

Information Note

Learning Methodologies

Methodologies Overview

When looking at providing training and development it is important to consider the whole range of different types of learning methodology rather than the traditional focus of training provision. Methodologies include guided reading, shadowing, coaching, mentoring, action learning, special assignments or project work, action learning, e-learning. Which methodology is most appropriate will depend on the following considerations:

- The particular knowledge, skills or behaviours the learner aims to acquire or develop
- The level of knowledge, skill or behaviour the learner already demonstrates
- The learner's preferred learning style
- The resources you have available (people, money, equipment, opportunity and time)

Example A – Senior Policy Officer

Needs to learn about employment law in order to ensure your employment policies are legally compliant. Has very little prior knowledge.

Learning style is predominantly Reflector and they have an MBTI preference for Introverted Thinking.

Methods chosen are seminar and background reading followed by opportunities to put the learning into practice whilst receiving mentoring from an external employment law specialist.

Example B – HR Officer

Needs to increase knowledge of employment law in order to provide advice and support to managers in handling difficult employment situations. Has good interpersonal skills.

Learning style is predominantly Pragmatist and they have an MBTI preference for Extroverted Sensing.

Methods chosen are shadowing of Senior HR Officer internally (with well developed knowledge and skills) followed by delegated project work combined with close supervision.

Learning Methodologies

Induction

Induction is essential to prepare and support a new employee's transition into the organisation, or an existing employee's transition into a new role. It is provided on the job by line manager and includes access to selected colleagues and background reading. It may also include a live piece of work such as a small project that is supervised and/or monitored, requiring the staff member to familiarise themselves with key aspects of the organisation and role to complete.

Coaching

Coaching uses day to day work as a learning experience by questioning and giving feedback and guidance. It may be carried out by the line manager or other members of staff with appropriate expertise, or by specialist external consultants. Coaching is a highly learner centred and led activity with the focus on live issues thus addressing real and immediate learning and development needs. Coaching can be one off, but is most successful when it is an on-going and long-term process.

Shadowing

Shadowing enables an employee to increase their understanding of an area of responsibility or specific tasks as well as their awareness of different ways of working and relating, through observing another individual performing their job on a day to day basis. Shadowing may be internal or with another organisation where role and culture compare well. Learning is by example and as a methodology it is fairly flexible and easily arranged. It can be used as a long term cost effective part of performance management and a useful rostering tool. It is important to be clear about the objectives of shadowing, for example is a learning strategy or handover.

Planned study/reading and reflection

Study and reflection offer opportunities for reading about and exploring a subject, which can trigger new ideas. This may also include e-learning. The individual manages their own study and reflection time and will need to be given structured opportunities to put their learning into practice.

Structured placements and visits

Placements, such as job rotation/job swap and within your organisation or with other organisations, can bring new insights into different ways of working and the stimulus to learn from other people's practice.

Planned work experience

Work experience such as delegated project work or taking on a new area of responsibility, can develop the individual's skills and thinking. Clearly structured supervision and support, possibly including coaching or mentoring, should be provided.

Training courses and seminars

Training can be useful to increase knowledge and understanding, strengthen existing skills, develop new ones or to explore new areas. These may be run by your organisation or may involve attending external events. Training courses are most successful when there are predetermined objectives and its integrated into performance management process. It is important to provide real opportunities for the new knowledge and skills to be put into practice as soon after the event as possible. Delays can result in loss of enthusiasm and confidence or forgetting the learning.

Secondments

Secondments provide opportunities for individuals to have working experience outside of their usual role and skills area or within a different organisational environment, thereby broadening their skills and understanding and enabling them to bring fresh ideas or approaches into the organisation. It can enable networking, cross cultural experience, and encourage peer-learning. There is the benefit of building links in consistency following placements in different areas. Secondments works well as part of an individual career path plan.

Mentoring

Mentoring can provide learning opportunities for the mentor as well as the mentoree. The mentor has the opportunity to think differently about their own area of expertise and ways of working/relating. The mentoree is provided with guidance and advice that is separate from their line management relationship and can broaden and challenge their thinking. It is important that that the mentoree has a say in the choice of mentor and that the two individuals have a confidential and mutually respectful working relationship. Incorporating mentoring responsibilities into job descriptions of key staff can encourage spontaneous and informal mentoring.

Shared learning forums

Shared learning forums such as Action Learning Sets or Practice Forums, provide opportunities for individuals to learn from each other's knowledge and experience and from the dynamic of group interactive thinking, problem solving and support.

Action learning

Action learning is based on individuals working on real problems that are capable of having action taken on them. The individual needs to be able to identify the problem, own it and identify steps necessary to resolve it. This is done with a group of colleagues who are 'comrades in adversity'. These colleagues may share the same problem, work in the same or another organisation or may have very different problems.

Individuals learn primarily by questioning their own and others' proposed actions, identifying a course of further action and a time scale. At the next meeting of the group, individuals report and discuss their progress and reflect on what they have learned. During the process individuals learn real skills and share insights with their colleagues.

When choosing your learning providers, whether internal managers or other colleagues or external specialists, consultants or training organisations, it is important to consider how well they fit with your organisation's values, desired culture and ways of working.

References and useful resources

Workforce hub link to learning advice and support on coaching, mentoring and action learning:

<http://www.ukworkforcehub.org.uk/displaypage.asp?pageid=8692>

See also the People In Aid Training and Development Resource sheets

<http://www.peopleinaid.org/resources/publications.aspx>

Dunn, R. (1997). The goals and track record of multicultural education. *Educational leadership*: 54(7), 74-77.

Diversity, Learning Style and Culture, Pat Burke, web article

<http://www.newhorizons.org/strategies/styles/guild.htm>

CIPD Members Resource Sheet: Action learning for practitioners and managers

Disclaimer: People In Aid does not recommend specific websites, publications or organisations offering services or support. Every reasonable effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the material offered, however, we cannot be held responsible for any adverse outcome of using it or engaging the services external agencies. All contact details are correct as of June 2007