. The client needs to be compliant with legislation.*

Every year, new laws and regulations are set by leg­islatures, county and city governments. Sometimes compliance legislation leads to the sudden availability of funds for training or consulting. Because of the new laws, organizations have to respond rapidly and effectively to avoid sanctions and injunctions.

If you read major metropolitan newspapers like *The New York Times* or T*he Wall Street Journal*, you can keep abreast of new legislation. On a local level, keep in touch with relevant industry news or at meet­ings of local governmental agencies. When you see compliance requirements coming up, be ready. Find out more about the new legislation. Determine what compliance will take. Get in touch with corporate and industry clients and create a path of convenience to your services as a solution to their compliance train­ing and consulting needs.

*5. The client needs to develop a new culture or mind set.*

When an organization decides it needs to do a major re-work on its dominant culture or mind set, three areas of challenge come into play: the challenge of *redesigning and rethinking*, (governance, avoiding re-invention of the wheel, strategy and purpose and so on); *the challenge of initiating* (making time, getting help and advice, finding relevance and so on); and the challenges of *sustaining the change* (overcoming anxiety related to change, assessment and measure­ment and so on).

Other Benefits of a Needs Assessment

Needs assessments help an organization:

• decide if training or something else is the most appropriate strategy to solve the challenges at hand

• avoid under-training or over-training

• prioritize training needs

• assess the importance of follow-up to a training as a role in the success of the employees

Contract education staff sometimes ask why they should do a needs assessment when they only get evaluated for selling and delivering training. (The question is a good one. It indicates that you are focused on doing income-generating activities.)

To understand the answer requires taking a longer-term focus. When you do a needs assess­ment, you’re more likely to do a better job in serving the client. When you do a better job serving the client, you’ll get more return business. This increase in business is the very thing you want to create more stable support for your unit, inside your organization and in the community you serve; you show added value and change the relationship from vendor to partner.

**Section III: Types of Contract Education Needs Assessment**

There are three types of needs assessment a contract education unit should be able to administer:

Organizational Needs Assessment: An organizational needs assessment follows a systems approach to analyze a proposed organization challenge or opportunity-based change, determine the impacts of the change on the organization, assess the preparedness of the organization entities to adopt the change, and assess the people and organizational risks associated with the change.

Occupational Needs Assessment: An occupational needs assessment follows a systems approach to analyze an occupation change, determine the impacts of the present employee occupational performance, and assess the skill and knowledge gaps of employees and their preparedness to adapt to the change.

Individual Needs Assessment: An individual needs assessment follows a systems approach to analyze an employee’s potential need to change, determine the impacts of the employee’s present performance, and assess the skill and knowledge gaps of the employee and their preparedness to adapt to the change.

The 8-Phase Needs Assessment Model is most appropriate to support the Organizational Needs Assessment.

The Organizational, Occupational and Individual Needs Assessment is most appropriate to support the Occupational and Individual Needs Assessments.

**Section IV: 8-Phase Needs Assessment Model & Example**

The method for doing a needs assessment varies from organization to organization. The simplest needs assessment will be a quick phone call or a brief face-to-face meeting with a client.

The most sophisticated or complex needs assessment – usually done for large, costly projects that will affect a number of people – will take the coordinated, well-planned time and at­tention of a number of staff over a long period of time.

The eight phases of the needs assessment are:

1. Understand the Challenge or Opportunity

2. Collect Information about the Challenge or Opportunity to Support Your Thinking

3. Organize What You Learned

4. Prioritize the Client’s Needs

5. Develop a Problem Statement

6. Decide if Training or Some Other Service Is Appropriate

7. Propose a Solution

8. Report Your Findings

NOTE: For the balance of this Section, a challenge, not opportunity, will be the organization’s concern, thus example.

Phase I. Understand the Challenge

When an organization has called you in to do a needs assessment, the first thing you do is to try to understand the problem and its causes. Remember that most problems may have more than one cause.

Generally, organizations will call for help when they are experiencing an opportunity to improve performance, such as buying new equipment to help implement a more efficient process in manufacturing. This might be considered a gain, but when an organization is suffering from low performance because of a problem, that might be considered a pain.

There are several categories of problems that typically plague organizations, including the following with possible solutions:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Kinds of Problems** | **Possible Solutions** |
| Lack of Information, Knowledge or Skill | * Provide training (new or review) * Improve relevance or method of training * Improve the transfer of skills from training environment to the workplace * Provide on-the-job aids * Provide mentoring or coaching to improve specific performance |
| Absence of or Ineffective Measurement | * Create or clarify measurements * Improve communication of measurements and their usefulness |
| Unsupportive Conditions | * Reorganize the workplace * Upgrade technology and information systems * Re-engineer work processes or positions * Remove obstacles to good performance |
| Absence of Standards | * Create or clarify standards * Communicate the standards to employees who use them * Consider employee feedback about standards |
| Insufficient Capacity | * Allocate human resources differently * Provide more human resources * Develop staff skills and knowledge to meet new challenges |
| Lack of Useful Feedback | * Provide feedback * Improve feedback processes * Train leaders to model feedback processes for learning |
| Ineffective Incentives | * Provide or increase positive incentives * Remove or reduce negative incentives (for example, remove incentive for poor performance) * Change who gets incentives * Let employees give feedback about incentives |

Of all of these kinds of barriers to high performance, the first category is most easily addressed with training. In the other categories, training is useful when it helps employees understand the cause of the low performance and how to correct it by doing things in a new way.

The following is a list of questions you can use in needs assessment interviews to help you gather information about the problem from the client’s point of view. Capturing the right information will help make your needs assessments valuable for gathering relevant solution guidance data.

