

Truths of Technology Training

Here's how to deal effectively with those undeniable problems of automation training.

By ELLEN W. SOKOL and JOHN C. BULYK

Studies said not to expect a boost in white-collar productivity without a boost in capital investment. So business executives scurried about, ordering word processors, personal computers, and workstations. The results, often, were *mid-management blues*—the symptoms of which are moans about little payback; *software misuse*—due to inability to squeeze an appointment in on a software training calendar booked solid; and *standing requisitions for systems and software trainers*—guilt from burning out all previous trainers.

In recent years, the flaw-filled practice of budgeting lots for technology but little for training spread wildly. If this practice infiltrated your organization, an understanding of technology training truths and ways of dealing with them may help you train your firm back into the black.

■ *Truth #1: Executives are people, too.* Training plans must include provisions for executives. If you want continuing support for the automation budget and strategy, your first client must be your manager or your manager's manager. Ask yourself who needs to know about the training, then what, when, how, and why they need to know. Not all executives need to know the features of systems being acquired for their staffs; however all need enough information to develop the attitudes, perspectives, and expectations necessary to support automation efforts. Informed, involved executives are essential to automation success.

One of the most effective ways of involving and informing executives is through carefully constructed, highly professional

briefings featuring recognized technology experts. Don't consider it a personal failing to bring in experts; you can display your strengths by designing and chairing the briefing. Include a hands-on component. Give management some context for viewing the automation effort, then point out its value to their personal work.

■ *Truth #2: Training is crucial to all stages of automation.* Common wisdom holds that training should occur only after the technology is in place, and should end once all the equipment is running. Nothing could be further from the truth. Training is a necessary tool throughout the automation process, from introduction to advanced use of the equipment.

During the early stages of automation, help the users understand what they can expect and what cannot be done (due to technological or organizational obstacles). If you launch users at every organization level on an informed path, they will be your partners, not your adversaries, in the automation effort.

Don't pull out during later stages. People with several years of automation experience report that the problems get more complex: Users must be retrained on updated systems and procedures, and file building and sharing procedures must be formalized.

■ *Truth #3: Focusing on user development is not a luxury, it's a necessity.* The number of information-system experts to users is usually less than 1 to 100. The only way to combat the obvious problem of this imbalance is to focus, right from the start, on making users proficient and independent.

Have you ever considered how sizeable a learning curve users must scale to achieve automation proficiency? Skills development, or learning the features and functions of a system, is only the first step. Once users can easily operate a system, they start using it in unintended and un-

Ellen W. Sokol and John C. Bulyk are managing directors at Organizational Resources Group, Inc., New York City.

Training and Development Journal, February 1986

ROA
FILMS & VIDEO

Your Single Source for More Than 400* Training Films

from all these Producers:

*We're adding more every day

Advantage Media	Journal Films
Aims	Karli & Assoc. Inc.
American Media	KLS Productions
American Society for Quality Control	Learning Resources
Bartnett	Leighton & Kidd
Best Films	Lucerne
Beveridge & Associates	Thomas McCann
Bosustow	Memory Masters Inc.
William Brose	National Safety Council
Hamilton Burnett	NFL Films
Cathcart & Alessandra	Nierenberg (Negotiation Institute)
CBS Fox (NBC News)	Pacific Resource Dev. Group
Creative Media	Rhett Palmer
CRM—McGraw Hill	Pyramid
Dartnell	Ramsgate
Walt Disney	Ratlab Productions
Educational Film Resources	Simon & Schuster
Educational Resource Foundation	Soft Fuzzy Productions
Esmeralda	Sports Films & Talents
Family	Thaxton & Associates
Film Communications	The Program Source
Filmfair	The Training Files
Goodmeasure	Translift
Gulf Publishing	United Learning
International Film Bureau	Vision Film Associates
	Visual Horizons

24 HOUR SERVICE
On Most Titles.

16mm, VHS and U-Matic formats
PREVIEW—RENT—PURCHASE
Our sales people are knowledgeable and friendly!

Service is our Business

CALL US TOLL-FREE
800-323-9468

In Illinois CALL COLLECT
312-647-0600

ROA

6633 W. Howard St. • Niles, IL 60648

Circle No. 133 on Reader Service Card

documented ways. Creative users go beyond applying the tool to specified jobs; their confidence pushes them to strive for new applications.

When users develop a technology sense, they feel ready to participate in systems acquisition, selection, and design decisions—they feel ready for full partnership with the information-systems professional. But only when these technology-savvy users gain *system* sense will the partnership work. System sense stems from understanding work requirements, organizational requirements, and human dynamics. This understanding, so critical to automation success, develops from experience in matching organizational requirements with system functions.

These important user development stages must be planned and budgeted for. ■ *Truth #4: Training is more than skills development.* At different stages in a person's or organization's development, the need to know shifts. A training program aimed at user development must anticipate shifting needs and provide supportive training. Such a developmental train-

ing program has three components: sensitization—activities that prepare users emotionally for the automation and the changes it will bring; education—activities that prepare the user intellectually for the automation; and training—activities that prepare the user to actually operate the automated tools.

Consider these familiar scenarios. Is skills training needed?

—A financial analyst who is proficient with Lotus 1-2-3 will direct a local area network selection and acquisition project.

—An administrative assistant responsible for a traditional departmental project file will build a related data base.

—An executive who is evaluating a plan to acquire an automated package will plan an information center.

At first blush these situations may not seem like training problems—they might seem like political, organizational, or financial ones. However, each situation has a knowledge or skill dimension that training must address. Training must also take responsibility for altering attitudes and beliefs that oppose the goals of the

automation effort. If trainers don't take these steps, no one will.

