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City Lights or Cities Lite Where Training's Concerned?

When the editors of *Fortune* recently rated America's best cities for business, they considered many factors, including—most encouragingly—"how well prepared each city is to train workers in new tasks." Judged by this measure, which *Fortune* termed "training capacity," here's the report card on America's largest cities:

A: Atlanta, Baltimore, Kansas City, Miami, New Orleans, Norfolk, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, and the Tampa Bay Area.

B: Dallas, Denver, Houston, Milwaukee, Phoenix, Portland (Oregon), San Antonio, and Seattle.

C: Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus (Ohio), Detroit, Los Angeles, Minneapolis/St. Paul, New York, Sacramento, and San Diego.

D: Boston, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C.

Look again at the *C* and *D* listings. More than a little ironic, considering the reputations some of these cities have as hotbeds of training and development innovation.

The Eighties: Wired on Working Women's Issues

While various labor stories come and go—specific union disputes, for example—working women's issues appear to be here to stay.

According to NEXIS News Monitor, media coverage of women's issues in the workplace has increased almost 1,500 percent since Labor Day 1979.

NEXIS News Monitor, a scan of the contents of the nation's leading daily newspapers, wire services, and magazines using Mead Data Central's NEXIS on-line information-retrieval service, focused on four issues: sex discrimination, child care, maternity leave, and job sharing. The

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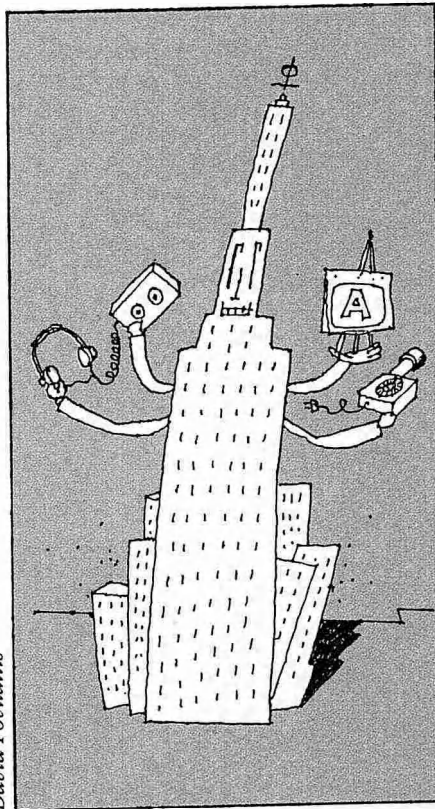
Monitor's systematic search of news and business sources uncovered 38,418 stories addressing what has become one of the strongest labor themes of the late 1980s.

The number of articles increased every year, from a modest 562 stories in 1979-80 to this year's 8,267 articles.

Although typically termed women's labor issues, the topics of sex discrimination in the workplace, maternity leave, and day care are clearly corporate labor issues as well. In fact, more than 55 percent of all the articles identified by NEXIS News Monitor looked at the child-care problem in the context of corporate America's productivity.

Over the decade, nearly 22,000 stories focused on corporate day-care problems and solutions, from on-site nurseries to subsidies for off-site providers. This year, more than 950 stories on the shortage of quality day care were filed.

Sex discrimination in the work-

place was also a strong media theme in the 1980s. Journalistic interest climbed sharply in 1982-83, when stories on the issue jumped from 187 to 1,011. The count has leveled off since then, holding steady at about 1,350 articles annually.

Getting less coverage from the news and business media were the issues of maternity or paternity leave and job sharing, although both have begun to attract more attention lately. Maternity leave, which in 1979–80 generated fewer than 100 stories, was the topic of 611 pieces last year. The gradually rising interest in the subject parallels increasing corporate emphasis.

The relatively new concepts of paternity leave and job sharing have yet to attract widespread coverage. Neither subject has broken the 100-stories-per-year barrier in the news and business sources surveyed by NEXIS News Monitor.

While media attention to women's labor issues continues to climb, the number of articles about such traditional labor subjects as the AFL-CIO have remained about the same. In non-presidential-election years, for example, an average of just 700 stories a year have focused on the AFL-CIO—a small number compared to the more than 8,000 stories addressing women's labor issues last year.

"Badly" She, Wrote

The most frequent error in written business communication is the misplaced comma, according to Zacharias Rosner, founder of The Grammar Group, a Chicago-based company that teaches basic grammar and language usage to corporations nationwide.