The questions will be useful for keeping assessment interviews on track. You can ask the questions and drive the interview yourself, or you can let the other person drive the in­terview and you can record their answers and ask any unanswered questions at the end.

|  |
| --- |
| 01. What are the problems you’re experiencing in your organization, department or team? |
| 02. Possible areas to listen for gaps in performance and expectations include:  \* performance standards  \* budget target numbers  \* absenteeism  \* accidents  \* labor costs  \* material costs  \* overtime  \* technical proficiency  \* legal problems  \* labor problems  \* disciplinary actions  \* other |
| 03. What effect do they have on your organization? |
| 04. What kind of problems do you think they are? Performance? Knowledge? Skill? Behavior? |
| 05. What do they cost you?  \* lost time  \* lost profitability  \* lower quality of product  \* lower quality of service  \* more waste  \* longer cycle times  \* increased turnover  \* lowered morale  \* higher accident rates  \* lower number of sales |
| 06. What have you tried to do to solve these problems? |
| 07. What has worked and what has not? |
| 08. What do you think the source of the problem is? |
| 09. Do others have other ideas about the source of the problems? |
| 10. How long have you had this problem? Is it an event or a pattern? Who knows its history? |
| 11. What do people feel in relationship to this problem? |
| 12. Who are the stakeholders in this problem? |
| 13. What employees (or customers or outside vendors, etc.) are affected by the problem and how? |
| 14. What do you think the solution involves? |
| 15. How would you prefer that I collect data, and from who, where and when? The following are possible ideas for data collection:  \* Human Resources Department  \* accident and safety reports  \* grievance filings and turnover rates  \* performance evaluations  \* product statistics  \* interviews with staff  \* data from customers or outside vendors, etc.  \* focus groups  \* others |
| 16. What would this problem look like if it were completely solved? |
| 17. How do you think we can help? |
| 18. What shall we do next? What can we do for you? What will you do? |

Phase 2. Collect Information About the Challenge to Support Your Thinking

Once you understand the problem – both in content and scope – you can decide how to collect data. This phase should include investigation of:

• the problem’s scope

• the problem’s causes

• the problem’s impact on the organization (what it costs)

You will have discovered some of this information in Phase I, but you may need data to verify what you’ve heard.

Some common sources of data include:

• Human Resource Department records

• Manufacturing reports and production statistics

• Performance evaluations

• Safety records

• Grievance reports

The methods for collecting this information include:

• questionnaires

• interviews

• observations

• focus groups

• job descriptions

• policies and procedures manuals

Remember, the point of the first two phases is to help you understand the problem, its causes, and what it is costing the organization to have this problem unsolved, day by day.

Phase 3: Organize What You Have Learned

You need to take time to organize what you have learned.

* Sort the information you gathered into categories of concern or opportunity (for example: job descriptions, labor costs, legal issues, budget problems, and so on).
* Decide which issues require training or other intervention and which do not.
* Determine which content and format actions might be best for the client.

Phase 4: Prioritize the Client’s Needs

Now, rank the needs. You can do this in several ways. Here are some suggestions:

• Ask the client their opinion on the priorities.

• Determine the cost of each problem, unsolved. Solve the most expensive problems first.

• Do a cost-benefit analysis. Decide what it costs to have the problem and what it will cost to solve it. In some cases, the solution will not only pay back the costs, but exceed them.

Phase 5: Develop a Problem Statement

For your review with the client, you will need to have a clear, succinct, written statement of the problem or opportunity as you see it. Do this in advance so you can clearly describe it to the client. Having this statement in writing will allow the client to educate others in the organization about the problem and the need to solve it.

Phase 6: Decide if Training or Some Other Service Is Appropriate

From what you have learned, you can now decide if the problem will be solved with training or some other service.

Phase 7: Propose a Solution

Now it is time to meet with the client and have them re­view the problem statement and the solution. See if it makes sense, from their perspective, before you proceed and prepare a report of your findings. In this meeting you should:

* Agree on the need(s).
* Agree on the priority of the needs.
* Decide what outcome the client would like. What would success look like?
* Decide how you will collaborate – who will do what?
* Decide to whom you will deliver the post-assessment report.
* Get buy-in from management.

Phase 8: Report the Findings

Now you should report the findings of the needs assessment to the client. The report should include:

* the problem statement
* the cost of having the problem unsolved
* list of needs you discovered
* analysis of whether or not those needs could be best solved by training
* a recommendation for action
* an appendix with the data collection methods and analysis explained
* an appendix with the data and an explanation of how it was interpreted

This needs assessment should be enough for most multi-faceted contracts. In the special cases of much more complex proj­ects, you should job the analysis out to consultants with the requisite experience and skills.

The following is an example of a Findings Report.

**Reporting Your Findings**

**EXAMPLE**

**Problem Statement**

Manufacturing defects have been a serious problem facing XYZ Jewelry Company for the last three years. By our estimations, manufacturing defects are as high as 30 percent, causing excessive and costly rework, reducing productivity, manufacturing margin, and sales.

**The Cost of Having the Problem Unsolved**

With manufacturing defects at 30 percent, the following are primary cost impacts:

* Although some materials can be reused, the additional materials purchased exceeds 20 percent of original purchase, costing over a year $130,000.
* The added work has increased employee overtime by 15 percent, costing over a year $75,000.
* The manufacturing defects have caused production to be 75 percent on-time, reducing sales by 10 percent or $300,000.

The total cost in increased expenses and reduced sales of having the manufacturing defects problem unsolved is costing XYZ Jewelry Company over $500,000 a year.

**List of Needs Discovered**

Our studies have highlighted the following needs:

1. Improved jewelry design by Product Development Team to reduce the production difficulty factor.
2. Factoring in some percentage for manufacturing defects when pricing.
3. Polishing, plating and stone setting were identified as the most problematic areas requiring manufacturing defect improvement training.
4. A better company understanding of the impact of manufacturing defects.

**Analysis**

Both consulting and training services can be provided to help reduce the percentage of manufacturing defects.

**Recommendation for Action**

The following services are recommended:

1. Facilitated discussion by a product development expert on ways to reduce the production difficulty factor and the development, implementation and monitoring of an action plan.
2. More in-depth analysis on the impact of manufacturing defects on pricing and the development of a variable cost factor for pricing of more difficult to less difficult jewelry items.
3. Polishing, plating and stone setting group and one-on-one training, as well as the development of the required skill sets and a training plan with compensation for laddered skill growth.
4. Training for the Leadership Team on building a company culture and the development of a plan to better communicate and educate employees about the impact of manufacturing defects.

**Appendix: Data Collection & Analysis**

The data collection and analysis methods used included:

1. Focus group meetings with employees including brainstorming and prioritizing.
2. The tracking and analysis of more difficult and less difficult jewelry items.
3. Review of employee training manuals and testing employees on expected skills.
4. Discussion with customers to determine the impact of late delivery on reorder and/or new sales.
5. Discussion with Leadership Team on their understanding of the problem and potential solutions and actions.

