

# TRAINING IN PLANTS: A REALISTIC APPROACH

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Over the past decade, many companies have been critically reassessing their organizational ability to identify and respond to changing conditions. To a large extent, this evaluation has been prompted by the changing social values and economic climate within our society and the world. As we emerge from this decade of change, General Foods (GF) — like many other organizations — no longer is asking the question of whether it should change, or even what should change. The question is simply, "How do we make the change?" In GF, the answer is training. Training is the means by which people acquire the skills and knowledge they need to perform the work. For many people, this means learning new behaviors like group problem solving, feedback skills, setting shared objectives, etc.

The history of training in GF is a long one and continues today to be actively supported throughout the

corporation, and, like all companies, GF needs to maintain training and development activities in order to function at its optimum level of productivity. GF, as a corporation, encourages and supports training and development at all levels of the organization and has developed philosophical and policy positions which articulate beliefs and guide the corporation's approach to training. Key points include:

- GF believes people want and should be given an opportunity for individual growth and development, and should be encouraged to increase their knowledge and improve their skills.
- Training and development goals should address performance-related business and personal needs.
- Training and development is the responsibility of each employee and his/her manager.
- Training needs and goals are established through Management Process<sup>1</sup> discussions.
- The training program and the results of the training, not the employee, are evaluated.

In order to maximize the intent of these statements, to optimize use of human resources and improve cost effectiveness, it was felt that a realistic, corporate-wide approach to training was needed. The following approach outlines what General Foods feels is the best strategy, and is the result of a participative effort by 40 manufacturing managers and personnel professionals from across the corporation.

As training within GF was defined and clarified, it became clear that "training needs" was at the hub of the whole process, and all other pieces of training revolved around the "needs." This concept has become the foundation for GF's approach to training in plants. The individual elements of training — the identification of training needs, the conversion of these needs into training options, development and implementation of training, and the evaluation of the training results are detailed in the following.

Training is disruptive to an organization's functioning. It is also expensive, requiring untold hours

of preparation and time away from the job for trainees, facility and equipment costs, and lost production. To minimize these issues General Foods approaches training as a work focused activity, that is, looking to specific areas of work where important performance discrepancies can be clearly identified, a need specified, and an objective to meet that need spelled out. Training is looked to as a way to close specific performance gaps between what is and what should be. Training is not seen as an end onto itself but as one method of improving individual, and as a result organizational, effectiveness and productivity.

#### Step 1:

#### Identification of Training Needs

The determination that training is needed to solve, or head off a problem requires a careful and systematic analysis of the organization. The questions "who needs training?" and "what training is needed?" are easy; it's getting good answers which is the hard

part. In fact, the identification of training needs is the most difficult and important aspect of the total training process.

The diagnosis of an organization to assess the need for training is the first step. The purpose is to collect qualitative and quantitative data and to articulate the gap in terms of skills between where we are and where we want to be.

The diagnosis process is conducted at two levels — organizational and individual — separately or concurrently. In the first case the whole or large segments of a manufacturing plant are analyzed, while the individual approach focuses on the employee (or small group of employees) or a particular job (or group of jobs). Again, the objective is to determine where gaps are between what is expected and what exists. As Figure 1 states, this is a cooperative effort by staff, management and employees. Experience indicates that this involvement is critical to getting the commitment and owner-

ship required to develop and implement recommended solutions. The degree of success that a training effort enjoys is often dependent on the degree of involvement achieved.

In one recent case, where the plant manager had conducted his own organization analysis, before calling for help to develop and implement supervisory skill training, his initiative, motivation and commitment to training resulted in a very positive training experience for his supervisors. In fact, initial evaluations indicate significant behavior change on the part of the trainees.