"Most business letters and memos probably have at least one grammatical or punctuation error," states Rosner, a former English teacher

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whose firm employs 10 traveling trainers. "Everyone from CEOs to secretaries makes these embarrassing errors," he says, "and they can harm a company's reputation and even cost it business."

Besides punctuation abuse, Rosner rates his top-10 grammatical blunders in this order:

1. *Myself*: *I* or *me* almost always suffices. Use *myself* only to emphasize or clarify.

2. *Just between you and I . . .*: The proper word here is *me*. Use *me* after any preposition.

3. Confusion over *fewer* and *less*: If you can count 'em, use *fewer*. "Express checkout: 10 items or fewer" is correct.

4. *Irregardless* instead of *regardless*: Use the latter. *Irregardless* is nonstandard English; those two extra letters add nothing but confusion.

5. *Feel badly*: Unless you are complaining about your poor sense of touch, you probably just feel bad.

6. *February 12th*: When the day follows the month, omit the *th*. *February 12* is correct.

7. *Capitol* versus *capital*: A *capitol* is a building. Anything else is a *capital*.

8. *Stationery* or *stationary*: A simple rule will help keep you straight. Pens, letters, and envelopes all have *es*; when you use them you're using stationery.

9. Confusion over *imply* and *infer*: *Imply* means to hint or suggest, while *infer* means to conclude, surmise, or assume. When you imply, you send a message; when you infer, you receive one.

10. *A group of employees are . . .*: The correct verb form here is *is*, because it refers to just one thing—the group.

Grammar and usage can be confusing (respected smart guy Sir Thomas More, for example, regularly bollixed the tricky *imply/infer* combo), but guidance abounds. Dozens of writing consultants will gladly teach corporate groups the intricacies of tense and sense, and
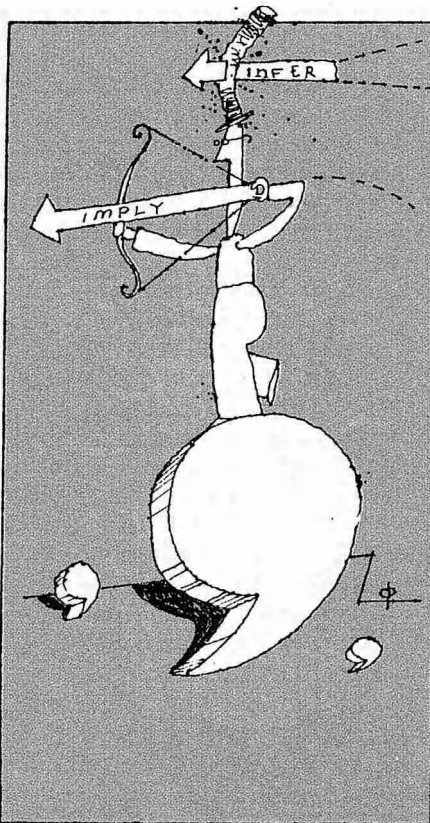
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grammar-checking programs that augment word-processing software are also available. Both of these options are expensive.

Cheaper assistance, and just as good if properly used, sits on the shelf at your local bookstore. For $5, *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White will tell you almost everything you need to know about clear writing.

By the way, here's what Strunk and White have to say about the comma placement problems that so vex The Grammar Group's Rosner:

■ "In a series of three or more terms with a single conjunction, use a comma after each term except the last."

■ "Enclose parenthetic expressions between commas."

■ "Place a comma before a conjunction introducing an independent clause."

■ "Do not join independent clauses by a comma."

Sign of the Times

New York City artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles last year assembled a large-scale public piece made of subway parts, fire hoses, mail bags, and several thousand work gloves. The title? *Ceremonial Arch Honoring Service Workers in the New Service Economy.*

Accounting for Training Costs

First the good news: Organizations increasingly welcome human resource development personnel into the corporate fold as full partners in key business decisions. CEOs the world over have begun to recognize that HRD can indeed contribute to productivity, competitive success, and profitability.

Now the bad news: A seat at the corporate head table comes at a price. Training and development pros find themselves having to explain their operations in unfamiliar ways—not just in terms of benefits, but also in terms of costs.

Accounting for HRD dollars can seem like a maddeningly inexact science because training managers often have a hard time identifying which dollars to count.

Production managers, in contrast, have no such trouble. Adding up costs for personnel to make the product, a place for them to make it, raw materials out of which to make it, processing equipment with which to make it, and capital costs that underwrite the whole operation gives a reasonably complete picture of the expense side of the production balance sheet. All of the numbers necessary for this type of accounting are written down somewhere, on a pay stub, lease agreement, invoice, or bank statement. Few of the cost centers involved in the production process are hidden.