**Appendix: Data & Interpretation**

Data was interpreted as follows:

1. Brainstormed and prioritized list were compared to industry metrics and best practices.
2. 20 different jewelry item batches were processed and tracked to generate varying manufacturing defect percentages averaging out at 30 percent.
3. Work hours were reviewed to determine the number of hours of overtime required to make up for the manufacturing defect rework.
4. Tabulation of customer feedback regarding the impact of late delivery on additional sales.
5. A comparison of the Leadership Team’s understanding of the issues impacting manufacturing defects compared to employee understanding.

**Section V: Organizational, Occupational and Individual Needs Assessment**

Not all contracts have multi-faceted solutions as reviewed in the previous Section. Many contract education contracts are focused on providing employee training but require more than a quick phone call or a brief face-to-face meeting with a client.

To ensure you meet the training needs of the organization you want to serve, you must first identify organization goals, understand current processes and procedures, identify job roles, identify skill gaps, identify competencies, identify hidden skills, interpret competency and data, and propose the next step.

In some cases, you may not have to incorporate each of the following needs assessment steps, but you should at least decide if the step is required or not.

Step 1: Identify Organization Goals

Before conducting your needs assessment, the organization needs to identify specific skills needs and goals by answering a few simple questions. Identifying business goals in relation to a skills gap broadly means that the organization should come up with a list of the skills and traits that they value in their employees and organization. Identifying critical and non-critical skills gaps will guide the organization to prioritize training according to budget constraints, timing requirements and business plan priorities.

The following checklist highlights several areas to consider when identifying the demand for skills the industry requires now and in the future.

Checklist 1: Identifying Your Current Understanding of Skill Requirements

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Information** | **YES** | **NO** | **NOT SURE** |
| **Demand for Skills** |  |  |  |
| 1. What are the key goals within your organizational business plan?  a. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  b. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  c. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |  |  |  |
| 2. Can you identify the current demand for skills in your industry and list the top three here?  a. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  b. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  c. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |  |  |  |
| 2.1 Do you know why these skills are important? Please explain: |  |  |  |
| 3. Can you identify the expected future (next five to ten years) demand for skills in your industry and list the top three here?  a. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  b. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  c. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |  |  |  |
| 4. Have you carried out a scenario planning to identify the possible future skills demand/issues for your organization? What did this tell you?  a. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  b. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  c. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |  |  |  |
| 5. What are the top three internal or organization drivers of change and what is the main skill required to address each driver?  a. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  b. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  c. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |  |  |  |
| 6. What are the organization values and identify the main skills, behavior and competencies required to support each value?  a. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  b. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  c. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |  |  |  |
| 7. Will the skills you have identified in the previous questions help you meet the goals identified in Question 1? Please explain: |  |  |  |

If an organization answered mostly ‘yes’ to Checklist 1 and could complete most of the information you have enough information to conduct an analysis of the skills gaps easily. You would then apply the information to properly evaluate the talent management strategy options available to the organization.

You do not have enough information to conduct a skills gap analysis easily if they answered mostly ‘no’ or ‘not sure’ on Checklist 1. You will need to consider a separate project to collect this information (see Section IV: 8-Phase Needs Assessment Model & Example) so that you can make informed decisions about talent management strategies and properly evaluate the options available.

*Future Skills Needs: Using labor market information to predict future skills needs can help to improve decision making in areas such as investing in training and identifying training that will best support employee skills needs. However, it is important that employers do not solely rely on forecasting methods because skill needs are driven by a variety of factors such as legislation, environment and technological advances.*

Step 2: Current Processes and Procedures

Another area that needs identifying at this early stage is the current processes and procedures that are in place. Identifying these early on will allow you to come back to them throughout the contract and assess how effective the current training or recruitment processes and procedures are. At the end of the contract a comparison between old and newly implemented initiatives will show the organization the positive changes associated with performing a skills gap assessment.

Checklist 2: Processes and Procedures

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Information** | **YES** | **NO** | **NOT SURE** |
| **Current Processes and Procedures** |  |  |  |
| 1. Do you have the following selection and recruitment processes:  a) Job descriptions regularly reviewed  b) Job specifications regularly reviewed  c) Formal process for identifying suitable candidates with skills that match description/specification  d) Formal interview process to confirm they have skills |  |  |  |
| 2. Do you have the following training and development procedures:  a) Performance appraisals  b) Internal training needs analysis  c) Compulsory training  d) Policy to enable employees to request training  e) Training plans for employees  f) Training matrix  g) Feedback after training – who gives the feedback and to whom |  |  |  |
| 3. Do you have the following exit interview processes that allow staff to rate:  a) Opportunities for advancement  b) Training available related to job description and development  c) Supervisor interest in supporting career development  d) Primary reason for leaving |  |  |  |

If the organization answered mostly ‘yes’ to Checklist 2 and could complete most of the information you have enough information to conduct an assessment of skills gaps easily. You would then use the information to properly evaluate the talent management strategy options available to you.

The organization may have to develop new processes and procedures to facilitate skills gap assessment if they answered mostly ‘no’ or ‘not sure’ to Checklist 2. You could recommend or consider a separate project to collect this information so that you can make informed decisions about the types of procedures and processes that will suit the organization.

Step 3. Identifying Job Roles

To facilitate the skills gap and needs analysis process it can be beneficial to identify particular departments or job roles (occupations) where staff are failing to perform to meet organization targets. These issues can be a symptom of skills gaps and the checklist below is designed to support employers through the identification process.

Checklist 3: Job Roles

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Information** | **YES** | **NO** | **NOT SURE** |
| **Determine Job Roles to Target** |  |  |  |
| 1. Largest job classification in organization:  a) Directors  b) Managers  c) Team Leaders/Supervisors  d) Technicians  e) Administrators  f) Entry Level |  |  |  |
| 2. What job roles have the greatest impact on clients/customers?  a. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  b. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  c. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |  |  |  |
| 3. What job roles generate the most income for your organization?  a. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  b. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  c. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |  |  |  |
| 4. What job roles have the largest gap between employees’ performance and organization expectations?  a. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  b. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  c. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |  |  |  |
| 5. What job roles experience the highest staff turnover?  a. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  b. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  c. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |  |  |  |
| 6. What job roles are expecting the greatest proportion of employee retirement in the next five years?  a. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  b. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  c. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |  |  |  |
| 6.1 Are these job roles critical areas of the organization? Please explain: |  |  |  |
| 7. Are any jobs experiencing recruitment difficulty?  a. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  b. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  c. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |  |  |  |
| 7.1 Are these jobs in organization critical areas? Please explain: |  |  |  |
| 8. Will any job roles experience any significant changes in service delivery or performance expectations during the next 12 months?  a. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  b. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  c. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |  |  |  |

If the organization answered mostly ‘yes’ to Checklist 3 and could complete most of the information you have enough information to conduct an analysis of skills gaps focusing on specific job roles or departments.