■ *Truth #5: Automation training needs are complex and must be made manageable.* A structured, written plan is necessary for communicating your automation training ideas to the organization. Your plan should cover three levels of staff: executive; managerial and professional; and administrative and support. The planned activities should include sensitization, education, and training.

For each of these activities, briefly describe what's needed at each staff level. First, assess needs: What will the organizational requirements be over time? Next, set objectives: What specific activities will meet those needs? Last, take inventory of resources: What is needed in terms of dollars, personnel, and technology?

When writing the plan, be as broad in scope as possible, do not feel limited by what does not seem possible at the moment. You may want to include a technology deployment plan. This would specify the budget for technology for the

**"HOW-TO" Films for
SUPER
SUPERVISORS**

Selection Interviewing
"More Than a Gut Feeling"
 How to maintain control • How to seek contrary evidence
 How to prepare questions • How to use silence • How to listen

Performance Appraisal
"The Human Touch"
 How to set objectives • How to build on strengths
 How to be candid and specific • How to plan and conduct appraisals

Time Management
"The Time Trap"
 How to save up to two hours daily
 How to use 50 time-management techniques

View these films today!
 Preview \$35 ea. • Rental \$110 ea. • Lease/Purchase \$550 ea.

AMERICAN MEDIA INCORPORATED
 1454 30th Street • West Des Moines, Iowa 50265
1-800-AM-CALLS In Iowa call collect 515-224-0919

planning period and include the number of persons per terminal or workstation. A more elaborate plan would include objectives for the office automation or personal computing effort.

Your detailed plan can guide you through effective training and development. But, beware: Planning is one of those managerial activities that can be of significant value or can become a personal Bermuda Triangle—whatever energy you send in its direction is lost for all time, with no payback at all. Prepare for this by making your training plan flexible.

■ *Truth #6: Trainers never have enough resources.* After you take inventory of your resources and map them over your organization's training needs, you'll probably think you have nowhere near enough resources to meet the needs. You will, most likely, have to deploy insufficient resources in the best manner you can think of.

Try several uses for the resources at hand. In your plan, write in specific, achievable objectives for as many needs as possible until you have exhausted all the resources. For instance, you could use all the resources to train secretaries on software or all to sensitize senior management to the cost/benefit relationships of automation. However, it's usually best to spread available resources across many different areas of the organization.

If you assume the same resources each year for the next three to five years, and you assume an unchanging set of needs, you can write objectives for the future. Both of these assumptions will prove false, but making them will provide some guidance into future needs.

You should now send a copy of your plan to your automation director to see what he or she has to say about it. Be prepared to modify the priorities and assumptions listed in the plan as you begin program implementation and receive feedback.

Remember, even with limited resources, you can make technology training work. Just be certain you touch on every aspect of the process—including the often overlooked sensitization and education—and cover all staffing levels. Your work, well planned, will produce the optimum automation environment: one filled with informed, independent, and highly proficient technology users.



Training Consultants

FRIESEN, KAYE AND ASSOCIATES

"20 YEARS SERVING THE TRAINING COMMUNITY"

We waited and waited... now the time is right
We analysed and analysed... now we know your training needs
We researched and researched... now we are sure we have found the exact answer to your

COMPUTER BASED TRAINING NEEDS

We are pleased to announce:

"COMPUTER BASED TRAINING"

(a workshop that was worth waiting for)

February 10-14, 1986, Ottawa

March 17-21, 1986 Toronto

April 28-May 2, 1986 Ottawa

Now we can guarantee that you will be able to prepare CBT courses that will make you as proud as we are of our new workshop. To assist you with practical hands on exercises, we have installed hardware and courseware at our Training Centres.

For more details, call us at any of our three locations

This workshop is available on an inhouse basis

HEAD OFFICE — 3448 RICHMOND ROAD, NEPEAN, ONTARIO K2H 8H7 CANADA TEL: (613) 829-3412

VICTORIA OFFICE — 370-3301 Douglas Street, Victoria, B.C. V8Z 3L2 TEL: (604) 385-3412

TORONTO OFFICE — 22 St. Clair Avenue East, 4th floor, Toronto, Ontario M4T 2S3 TEL: (416) 960-5343

Circle No. 142 on Reader Service Card

HILLSDALE

The ideal climate for manager development.

- ✓ "Self-Analysis for Managers" and other outstanding seminars.
- ✓ Professional consulting and custom-designed programs.
- ✓ Superb facilities for meetings and conferences.
- ✓ A total live-in concept, plus fine dining & recreation.
- ✓ Campus setting—ideal for maximum results.

FREE BROCHURE describes year-round seminar program with unique manager development series used by over 400 companies. Write or phone for free brochure today.



DOW LEADERSHIP
CONFERENCE CENTER
Hillsdale College • Hillsdale, MI 49242
517/437-3311

Circle No. 144 on Reader Service Card

The CAREER ASSESSMENT CENTER...

identifying managerial strengths & developmental needs

DIMENSIONS 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Influencing	██████████
Planning and Organizing	██████████
Delegation	██████████
Analytical Skill	██████████
Management Control	██████████
Decision Making	██████████
Sensitivity	██████████
Stress Tolerance	██████████
Oral Communications	██████████
Written Communications	██████████

PCI Psychological Consultants, Inc.
Serving Financial Institutions,
Manufacturing, Government and
The Pharmaceutical Industry
6724 Patterson Avenue • Richmond,
Virginia 23226 • (804) 288-4125

Circle No. 132 on Reader Service Card