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HRD costs, on the other hand, aren't nearly so discrete. . .

. . .Or are they? According to the major corporations working with Organization Resources Counselors (ORC) to develop a standard of HRD accounting principles, measuring training and development cost accounting lends itself to the sort of analysis that drives traditional business accounting. Judging by a study they recently completed, HRD accounting relies on many of the same costs centers.

By breaking the training and development process into six component parts—development, delivery, facilities, trainees, educational assistance, and administration—training managers can get an accurate idea of just where their

employers' HRD dollars are being spent. The ORC Personnel Development Group Training Task Force, which includes representatives of AT&T, Ford Motor Company, General Dynamics Corporation, General Motors, IBM, Motorola, Shell Oil Company, and Westinghouse Electric, reports that the following factors must be considered to achieve an accurate accounting of training and development costs.

Development

Costs include all expenses connected with analyzing, designing, developing, supporting, evaluating, revising, and maintaining courseware. Specific factors include
■ **Payroll**—expenses including salaries, bonuses, and employee-

benefit costs for trainers.
■ **Contract**—costs paid to people or organizations who render training services to the contracting organization.
■ **Materials**—costs for office supplies, subscriptions, postage, telephone service, program materials such as binders or handouts, and printing and reproduction.
■ **Computer services**—costs for hardware and software.
■ **Other services**—costs for such support services as word processing, graphics, messengers, and video production.
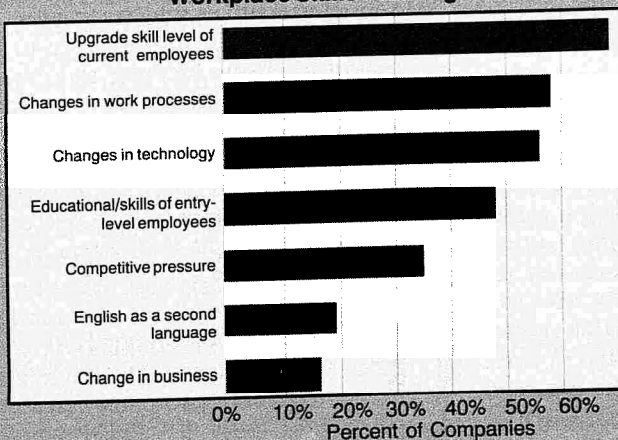■ **Equipment**—costs for bought or leased equipment. "If the equipment is capitalized, depreciation costs should be included," the task force report explains. "If purchased
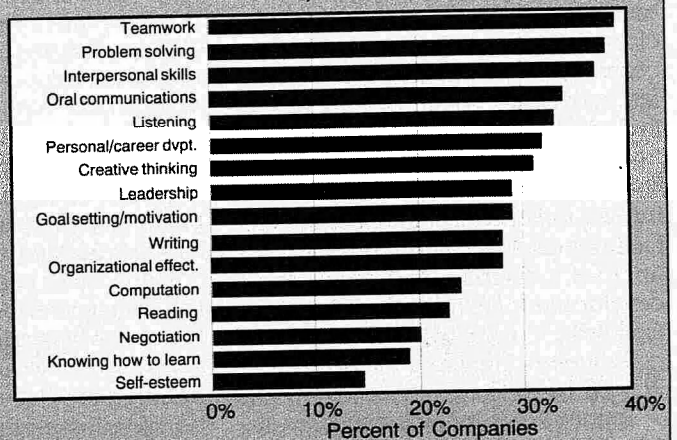
NATIONAL HRD EXECUTIVE SURVEY

Broadly Defined, Basic-Skills Training Grows

The desire to upgrade current workers' skills, changes in work processes and technologies, and the educational shortcomings of entry-level workers have led 73 percent of employers to institute basic-skills training programs, according to the latest findings of the American Society for Training and Development's National HRD Executive Survey. ASTD researchers defined basic skills as the traditional reading, writing, and computation, plus 13 other competencies including such skills as problem solving, teamwork, knowing how to learn, creative thinking, and leadership. Defined more narrowly, in terms of just the three Rs, only about 25 percent of employers provide basic-skills training. Eighty-four percent of the organizations responding to the ASTD poll said the need for basic-skills training will increase over the next three years.