You do not have enough information to conduct a job role or department focused skills gap analysis easily if they answered mostly ‘no’ or ‘not sure’ to Checklist 3. This may indicate that the skills gap within the organization must be identified on an individual basis. Identifying Skills Gaps describes how this data can be collected.

Step 4. Identifying Skills Gaps

You can help organizations identify skills gaps and prioritize them. Organizations should use the following actions to identify skills gaps.

Checklist 4: Evidence Table

Action 1: Think about whether an employee/team/division is meeting their stated goals on a regular basis. If they are missing targets, then there may be a skills gap preventing them from being effective in their role. List the skills they require in their job role below – what are they missing?

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Skill** | **Behavioral Description** | **Yes** | **No** | **Not Sure** |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |

Action 2: Ask your employees to list the skills they need to perform in their current role. Have they identified any that they do not have? By giving them this opportunity, they are most likely to be receptive to the introduction of new training.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Skill** | **Behavioral Description** | **Yes** | **No** | **Not Sure** |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |

Action 3: Encourage each employee to complete a written or online assessment to complement the information you have already collected.

If you have followed the three action process above, you should have identified skills that will need to be prioritized through training. This is because it allows the weaknesses of the individual to be easily pinpointed, allowing you to progress to plan your training.

*Online Surveys: These surveys are commonly used to gather data due to the quick and easy nature of them. Attention should be paid to the fact that they should not be used alone as data may be skewed by personal opinions.*

*360 Degree Feedback: A performance appraisal system that gathers feedback on an individual from a number of sources, such as supervisors, peers, direct reports, external customers and a self-assessment, and can be used to identify skills gaps/training needs.*

Step 5. Identifying Competencies

Identifying the competencies and behaviors individual employees possess can also help prioritize training resources. Checklist 5 shows a selection of different competencies that can make up employees’ roles. Add or delete competencies as you see necessary. Once all evidence is in, the relevant skills can then be assigned competency ratings.

Checklist 5: Competency

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Competency** | **No Evidence of Competence** | **Some Evidence of Competence, but Needs More Training** | **Quite Competent, Needs More Experience** | **Very Competent** |
| Building Trust |  |  |  |  |
| Coaching |  |  |  |  |
| Collaboration |  |  |  |  |
| Communication |  |  |  |  |
| Conflict Management |  |  |  |  |
| Customer Service |  |  |  |  |
| Problem Solving |  |  |  |  |
| Decision Making |  |  |  |  |
| Delegation |  |  |  |  |
| Initiative |  |  |  |  |
| Motivation |  |  |  |  |
| Managing Workload |  |  |  |  |
| Time Management |  |  |  |  |
| Negotiation |  |  |  |  |
| Planning |  |  |  |  |
| Leadership |  |  |  |  |
| Teamwork |  |  |  |  |
| Technical Knowledge |  |  |  |  |
| Others |  |  |  |  |

If the organization answered ‘very’ or ‘quite’ competent to Checklist 5, then you know that employees possess the correct competency for their role. You would then use the information to properly evaluate the talent management strategy options available to you.

The organization will need to prioritize the training resources if they answered mostly ‘no’ or ‘some’ competence to Checklist 5. You will need to consider a separate project to collect this information so that you can make informed decisions about talent management strategies and evaluate the options available to them.

Step 6. Identifying Hidden Skills

Although this document has focused on skills gaps we must not forget that performing a skills gap analysis will also uncover skills that people did not know they had. These hidden skills are often not job specific skills, but transferable skills that you have gained throughout your life. Checklist 6 identifies some common skills that individuals often do not realize are noteworthy accompanied by an example of the skill and how they may have developed it.

Checklist 6: Identifying Hidden Skills

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Skill** | **Example** | **Yes** | **No** | **Not Sure** |
| Budgeting | This skill is developed by everyday tasks, from grocery shopping to paying your bills each month. |  |  |  |
| Multi-Tasking | Holding down a job, running a home, having children, all adds to your multi-tasking capabilities. |  |  |  |
| Planning,  Organizing and Time Management | These three skills are intrinsically linked, to succeed in many aspects of life. By meeting educational deadlines, you will have combined these skills to succeed. |  |  |  |
| Resource  Management | Getting done what you need to get done with the resources at hand. |  |  |  |
| Social Skills | General interactions will have given you the confidence to lead people without realizing. |  |  |  |
| System Skills | Seeing how things, people or information relates to each other. If you are proficient in this area you are likely to respond well to detailed training |  |  |  |
| Technical Skills | Having a foundation in using IT equipment will mean that employers can train you in the area without starting from the very beginning. |  |  |  |
| Foreign Language Skills | Speaking a foreign language says a lot about a person, it shows you are willing to work hard and have a good memory. |  |  |  |
| Work Ethic | Being punctual, setting yourself high goals and standards will show employers that you can be an asset. |  |  |  |
| Customize |  |  |  |  |

If the organization can answer ‘yes’ to most of these skills, you will find that they have a good level of foundational or transferable skills. These are looked upon highly by most organizations as they indicate employees have the potential to learn job specific skills and respond well to training.

If they have answered ‘no’ or ‘not sure’ to all or a majority of the listed skills, they are probably being too harsh on themselves. Life experiences will have led to you developing certain skill sets, you just need to work out which ones.

Step 7. Interpretation

The final outcomes of such an assessment will be that individual/job role/department competency profiles are produced, containing the skills interpretation table and any comments associated with it for each employee. Explanation of lack of competencies and measures to counteract this will be included in the individual reports. Keeping the individual reports well filed and up to date with any training that takes place is suggested as it will help track employee development progress.