During an organizational analysis, a study or audit of the entire plant is conducted. The organization's short- and long-term objectives are compared against actual results, government regulations and licensing requirements are studied, consumer complaints examined, resource allocations are questioned, and the level of management skill, technological status,

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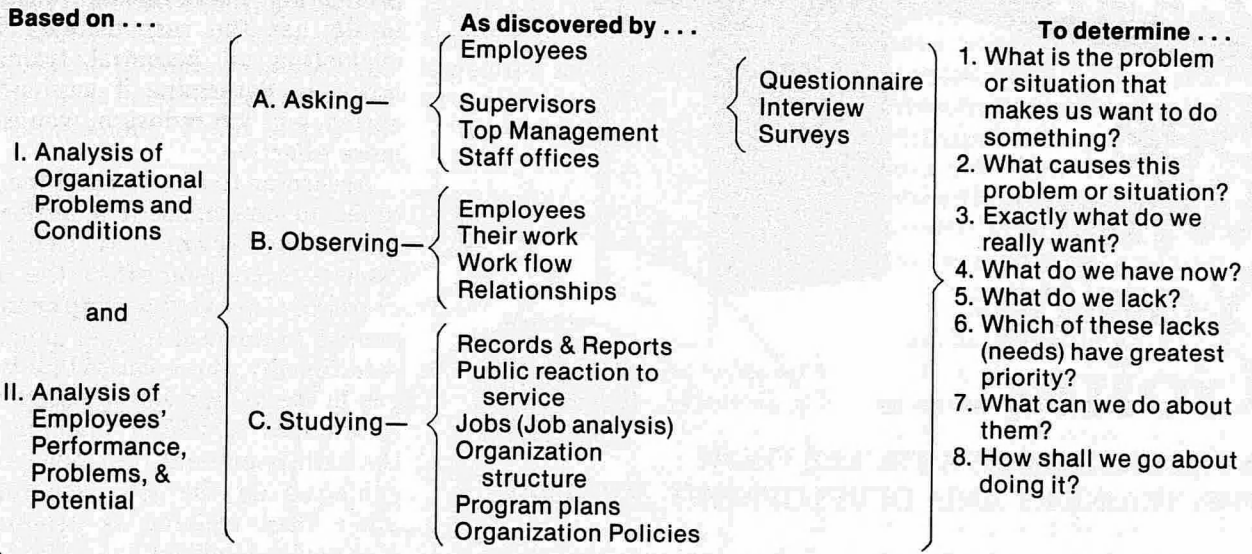
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Figure 1

**TRAINING NEEDS IDENTIFICATION**

Determine plant objectives and activities necessary for an efficient operation to accomplish those objectives.



A COOPERATIVE EFFORT OF EMPLOYEES, SUPERVISORS, MANAGEMENT AND TRAINING STAFF.

and organization and work design are reviewed. Data is gathered through discussions with plant management, discussions with employees (individually or in groups, including hourly workers and union representatives), attitude surveys, or operating records, detailing:

- Yields
- Efficiencies
- Cost
- Quality
- Waste
- Housekeeping
- Safety
- Attendance
- Turnover
- Downtime
- Grievances
- Etc.

The organizational analysis for training needs should also help define the overall management philosophy in the plant. It is important that the attitudes and behavior of the plant management be consistent with what is trained and how the material is presented, especially for supervisory training. The definition of the plant's man-

agement philosophy should also identify "ongoing" training needs; those programs which provide basic skills or information necessary to success in a particular plant environment. For example, team building and group problem-solving skills are basic to the operation of GF's Topeka Pet Food facility, best known for its practice of team management.

Procedures for assessing training needs on an individual basis range from personal interviews with the prospective trainee to the observation of the person or group on the job. The goal here is to identify specific training needs for an individual or group of employees so that training can be tailored to these needs. Likewise, job analysis — systematic, detailed collection of data on a job's purpose, tasks, how tasks are performed, and skills needed to perform the job — can be conducted to define specific training content. An example, of course, is a new line start-up or new equipment installation.

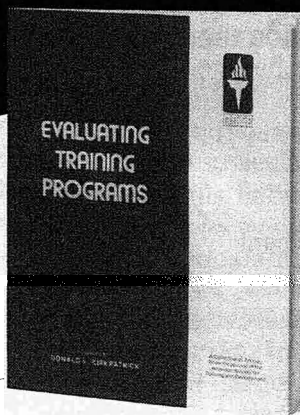
Clearly, the identification of the need for training is primarily the responsibility of the line manager in the area where a need exists.