Factors Causing Increase in Need for Basic Workplace Skills Training

- Upgrade skill level of current employees
- Changes in work processes
- Changes in technology
- Educational/skills of entry-level employees
- Competitive pressure
- English as a second language
- Change in business

Percent of Companies (0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60%)

What Basic Workplace Skills Training* Will Cover, 1990 - 1992

- Teamwork
- Problem solving
- Interpersonal skills
- Oral communications
- Listening
- Personal/career dvpt.
- Creative thinking
- Leadership
- Goal setting/motivation
- Writing
- Organizational effect.
- Computation
- Reading
- Negotiation
- Knowing how to learn
- Self-esteem

Percent of Companies (0% 10% 20% 30% 40%)

*Training provided to hourly and non-supervisory employees

but not capitalized, the full costs of the equipment should be included in the year of purchase."

■ **Travel and living**—travel costs incurred by training personnel, including transportation, meals, and accommodations.

Delivery

Costs include all expenses associated with delivering a training program and evaluating it on an ongoing basis. Specifics include

■ **Payroll**—same as for development.

■ **Contract**—same as for development.

■ **Materials**—same as for development.

■ **Computer services**—hardware and software costs, including those going toward computer-based training or other computer applications that support the training experience.

■ **Other services**—costs for support services, especially including word processing, graphics, teletraining support, and videotaping.

■ **Travel and living**—same as for development.

■ **Meals**—costs connected with providing refreshments and meals to those participating in training programs.

Facilities

Costs include all expenses for facilities owned or leased for any training purpose. These can include classrooms, schools, learning centers, offices, studios, and conference rooms. Facilities costs also include operation, security, and maintenance expenses.

Proper accounting requires determining expenses for administrative facilities (including common areas, libraries, cafeterias, and staff areas), development facilities, and delivery facilities.

Trainee costs

Trainee costs include expenses attributable to those who participate in a training program.

■ **Payroll**—costs of trainees' salaries, bonuses, and benefits prorated for the time they spend attending the program.

■ **Travel and living**—costs incurred by trainees while traveling to and from the training site and while attending the training program.

Educational assistance

Costs are those connected with tuition payments on employees' behalf. These include both those paid directly to educational institutions and those paid to reimburse employees for their own expenses.

Administration

Costs include all other training expenses not assigned to development or delivery. Specifics include

■ **Corporate overhead**—the training function's share of corporate, departmental, management, and staff expenses. These generally include prorated legal, accounting, public-relations, and labor-relations costs.

■ **Miscellaneous**—all other training costs not classified under development, delivery, facilities, or corporate overhead.

■ **Payroll**—expenses including salaries, bonuses, and employee benefit costs for personnel engaged in the administrative, marketing, and sales aspects of the training function.

■ **Contract**—costs paid to people or organizations who render administrative services to the contracting organization.

■ **Materials**—costs for office supplies, subscriptions, postage, telephone service, program materials such as binders or handouts, and printing and reproduction used to support training administration.

Using these cost categories, training managers should be able to determine where their HRD dollars are going, a critical first step in determining the value of the organizational training function. HRD specialists who learn to prove their worth in such a manner will truly deserve their seats at the head of the corporate table.

▌Random Stats

Workplace wants

When the Kansas training concern Padgett Thompson asked employees to rank by importance 10 attributes of a good workplace, they listed them in this order. The numbers in parentheses indicate the ranking supervisors thought workers would assign to each.

1. Appreciation for a job well-done (8)
2. The feeling that they're in on things (10)
3. Understanding for personal problems (9)
4. Job security (2)
5. Good wages (1)
6. Interesting work (5)
7. Promotions and opportunities for growth (3)
8. Management loyalty (6)
9. Good working conditions (4)
10. Tactful discipline (7).

Business's Tower of Babel

Fluency in a foreign language is rapidly become a prerequisite to executive excellence.

When the temporary personnel services firm Accountemps asked corporate vice-presidents and personnel executives which tongues budding global managers need to master to ensure business success during the next 20 years, 44 percent spoke of Spanish. Japanese came in second at 33 percent, followed by French (eight percent), Chinese (six percent), and German (five percent).

Russian brought up the rear, netting one percent.

▌Two to a Terminal?

By Brenda Shull, of General Dynamics' DSD Central Center in Fort Worth, Texas.

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On Friday, October 13, millions of PC users held their breath and turned on their machines. A couple of nasty computer viruses were thought to be on the loose, primed to delete files and zap hard drives. Mercifully, few units were so afflicted.