Competency Scale Table

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **0** | **0.25** | **0.5** | **0.75** | **1** |
| No evidence of  competence | Some evidence of  competence | Evidence of  competence, however needs extra training | Very competent,  needs more exposure to use their skills | Full evidence of  competence |

Checklist 7 could be used to interpret the data and produce individual/job role/department competency profiles based on the scale shown in the Competency Scale. The example below is drawn up for an individual although it could quite easily be adapted to show the trends of a particular job role.

Checklist 7: Data Interpretation

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Name:** | **0** | **0.25** | **0.5** | **0.75** | **1** |
| **Role:** |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Skills** |  |  |  |  |  |
| Leadership |  |  |  |  |  |
| Communication |  |  |  |  |  |
| Team Work |  |  |  |  |  |
| Problem Solving |  |  |  |  |  |
| Self-Management |  |  |  |  |  |
| Planning and Organizing |  |  |  |  |  |
| Technology |  |  |  |  |  |
| Learning |  |  |  |  |  |
| Initiative and Enterprise |  |  |  |  |  |

|  |
| --- |
| Comments: |

Step 8. The Next Step

By the time you reach the final stage, the skills gaps within the organization should have been identified following the interpretation of the results. Checklist 8 is designed to establish if you have sufficient understanding of the skills gaps within the organization required to prepare training programs.

Checklist 8: Understanding Skills Gaps

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Information** | **Yes** | **No** | **Not Sure** |
| **Skills Gaps** |  |  |  |
| 1. Can you identify and articulate specific skills gaps? |  |  |  |
| 2. Can you identify and articulate specific levels within the organization where there are emerging skills gaps? |  |  |  |
| 3. Can you identify specific teams within the organization where there are emerging skills gaps? |  |  |  |
| 4. Can you identify specific demographic profiles within the organization where there are emerging skills gaps? |  |  |  |

If they answered mostly ‘yes’ to Checklist 8 you have enough information to make some decisions about how to address the workforce issues through talent management. The information you collected and analyzed will help the organization properly evaluate the talent management strategy options you present to them.

You do not have enough information to conduct an analysis of your workforce easily if they answered mostly ‘no’ or ‘not sure’. You will need to consider a separate project to collect information so that you can make informed decisions about talent management strategies and properly evaluate the options available to them

**Section VI: Contract Education Needs Assessment Best Practices**

The previous Sections have included needs assessment best practice strategies, techniques and tips. The following are additional needs assessment best practices.

1. Your job is to serve your clients, thus the importance of having good listening skills and working collaboratively to develop an effective and affordable solution.
2. Understand the difference between a multi-faceted solution compared to a training solution. Contract education units are understanding the importance of shifting from information (just training) to solutions (possibly including consulting, mentoring, research as examples). Your goal should be to do more work with less clients then less work with more clients. Ideally your needs assessment work should help you embed your unit with clients.
3. Documentation is critical. Using many of the tools and checklists required, you can document your needs assessment research and solutions. When reporting out to clients whether on paper and/or face-to-face, it is important your reporting is as professional as possible. Just because someone does a good job doing needs assessment, that does not mean they are always the right person to report out.
4. Ideally the person/people on your team doing needs assessment should not be the people selling. Their job is to build relationships and open doors, not get engaged with the detail work of needs assessment. Having a person/people on your team who can do needs assessment, will ensure a better and more consistent job.
5. Be up on what is happening in the client’s industry. The person doing the needs assessment must have an understanding of the client’s industry or be able to learn. You want to be known as an expert.
6. Don’t give away needs assessments. They are costly, but critical. You need to be able to sell the importance of needs assessment. Include in your sales kit and your website your needs assessment capabilities and testimonials.
7. If you do not get the contract after the needs assessment, do your best to understand why and do not be afraid to check back on how the selected vendor performed.

**Section VII: The Cost of Needs Assessment**

There is a cost to performing a needs assessment. In many cases, the cost will be minimal and without question you will absorb the cost or factor in the minimal cost when pricing to get the contract. But in other cases, the cost could be significant, and you will want the cost covered by your client.

There are four options when it comes to the cost of needs assessment.

Option #1. Do Not Charge. The cost may be minimal, or you are trying to sell a client for the first time. If you do not charge for the needs assessment, it is important the client knows you are not charging and what the cost would have been. This way they are prepared in the future if you charge.

Option #2. Embed in Contract Price. You want to charge for the needs assessment, but you prefer not to provide a separate price. You know the cost and you can factor the cost into the final contract price. You are willing to take the risk that the client might not purchase the contract or already upfront there has been an agreement that the contract will be purchased, but first the needs assessment should be performed. One question to answer is: Should the needs assessment cost be marked-up the same percentage as the contract delivery price?

Option #3. Charge for Needs Assessment. Before going forward with the needs assessment, you and the client agree on the price for the needs assessment service. Most likely a contract for the needs assessment is signed-off on by the client. Same question as Option #2: Should the needs assessment cost be marked-up the same percentage as the contract delivery price?

Option #4. Deduct from Contract Price. You provide a price for the needs assessment and there is an agreement that if the client purchases the contract, the cost of the needs assessment will be deducted from the contract price.

Time Estimates

Time estimating is critical to accurately determining the price of the needs assessment. After doing multiple needs assessments, you will have a better idea of the cost of needs assessment, so when first doing needs assessment, time estimating it is best to add in a fudge-factor of 10 to 20 percent. So, if you project it will take 30 hours, you may want to price at 35 hours.

The following are tips for increasing estimating accuracy:

1. On all needs assessments, maintain an ongoing actual hours database of recorded time spent on each aspect of the needs assessment.
2. Create and use planning documents. Be clear about the steps you will take to perform the needs assessment, so you can estimate time on each step.
3. Keep in mind complexity. Some needs assessments may be more complex thus each needs assessment step may differ in time depending on the situation.
4. When estimating time, include your assumptions on why you have estimated the amount of time.
5. Develop a chart that you can fill in with each task, estimated time, and your assumptions.
6. In more nebulous situations, you may want to agree with the client that there will be a cost for you to estimate the needs assessment cost.
7. When developing your chart prioritize the importance of each step. If the price you provide the client is too high, you can then go back and possibly cut back on one or more steps, thus the price.

Costing & Pricing

In pricing contracts, the norm is to take the projected cost of the contract, for example $5,000, and require the $5,000 cost to be 50 percent (or less) of the final price, for example $5,000 divided by 50 percent equals $10,000. Once you know the $10,000 requirement, you may increase the price if you know you can because of competition pricing or what the market will bear. Or you may reduce the price by reducing your costs to remain competitive.