Because each manager is responsible for the performance of his or her organization, line management must be responsible for determining when training is needed to close a gap between actual and expected performance. Further, it is the line manager's responsibility to support and reward the employee for training participation and subsequent behavior changes on-the-job.

It is, however, the responsibility of personnel to act as consultants once the manufacturing managers assess their needs. Personnel must question and distill each perceived need, until a clear picture of what kind of training is needed develops. Personnel also has the role of identifying and anticipating plant-wide training needs in their area of functional expertise, and to initiate action resolving the needs.

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## Step 2: Conversion of Needs into Training Options

The conversion of identified needs into actual training programs is neither simple, nor a one-step process. Because training can be expensive and disruptive to production, the personnel function in GF has the responsibility for evaluating all potential training needs to determine if any other option, e.g. job redesign, would be more effective.

According to Mager and Pipe, in order to determine if a performance discrepancy or need is "worth" a training effort the discrepancy must be important enough to warrant further action.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, there has to be a true gap in the skill or knowledge level of trainees to justify training. If the skill is present, but not being exhibited on the job, something other than training is required, e.g. better feedback.

Once the need for training is agreed to by personnel and line managers, a formal proposal for recommending training, and requesting plant resources to assure that appropriate training is developed, implemented, and evaluated is written by personnel and agreed to by plant management. The proposal should detail:

1. Specific need.
2. Proposed method to meet the need.
3. Suggested timetable for implementation.
4. Expected outcomes or results.
5. Proposed budget and needed resources.

In one of our plants, the analysis of needs for total supervisory training was, in part, accomplished by using published texts and articles to identify relevant areas of the supervisor's job. These identified responsibilities were reviewed by top management and only those seen as most relevant for this particular division were retained. Next, plant middle management was brought into the analysis. Each department head was assigned one or more modules in their area of expertise and given the charge of forming a committee to broadly outline the content of each of those modules. The depart-

ment head group then met and reviewed the proposed content for all modules. This review identified areas where the content significantly overlapped and, in some cases, the material was combined. Twelve training modules ultimately emerged from this analysis.

Resources were not available to develop the 12 modules at once and department heads placed priorities on the modules. From this, a de-

velopment plan was completed. Finally, a department head and a personnel resource head were put in charge of the development of each module. The basic outlines were expanded, reviewed and assignment for developing material was made. Timetables for completion of the materials were organized and development of the program started.

We have discovered, through

the analysis of unsuccessful training efforts, that line-management participation is critical. Where a valid training need exists and a practical and realistic program is designed to meet that need the training will sell itself, especially where managers and employees have participated. Plants that operate under a "Thou shalt train" directive invariably find little or no participation, commitment, or success for their training dollars, when the other elements are not present or when the needs have not been properly analyzed.

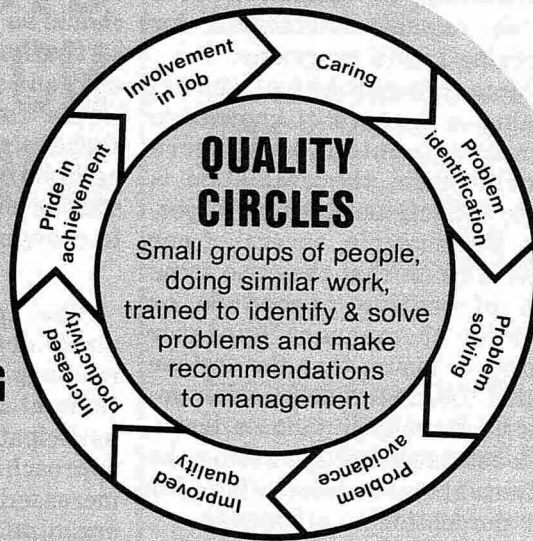
### Step 3: Development and Implementation of Training

Once the need for training has been identified and agreed to, the decision becomes exactly what training program content will meet the need, how it will be presented or taught, and by whom. Does the line manager conduct a four-hour lecture or do we design a five-day retreat run by consultants? Whatever the program content or mode of presentation, it must meet needs and desired outcomes which were identified during the diagnostic stages of the process. Additionally, to create a good learning environment, the following traditional training criteria must be met:

1. Provide active involvement and participation for trainees.
2. Provide feedback on learning progress.
3. Facilitate transfer of learning back to the job.
4. Reinforce desired behavior or correct responses.
5. Provide time to practice and repeat new behavior.
6. Create an atmosphere where trainees are motivated to learn.

