

"AS AN HRD SPECIALIST, YOU SHOULD BE GUIDING MANAGEMENT
IN MAKING CORRECT DECISIONS ABOUT
THE PEOPLE SIDE OF YOUR METRICATION PROGRAM."

METRICATION: WHAT CAN HRD SPECIALISTS DO?

BY LARRY
G. SHORT

The U.S. is going metric. And you, as HRD specialists, need to plan ahead before it arrives in your company (if it hasn't already). In this article, I am not going to trace the history of measurement systems or try to teach you how to measure metrically. But, so that you can plan ahead, I want to make you aware of:

- Where is the U.S. on metric conversion?
- What's expected of HRD people, and when?
- Some ideas on metric learning strategies.
- Where can you get some help?

An Opportunity in Disguise

The transition to the modernized metric system called SI (the International System of Units) presents a fascinating challenge to trainers. Think of it . . . over the next few years, millions of people must change familiar behavioral patterns. We, who make our living changing human behavior, should grasp this golden opportunity,

which has never been presented to us before, and probably will never be again. Many manufacturers look upon metrication as a chance to consolidate product lines, capitalize on advertising opportunities, and make judgment decisions on long-range capital equipment investments. Likewise, trainers should be looking for opportunities to be of service to their companies or clients.

On December 23, 1975 President Gerald R. Ford signed the *Metric Conversion Act* which ensured that considerable resources of the federal government will be employed to help bring about an efficient and economical transition to metric usage in this country. The approval by the president and Congress marked a culmination of a legislative history which began back in 1866, with legalization of the metric system for the United States.

The Act has several major features. To summarize, ". . . *the policy of the United States shall be to coordinate and plan the increasing use of the metric system in the United States.*" A U.S. Metric

Board will be established to assist in planning and coordination of the changeover. The Board will contain representation from all sectors of the economy and report annually to the president and the Congress.

Another major feature of the bill is that the conversion is to be voluntary. In other words, without explicit government mandate, conversion will evolve within the private sector and within the federal government but without hard and firm timetables. Each sector of the economy will convert at its own speed based upon its own needs, opportunities and constraints. Thus, there is no specific timetable for national conversion of metrication. Individual timetables are being developed for specific industries and will continue to be developed.

The Board is in the process of being confirmed by the Senate, and until it is, many individuals and organizations are hesitant to take action. You might describe the present climate as "moving forward but at a cautious pace." Those who are watching the move-

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ment feel that once the Metric Board is confirmed, things will really start to happen. When? It's hard to tell, but probably mid 1978 at the earliest. And when things do start to happen, when your company will need employee training, and to what extent, depends greatly on its particular sector of industry. Many industries are already heavily involved; others have yet to begin.

The metric system has already made inroads into our lives in many ways. The role of film we have for our 35mm camera, the 100mm cigarette that you may smoke. The electricity that we use is measured in a metric unit. The Olympics and their events are in metric units. Educators in many ways have been leading America toward metrication. Virtually every state has incorporated some metric program into its curriculum.

The motor-vehicle industry is several years into its metric conversion process. Many of your cars have metric-dimensioned components today. The textile and apparel industries are also moving ahead toward metrication. A number of manufacturers in the apparel industry are dual-labeling their products at this time.

HRD Responsibilities

Do you think that when your industry and/or company converts from the customary measurement system to SI metric, that you should be involved? Are you getting involved? Ask yourself these questions:

- Do I know where my industry and/or company stands regarding metrication?
- Does my company have a written metric policy statement and have I read it?
- Am I aware of what planning is taking place regarding metrication in my company?

tion in my company?

Now that you have answered those questions for yourself, I pose one more for you to consider:

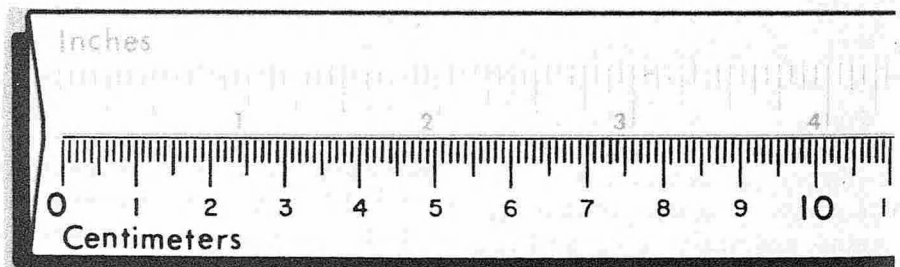
- Should I, as an HRD practitioner, be helping guide my management in making the correct decisions about the people side of their metrication program?

Let's examine some of the areas in which management could use guidance in the development of metric training.

First and foremost, some managements tend to overreact and to overtrain on metric. To perform on the job, employees do not need to know everything there is to know about the metric system any more than they do about the customary system! The "need-to-know" areas of metric usage must first be carefully defined so that training time

even stronger. Of course, this is nothing new, but if you don't become involved in the early planning stages of metrication programs, you may find yourself bound to an approach that does not best fit the need. Media decisions for metric training should be based on the same logical criteria as any other training; i.e., learner population, learning locations, frequency of learning, etc.

Another area where you can guide management is to reduce the effects of the "reinvent the wheel" syndrome. Metric training materials are already on the market that may fit, or at least can be tailored to fit, your company's identified training needs. Since the U.S. is one of the last countries in the world to adopt the SI metric system of measurement, there is



and money is spent where it produces the most cost-effective performance results.

An analysis should be made to determine how customary measurement is presently being used on the job so that training will be concentrated on metric equivalents; e.g., reading metric measurement tools, writing and typing metric terms, interpreting metric data, etc.

Management also needs guidance in making media decisions. As in many training efforts, there is a strong trend toward locking into a training delivery system before real training needs are determined. In metric training, this trend is

much training material already available.