Sometimes with pricing contracts, you may decide to not price certain costs with as high a mark-up as other costs. For example, you want materials to be 80 percent of the price, so $2,000 for materials divided by 80 percent equals $2,500, while the cost of delivery must be 50 percent of the price. So, for $5,000 delivery costs and $2,000 materials cost, your price may be $12,500 instead of $14,000, which would be $5,000 plus $2,000 equals $7,000, divided by 50 percent equals $14,000.

Ideally your needs assessment services should get the same mark-up as your contracts. If the needs assessment costs $2,500, then $2,500 divided by 50 percent equals $5,000. If you do not want to charge that much, the highest you should increase the percentage to is 75 percent, thus $2,500 divided by 75 percent equals $3,350.

Using the above $2,500, thus $3,350 or $5,000 example, now we go back to the four options.

Option #1. Do Not Charge. You absorb the $2,500 cost and charge $10,000 for the $5,000 contract cost.

Option #2. Embed in Contract Price. You add the $2,500 cost to the $5,000 cost and depending how you mark up, you charge $12,500 or $14,000.

Option #3. Charge for Needs Assessment. You charge either $5,000 or $3,350 for $2,500 needs assessment cost.

Option #4. Deduct from Contract Price. You know the needs assessment and contract cost and determine your price is either going to be $12,500 or $14,000 and then you add again in the $3,350 or $5,000 but then deduct from contract price. So, $12,500 would become $15,850, but you would then deduct $3,350.

**Section VIII: Change Initiative Project Management**

As contracts become more complex, there is a growing need to understand and utilize project management best practices. A project is a temporary endeavor undertaken to create a result. The needs assessment process has identified a desired result and good project management may need to be utilized to ensure the contract services agreed to are delivered as the contract documents.

Project management is a process. There are four steps to successful project management.

Step 1. Initiate the Project. Recognize the project must be done, determine what the project must accomplish, and formally launch the project with a project charter. A project must have a project sponsor – the person for whom the project is being undertaken and is responsible for committing the resources required.

Step 2. Plan the Project. Develop a detailed plan for the project including the task list, resource assignments, schedule, budget, communication plan, risk plan, and change control process. A project must have a project manager – the individual appointed and given responsibility for the overall success of the project.

Step 3. Execute and Control the Project. The technical work is performed according to plan and any variances are identified and acted on to keep the project on track. The project manager is accountable for clear and consistent communication.

Step 4. Close the Project. The project is handed off, lessons learned are recycled, and success is celebrated.

Even less complex contracts would benefit from the utilization of project management best practices.

There are many books written on project management and associations and businesses researching and supporting project management knowledge and skills. A great book to check out is *Just Enough Project Management* by Curtis Cook published by The McGraw-Hill Companies.

**Section IX: Change Management and Needs Assessment**

When an organization undertakes projects or initiatives to improve performance, seize opportunities or address key issues, they often require changes; changes to processes, job roles, organizational structures and types and uses of technology. However, it is actually the employees of the organization who have to ultimately change how they do their jobs. If these individuals are unsuccessful in their personal transitions, if they don’t embrace and learn a new way of working, the initiative will fail. If employees embrace and adopt changes required by the initiative, it will deliver expected results and may also create new consulting and training opportunities for your contract education team.

Change Management

Change management is the discipline that guides how an organization prepares, equips and supports employees to successfully adopt change in order to drive organizational success and outcomes.

While all changes are unique, and all employees are unique, decades of research shows there are actions an organization can take to influence employees in their individual transitions. Change management provides a structured approach for supporting the employees in the organization to move from their current states to their own future states.

Supports for Successful Change

The three key supports for change are:

1. Enhance personal results – I change because it will benefit me.
2. Develop networks of committed people – I change because people I respect are also changing.
3. Improve business results – I change because the change makes business sense I can understand.

The following are supports for successful change initiatives:

* The change is connected with clearly defined work goals and processes.
* The change is connected to improving performance.
* The change involves people who have the power to take action regarding these goals.
* The change uses a process that balances action and reflection and connects inquiry and experimentation.
* The change is intended to increase people’s capacity, individually and collectively.
* The change focuses on learning about learning, in settings that matter.

Leaders have a key role in successful change management. Leaders’ helpful actions can include:

* Create a work environment where the stress of change is acknowledged, and the effort to move forward is appreciated and rewarded.
* Gauge employees’ success by using observable, measurable benchmarks.
* Understand that helping employees know *why* they are changing will be more effective than simply demanding changes.
* Before implementing change, educate employees about the phases of both the *change* and the *transition* (transition refers to the stages in the personal aspects of change; primarily, the ‘neutral zone’, and new beginnings).
* Speak openly and often about which stage of the change project they are in, and even more importantly, which stage transition they are in.
* Remind yourself that a leader’s position is one of support during change, not one of control.

Six Change Steps

The following six steps should be followed in change management:

Step 1. Clarify the Need. Why is the change taking place?

Step 2. Define the Results. What will it look like after the change is complete?

Step 3. Produce Your Plan. Document the change plan that will be followed.

Step 4. Implement the Plan. Using good project management skills, put the plan in motion and monitor the plan.

Step 5. Stabilize Outcomes. Your results may shift thus your plan may need to be adjusted. Near the end of a change initiative, it’s common for there to be a last-minute tendency to return to old ways. This happens because the new way is not yet stabilized, and the old is not yet completely gone. There may be stress or confusion as the final shift to the new way sets in – this is normal! Remind people of this stage and that when they feel discomfort with the final steps to implementing the new ways. It’s actually a good sign – real and lasting change is on the horizon.

Step 6. Assess the Process. Upon completion of the change plan, evaluate the process: examine what worked, and what needs work.

Transition Management

You cannot force change. Remember that embarking on any path of change is a matter of choice. No one can be forced to change. Trying to force change will backfire.

The three barriers to change are:

1. Managers, supervisors and other leaders are unable to commit to change that does not directly affect them: so be sure they know how and why it does affect them.
2. The change requires people to talk about sensitive topics or situations. If your staff doesn’t have the skills, be sure you give them help to navigate the required conversations.
3. Focusing on symptomatic solution-making. When you fix symptoms, the root cause will continue to cause poor performance. When you find and fix root causes, the problems go away.