Some computer novices, however, face a malady just as paralyzing as those viruses could have been: a nervous allergy that strikes when rookie users sit down at unfamiliar keyboards to learn new skills. There's no question that computers sometimes intimidate, but there's also no question that corporations today depend on computers and need employees who know how to operate them.

Just as computers are relatively new things, so is computer training. The first organization of computer trainers began just ten years ago, with the creation of Coordinators of Data-Processing Education (CODE) in the San Francisco area. Since then, much has been learned about how to best impart computing skills, but some fundamental questions remain unanswered.

One of the most basic: How many terminals are required to train a given number of students? It's an important issue for several reasons.

First of all, any type of training is expensive, so employers want to make sure the lessons stick right from the start. Conventional wisdom says maximum retention occurs with maximum exposure to the material. That seems to imply that all students ought to have their own terminals during a computer training session.

But the equipment is expensive, and providing a keyboard and monitor for each trainee can substantially increase educational costs. To save money, many companies ask their employees to share terminals while they undergo training.

Researchers at General Dynamics Corporation's DSD Central Center recently wondered which arrangement works best. To find out whether the ratio of students to terminals has any effect on learning, they decided to run an experiment.

Fifty-two students who had signed up for an in-house computing course were randomly assigned to one of two groups. Classes were identical in all respects except the number of trainees per terminal: two people shared a terminal in the control group, while each student in the experimental group had his or her own equipment.

Before the training began, both groups took pretests to measure their baseline skills. When the courses ended, the trainers reviewed post-test results and compared them to pretest scores.

The outcome: There was no significant difference between the two groups' scores. Learners who shared a terminal boosted their knowledge and skills by 59.7 percent on average, while those who had terminals all to themselves raised their proficiency levels by an average of 58.8 percent.

Although the two groups posted similar skills increases, members of the one trainee/one terminal group were more likely than the others to say they had improved. Asked whether or not they had become more proficient as a result of the training, 88 percent of the solo learners said they had. Only 79 percent of the terminal sharers believed they performed better after training than before.

Interestingly, General Dynamics' trainers favored the two-per-terminal arrangement. In contrast to trainees' perceptions, they said terminal sharing boosted learner confidence.

Heard in Passing

As the United Auto Workers geared up for their convention this past summer, the organization faced its most significant schism in years.

At issue: the increasingly popular work-team concept, which most automobile manufacturers now embrace as a way of encouraging greater productivity. The U.A.W leadership generally supports work-team systems. A splinter group within the union—known as New Directions—maintains that work teams are bad for rank-and-file members and the union itself.

The following exchange on the question took place in the business section of the The New York Times.
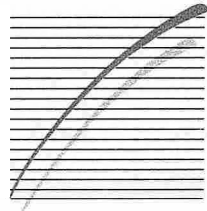
"In order to survive, today's industries need rapid, continuous improvement. This can be accomplished only by a totally involved and motivated workforce. The workers of today and tomorrow are knowledge workers. Their greatest contribution is their creativity and their ability for self-direction. Their greatest need is for security and the opportunity for self-development. The work team represents a flexible and effective way to meet these objectives. . . .

"Fears of change, which lie at the heart of the resistance to the team approach, can be alleviated by an enlightened management and a unified union leadership. The team system, implemented through a joint union-management approach, can make a significant contribution to restoring the competitiveness of our manufacturing industries. The unions can in this way regain their vitality and growth. This opportunity should not be lost through fear and misunderstanding."

—Sydney P. Rubinstein, president of Participative Systems, Inc. and author of Participative Systems at Work.

"New Directions members charge that [the team concept] fosters what has been called management by stress, speeded up assembly lines and the ideological manipulation of the workers. . . .

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"On the shop floor, the team concept is increasingly enforced by what is called the joint-activities staff—which some workers refer to as the 'thought police.' The workers' joint-activities staff members are paid both from union and management funds. They patrol the assembly lines, spread the propaganda of cooperation, single out opponents of union-management togetherness and interfere in union elections.

"In the political arena, the team concept means that the U.A.W. administration has become an aggressive lobbying arm of the automobile and aerospace interests while standing virtually mute as corporations tyrannize local communities through threats of plant closings, refusing to pay fair taxes or to abide by environmental, health and safety regulations."

—*Eric Mann, former automobile assembly-line worker and author of* Taking on General Motors.

"In Practice" is edited and written by John Wilcox. Send items of interest to In Practice, Training & Development Journal, 1630 Duke Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313.