Timing is all important when designing a metric training plan. Obviously, as in any training situation, if the learning process and actual performance on the job are too far apart, poor performance results. If metric training is not completed in adequate time, employees will not be ready for the conversion; consequently, it is of primary importance that the training activity of any company be closely tied to the total metrication process.

Your company's metrication program can fail if people are not prepared and knowledgeable when

the time comes for them to use metric on the job. The key to metric preparedness is being sure that HRD needs are considered every step along the way just as strongly as tool and equipment needs.

Metric Training Strategies

Here are four points you should keep in mind when forming your metric training strategies:

First, you must be aware of the "state of mind" of your trainees. Ed Janis, General Motors Corporation's metric coordinator, describes the states of mind which everyone goes through when learning the metric system as the "psychology of metrication." The learner progresses from one state of mind to the other in the following sequence: horror, resistance, compliance, involvement, awareness, enthusiasm and crusading. It is important for you to identify which state of mind your learners are in so you can take the appropriate actions.

Teaching more on the metric system than is needed for the indi-

vidual's job further contributes to the fear factor. It logically follows then, that a well-structured training-needs analysis must be done early in the metrication planning steps. Care must be taken, however, to be sure that the employee's movement to other jobs is not restricted by lack of certain metric knowledge.

One of the better ways to learn the metric system is by doing. In other words, get learners involved in using metric measurement, rather than spending a disproportionate amount of training time on the metric theory and history.

Metric training has the best chance for success when it takes place just before the knowledge must be used. It has been said, "The best metrication program is a series of nonevents." In other words, it should happen gradually and quietly over a period of time. Why? People naturally fear the change to a new system. The more attention that is concentrated on the change, the greater the possi-

bility of increasing fear.

Differing opinions regarding group vs. self-instruction can best be answered by a careful analysis of your own logistical and budgetary constraints. Both work if properly structured and administered.

Get Yourself Prepared

There are some things you can do to prepare yourself for that moment when you may be asked to do something about metric training. Start listening, talking and reading about metrication. Attend metric meetings which are being held all over the country. Write for metric information from organizations such as the National Bureau of Standards (NBS) and the American National Metric Council (ANMC).

The metric resources at the end of this article feature some of the major periodicals that will give you a good start toward keeping up with metric developments in the U.S. Use reader reply cards in these periodicals to get yourself on metric product mailing lists.

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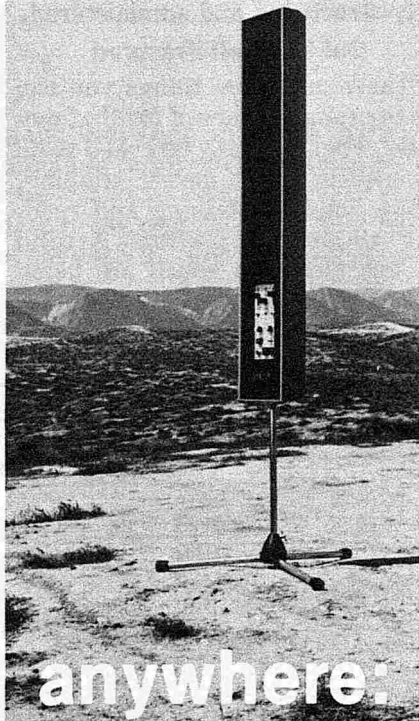


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"PEOPLE NATURALLY FEAR THE CHANGE TO A NEW SYSTEM. THE MORE ATTENTION THAT IS CONCENTRATED ON THE CHANGE, THE GREATER THE POSSIBILITY OF INCREASING FEAR."

The American National Metric Council is one of the places you can get some assistance in your metric training planning. It is a national, nonprofit organization established in 1973 under the private sector's initiative. ANMC has established sector committees dealing with conversion in various aspects of the economy, and is involved with planning, coordinating and implementing the voluntary conversion to the metric system. It currently has over 2,000 corporations, organizations and individuals subscribing to the ANMC services and participating in committee activities. This organization periodically conducts metric training conferences and annually holds a national conference on metrication.

The Employee Training Sector Committee is one ANMC committee of special interest to HRD people. Its objective is to receive and disseminate metric training data among other ANMC sector committees and industry associations. The American Society for Training and Development has agreed to serve as the committee's secretariat association and is currently assisting the sector's efforts.

The Employee Training Sector Committee is studying the following issues:

- When various industry sectors will need metric knowledgeable people, and approximately how many.

- What custom-designed metric programs for each sector are available.

- What papers or articles of interest to HRD people are available.

Results of these studies will be published some time in 1978.

It's Up To You!

You may never have to step up to the metric training challenge . . . on the other hand, you might.

The transition to SI metric in the U.S. is not going to go away. People are going to have to know how to use the metric system of measurement to perform their jobs, and you are in the business of helping people perform. You really can't ignore this impending fact unless you are in an industry or business which will never be impacted by the change — and that is almost impossible.

METRIC REFERENCE SOURCES

Metric News Inc.
830 N. 109th St.
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53226

Metric Reporter (biweekly)
American National Metric Council
1625 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

A Bibliography of Metric Standards
Items 1 through 4 are available from:

American National Standards Institute
1430 Broadway
New York, NY 10018

NBS Special Publication 330
The International System of Units (SI)
U.S. Government Printing Office
Washington, D.C. 20036

Metrication for the Manager
by John T. Benedict
American National Metric Council
1625 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20036

Larry G. Short is president of Creative Universal, Inc., Southfield, Mich. He is also chairman of the Employee Training Sector Committee of the American National Metric Council and has been working with the Committee since 1974. A past president of the Greater Detroit Chapter of ASTD, he has been working in the HRD and communications industry for over 27 years.