Change management requires good transition management. Employees will be going through three change phases: Endings, Neutral Zone and New Beginnings.

All change begins with Endings. You are no longer operating the way you were operating. You will want to compensate for the losses, communicate with employees often, define what is over and what is not over, mark the endings, treat the past with respect, let employees take a piece of the old ways with them, and show how endings ensure continuity with what matters.

The Neutral Zone is where the greatest challenges exist. Anxiety rises, and motivation fails. Employees feel disoriented and self-doubting. Employees miss more workdays. Old weaknesses reemerge. Employees are overloaded, signals are often mixed, and systems are in flux and therefore unreliable. Employees become polarized between those who want to rush forward and those who want to go back to the old days. Organizations are vulnerable to attack from the outside.

This is the time to protect people, review policies and processes, reorganize the decision making structure and process, set short-range goals, do not set people up for failure, and find out what managers, supervisors and other leaders need to function in the Neutral Zone.

To successfully manage transitions:

* Recognize peer group consensus as a major influence on willingness to change. Cultivate group agreement.
* Emphasize two-way trust in all matters.
* Think of change as skill-building. Any investments you make in staff skill now pay off over and over again in the future.
* Concentrate on training as part of the change process.
* Allow time for change to take hold.
* Expect some confusion as people try out new systems. Expect a little lag time as they perfect new policies and processes.
* Encourage employees to adapt the basic idea of the change to fit the real world around them.
* Be truthful and be willing to listen to the truth of others as they describe their experience during the change process.
* During times of transition, know that good questions are as valuable as good answers. Encourage questions that show ownership of the change process.

**Section X: Conclusion**

Needs assessment is becoming more important in generating and closing contract sales. Your clients want successful high return-on-investment training, but they also want you to have the expertise to help their organization to fix problems and seize opportunities to help them succeed and grow. You will never be able to be everything to all clients, but your best clients most likely will benefit from the needs assessment you can perform.

The Contract Education Needs Assessment Tool Kit has shared two needs assessment models – one for more complex projects and the other where training is the most critical deliverable. As with any resource, you should benefit from the information shared but ultimately develop needs assessment models and tools that work best for your unit and the clients to whom you are selling.

As members of California Community Colleges Contract Education, you are encouraged to share needs assessment experiences, tools and best practices you have implemented. We learn best when we learn from people who are having success. This Contract Education Needs Assessment Tool Kit can be expanded upon by California Community Colleges Contract Education.

For any additional support on contract education sales, needs assessment, pricing, documents, and much more, contact the LERN at [info@lern.org](mailto:info@lern.org).

**Section XI: Additional Contract Education Needs Assessment Resources**

The following are additional contract education needs assessment tools for your review and use.

**NEEDS ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Use this checklist to see if you have completed all the work necessary for a successful needs assessment. Use only those that apply.** | |
| Phase I: Gather Preliminary Data | |
|  | 1. Schedule initial meetings to gather information from your client contact and other key people. |
|  | 1. Obtain a senior manager's perspectives about the goals of the assessment. |
|  | 1. Is there consensus about the goals of the needs assessment among those involved? |
|  | 1. Identify the educational level of the proposed audience. |
|  | 1. Determine the learners' preferred learning styles. |
|  | 1. Identify learners' attitudes toward a new system or technology. |
|  | 1. Identify computer literacy levels of the proposed audience. |
|  | 1. Identify the prerequisites for using a system, process or technology. |
|  | 1. Identify the prerequisites for revising or updating an existing program. |
|  | 1. Identify the prerequisites for developing a new program in this organization and in your own shop. |
|  | 1. Identify end-user requirements for a new system or technology. Are they present? |
|  | 1. Determine what testing or evaluation strategies will be used to measure success. |
|  | 1. Determine whether certification will be required or advantageous. |
|  | 1. Identify resources that are available to conduct and implement the assessment. |
|  | 1. Determine if you require the assistance of external sources, such as subject-matter experts or consultants of any kind, in the organization or hired by you. |
|  | 1. Review records, reports, and other data. |
|  | 1. Obtain input from all other relevant sources. |
|  | 1. Benchmark against other existing programs if it makes sense to do so and the data is available. |

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| Phase II: Plan | |
|  | 1. Establish a project plan. |
|  | 1. Determine what types of data must be collected. |
|  | 1. Identify sources of data. |
|  | 1. Notify the appropriate people about the assessment for permissions and cooperation. |
|  | 1. Obtain approval to proceed with the assessment from anyone who could put it on hold. |

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| Phase III: Perform Training Requirements Analysis | |
|  | 1. Develop needs assessment tools. |
|  | 1. Pilot tested needs assessment tools. |
|  | 1. Determine current knowledge and skill levels. |
|  | 1. Determine desired knowledge and skill levels. |
|  | 1. Examine what existing training materials, if any, can be used. |
|  | 1. Identify what non-training interventions, such as job aids, can be used. |
|  | 1. Identify what factors are impeding learning at this time. |
|  | 1. Determine the best medium of delivery. |
|  | 1. Decide whether existing training delivery systems can be used. |
|  | 1. Ask if current training delivery systems require updating. |
|  | 1. Determine whether training services must be outsourced–if so, can you do it all? |
|  | 1. Will the current training evaluation system work in this case? |
|  | 1. Determine if any new technological equipment will have to be added. |
|  | 1. Determine what additional other resources will be useful, if any. |
|  | 1. Determine whether additional personnel will need to be hired and in what positions, for what FTE. |
|  | 1. Assess whether changes must be made in the facility or its arrangement. |
|  | 1. Establish what resources will be needed to implement training. |
|  | 1. Determine how supervisors or managers will support learning. |
|  | 1. Determine how the current environment will support learning. |

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| Phase IV: Analyze the Date | |
|  | 1. Compile results. |
|  | 1. Identify patterns or deviations from the norm in the data. |
|  | 1. Brief your client contact about the results of the assessment. |

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| Phase V: Prepare Your Report | |
|  | 1. Establish priorities for implementing interventions. |
|  | 1. Estimate projected costs for implementing each intervention. |
|  | 1. Does the report contain all the relevant information (in the body or in the attachments)? |
|  | 1. Make the report precise and concise? |

