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HRD Resources Allocation,
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Build a Lean, Clean Training Machine

BY RAY A. FAIDLEY

ARE YOU EXPECTED TO MEET INCREASING DEMANDS FOR TRAINING WITH FEWER RESOURCES? CONSIDER ADAPTING "LEAN" MANUFACTURING TECHNIQUES TO HELP YOU DO MORE WITH LESS.

Many North American manufacturers are putting their plants on a diet. Their goal? To produce more, and more varied, products with fewer workers, smaller factories, lower costs, shorter cycle times, and sparser inventories.

These companies are adopting "lean" production. According to James P. Womack, Daniel T. Jones, and Daniel Roos in *The Machine That Changed The World*, "Lean production is 'lean' because it uses less of everything compared with mass production."

But don't dismiss lean production as a euphemism for firing workers or skimping on quality. Lean production doesn't make do with less; it does more with less by doing things differently.

Lean production was pioneered after World War II by Eiji Toyota and Taiichi Ohno at the Toyota Motor Company in Japan. Other Japanese companies copied the system, setting the stage for Japan's rise to economic preeminence.

Trainers play a prominent role in lean organizations, whose success depends largely on adaptable, highly

skilled workers who collaborate well and use high technology effectively. For example, new production workers in Japan receive 380 hours of training, and new workers in Japanese-owned plants in the United States receive 370 hours—almost eight times as much as the 47 hours of training that new workers in U.S. plants in North America receive.

Although lean production was pioneered in Japan's manufacturing industries, the lessons of lean production apply to service industries as well. So, as more organizations adopt lean strategies, the demand for training will grow dramatically. How should companies respond?

Typically, a company's first reaction might be to increase the size of its training department. After all, the employees who need training represent companies' "internal customers," and current thinking holds that companies must not only meet, but exceed, customers' needs.

But expansion is a "fat," and therefore inappropriate, response. To succeed, lean organizations require similarly lean support services. Training departments have to reflect

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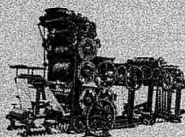
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the overarching philosophy of doing more with less. Trainers need to adapt the practices of lean manufacturing to their own work.

New mission

Trainers in a lean department have to stop thinking about training as a scheduled event that occurs in a particular forum. Lean training departments deliver training as it is needed, where it is needed, and when it is needed. A lean training department fulfills its mission only if it consistently delivers training on demand, which usually means on short notice.

Lean training departments don't look exactly the same in every organization, but they follow similar precepts.

Buy, don't develop. To save time, lean training departments steadfastly avoid developing anything already on the market. Trainers can buy nearly everything they need, and nearly always for less than it would cost to develop a similar program, when you consider not only the costs of trainers' time, but also the costs of printing, storage, inventory maintenance, and periodic updates.

Rely on outside trainers. In traditionally organized departments, trainers spend a lot of their time preparing for and conducting stand-up training. In lean organizations, in keeping with the goal of reducing cycle times, trainers aim to deliver training as quickly as possible.

Lean training departments devise alternative delivery systems and methods. For example, many lean departments "outsource" training: They develop a network of professionals, such as independent consultants and college professors, and crosstrain them to deliver core training programs as needed.

Assume new roles. If trainers in lean organizations do not develop or deliver training, what do they do? They select and certify networks of external trainers, continually monitor how their training systems perform, evaluate and purchase programs, customize program materials, and negotiate with suppliers.

Relationships with suppliers

A lean training and development department must deal differently with suppliers.

For example, a lean training function has short lead times. Just-in-time training needs a just-in-time inventory system. Ideally, materials arrive the day before a program, are distributed to participants, and never enter inventory. This ideal scenario rarely occurs in practice, but trainers still should push suppliers to deliver materials on short notice, which eliminates the need to keep extra stock on hand.

Facilitator certification can become an issue for a lean training department. Training departments must be able to expand their delivery systems quickly if the demand for training suddenly increases. To prepare, trainers should seek suppliers who provide "master trainer certification," which means the supplier will certify someone in the training department to deliver the program and to certify others to deliver the program. Having a "master trainer" in-house enables the department to respond quickly to a spike in demand.

Lean training organizations live or die by their response time. Short response times require suppliers that can provide fast, flexible support. The best way to get that kind of support is for a training organization to view its suppliers as partners.

Most suppliers communicate with customers through their salesforces. That's not service; it's selling. Insist that suppliers "walk their talk" when it comes to customer service.

By adopting these practices of lean production—outsourcing, instituting just-in-time inventory, and viewing suppliers as partners—trainers in any setting, working with limited capital and human resources, can provide more training to employees and tailor it to employees' needs and schedules. ■

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