In GF, personnel is responsible for the design, development and implementation of training. The knowledge, expertise, and available resource information to conduct a successful program is within their functional area. However, all available technical experts are involved to assist in developing specific content areas and in implementation, as co-trainers. Other resources including corporate training programs and people, col-

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leges or university resources, professional societies, and consultants are also available to the trainer.

#### Step 4: Evaluation of Training

Determining how well a training program met its objectives is the essence of evaluation; did it do what it was designed to do? Typically, evaluation is not an easy thing to do, especially with the limited resources available in the plants, but it is something which is critical to the ongoing success of any training. The feedback that is received from carrying out an evaluation is invaluable in improving future programs.

Evaluation starts with the original, identified need for training. If evaluation starts with the original training objectives then results can more easily be tied back to needs.

There are a number of ways to collect data for evaluation, including asking the trainee (self-perception), asking the supervisor, or observing changes in knowledge or

behavior. For instance, in GF, collecting information on immediate reaction consists of measuring the feelings or reactions of the trainees, on a number of variables, usually by questionnaire immediately after the session or within a short time period after training. Soliciting reactions for what was most helpful/least helpful, physical facilities, subject matter and its presentation, and performance of trainers are typical. Though this type of evaluation does not measure learning or results, it does provide valuable information for improving future programs.

The measurement of actual learning — in terms of knowledge or training content — is more difficult; again, the evaluation is tied to the original training objectives. For example, several of our plants indicate that they use some form of testing procedure or checklist to measure operator training to insure that the trainee learned the material. In other instances, knowledge gain or learning is assessed through asking the individual or the supervisor for their perception or judgments.

Measuring actual behavior change, the key to improved performance, is a third evaluation procedure. The objective here is to assess if anything has, in fact, changed as a result of the training. It has been found that even if a trainee loves the program and learns and understands all the concepts and principles, a change in behavior still may not occur. In other words, how has the learning translated into behavior change and improved results?

The ultimate test of a program's value is the result it produces, as results are directly tied back to the original need for training. The objectives of training programs should be stated in terms of results — reduced grievances, increased quality, less absenteeism, etc. — and the evaluation is in terms of these objectives or sought for results.

Obviously, certain types of training are easier to evaluate for results than others; boxes out-the-door can be counted before and after training, as can the number of damaged jars. It is harder to

evaluate the effectiveness of an interviewing-skills workshop or the effect of group problem solving on the quality of solutions. Also, whenever results are measured, it has to be at some period, e.g., six months, after training, and other factors such as new equipment or procedures can influence the results. These other influences have to be identified and taken into consideration when assessing the ultimate value of the training.

Whatever evaluation strategy is considered and implemented, it should be planned at the same time as the training program is developed and should be an integral part of the total package. Evaluation should also be a continuous process permitting the program to constantly improve and be responsive to changing needs.

#### Conclusion

The approach to training in plants detailed here has become a roadmap and guide throughout the General Foods organization. The participative process by which the approach was developed greatly increased the ease with which the organization accepted and began to practice it. This approach has contributed to a "rebirth" of training as training became better focused on the needs of the organization and the people. The acceptance and commitment to training is increasing, as the results begin to show positive outcomes as a result of meeting specific needs.

#### REFERENCES

1. The Management Process is General Foods' philosophy of management and work planning system. It is an ongoing process between the manager and the employee involving discussions and agreement on work and working relationships.
2. Mager, Robert F. and Peter Pipe, *Analyzing Performance Problems*. Belmont: Fearon-Pitman Publishers, 1970.

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