**QUESTIONS FOR A BRIEF CLIENT NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

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| **Learning more about the problem** |
| **Focus questions** |
| Ask the person to describe the problem. Be open and non-partisan in your questions. |
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| **Observation questions** |
| What does the person see/hear/know? |
| What information do they have about the problem? |
| Try to define what the problem IS and not what the problem is NOT. |
|  |
| **Analysis questions** |
| Probe what meaning the person sees in events surrounding the problem. (Interpretation/spin on the data) |
| This will help you understand their relationship to the event and how they think about it. |
|  |
| **Feeling questions** |
| Without trying to fix the feelings, try to discover how the person feels. |
| Exploring this will help the person be able to move on with the rest of the discussion. (Though sometimes you will have to push a bit to get them to move on.) |
|  |
| **Strategic questions** |
| *Visioning questions* |
| What would happen if this problem were fixed? |
| What would not happen anymore? |
|  |
| *Change questions* |
| The questions in this stage should deal with how to get from the current state to the preferred state. |
| Notice that there will be more than one alternative for accomplishing the change. |
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| **Consideration of all the alternatives** Try to hold no opinion at this point. |
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| Doing nothing is always an alternative—and often one that appeals to clients. |
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| **Consider the consequences of each alternative.** |
| What happens if we do this? |
| Look for short term, medium and long-term consequences. |
|  |
| **Consider the obstacles to each alternative.** |
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| **Personal involvement and buy in** |
| What does this person bring to the equation in the solution? How can they help? |
| What do they need from you? |
|  |
| **Personal action questions** |
| What should the client do now? |
| What should you do now? |
| Do you have a commitment to each other to do something specific? |
| List the details of the to-dos |

**GAP ANALYSIS WORKSHEET**

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| **Gap Analysis Worksheet** | | | |
| Process/task | Current performance/state | Preferred performance/state | Cost of having this performance problem |
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**MANAGEMENT TRAINING NEEDS ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE**

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| **Management Training Needs Assessment Questionnaire**  Instructions: This questionnaire will likely take less than 20 minutes to complete. Your input will help us determine training needs for the coming [quarter, year, etc.]. |
| 1. What are the five main responsibilities of your job? List the approximate percent of time you spend on each job responsibility. |
| 1. What competencies do you require to be successful in your job? |
| 1. What are the critical success factors for your effective performance? |
| 1. What are the primary obstacles to your success? |

**Instructions:** This survey will take approximately fifteen minutes to complete. Please rate your [managers/subordinates] on the following items, using the key below. Please be candid when responding. Circle your choices.

**Key:** 1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Somewhat Agree

4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree N.A. = Not Applicable

# Leadership

**1.** They are visionaries. 1 2 3 4 5 N.A.

**2**. They serve as coaches and mentors. 1 2 3 4 5 N.A.

**3.** They encourage teamwork. 1 2 3 4 5 N.A.

**4.** They treat me and my co-workers fairly. 1 2 3 4 5 N.A.

**5.** They treat me and my co-workers with respect. 1 2 3 4 5 N.A.

**6.** They project a positive view of the organization to

clients and customers. 1 2 3 4 5 N.A.

## Communication

**7.** They clearly communicate what is expected of me. 1 2 3 4 5 N.A.

**8.** They clearly communicate what is expected of my

co-workers. 1 2 3 4 5 N.A.

**9.** They keep me informed about critical business

issues that may have an impact on my job. 1 2 3 4 5 N.A.

**10.** They keep me updated about the unit's accomplish-

ments through memos and other communication

channels. 1 2 3 4 5 N.A.

**11.** They are effective in making presentations to

others. 1 2 3 4 5 N.A.

**12.** They establish clear channels of communication

between group members. 1 2 3 4 5 N.A.

**13.** They establish clear channels of communication

between this unit and other units. 1 2 3 4 5 N.A.

### Performance Management

**14.** They are genuinely concerned about my job

performance. 1 2 3 4 5 N.A.

**15.** They provide me and co-workers with challenging

tasks. 1 2 3 4 5 N.A.

**16.** They provide opportunities for professional growth

and development. 1 2 3 4 5 N.A.

**17.** They conduct effective performance appraisal

meetings. 1 2 3 4 5 N.A.

**18.** They resolve conflicts effectively. 1 2 3 4 5 N.A.

**19.** They provide feedback at the appropriate time. 1 2 3 4 5 N.A.

# Project Management

**20.** They delegate tasks according to the appropriate

skill and experience level of the group members. 1 2 3 4 5 N.A.

**21.** They forecast the workload of the group effectively. 1 2 3 4 5 N.A.

**22.** They plan effectively. 1 2 3 4 5 N.A.

**23.** They take appropriate corrective action when

necessary. 1 2 3 4 5 N.A.

# Customer Service

**24.** They put the customers' needs before the needs of

the organization. 1 2 3 4 5 N.A.

**25.** They are sensitive to the needs of customers. 1 2 3 4 5 N.A.

**26.** They are continually seeking ways to provide

superior service to customers. 1 2 3 4 5 N.A.

**27.** They are aware of industry standards for customer

service. 1 2 3 4 5 N.A.

# Sales

**28.** They demonstrate effective negotiation skills. 1 2 3 4 5 N.A.

**29.** They proactively identify sales opportunities with

internal and external customers. 1 2 3 4 5 N.A.

**30.** They forge strong relationships with internal and

external customers. 1 2 3 4 5 N.A.

**CHANGE READINESS CHECKLIST**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Have clear objectives for the change initiative been established? |
|  | Has a leader been assigned to facilitate the change effort? |
|  | Does the leader have the requisite interpersonal and organization development skills to facilitate the change initiative? |
|  | Are adequate internal resources available for implementing the performance improvement plan? |
|  | Are external resources required? |
|  | Have reasons for change been communicated to top management? |
|  | Is top management committed to implementing the performance improvement plan? |
|  | Is top management willing to take risks to implement the performance improvement plan? |
|  | Have reasons for change been communicated to middle management? |
|  | Is middle management committed to implementing the performance improvement plan? |
|  | Have reasons for change been communicated to front-line employees? |
|  | Are front-line employees committed to implementing the performance improvement plan? |
|  | Have milestones for celebrating successes been established? |
|  | Have strategies for motivating and reinforcing those involved in the performance improvement initiative been devised? |
|  | Has a follow-up plan to monitor the change initiative been developed? |

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