

ACCORDING TO PLAN

Organisations are not linking training to their business plans, making it impossible to assess whether it is paying off, says an Industrial Society survey. Personnel Today, December 1994.

Many organisations do not know whether training has paid off or, in many cases what it was supposed to deliver in the first place. The problem, according to an Industrial Society survey of more than firms, is a failure to link training to the business plan. The survey found that four in five organisations make some attempt to evaluate their training activity. But most of those rely on nothing more sophisticated than post-course questionnaires - happy sheets assessing their impressions of the course tutor, overhead slides and lunch.

This means that other development activities such as mentoring, coaching and secondments are left virtually unmonitored. Nine in ten training courses are monitored in some way, with management training coming under greatest scrutiny with four in five firms assessing its success and benefits. Less than half of the survey organisations evaluate information technology training and less than one in three sales training.

But the pressure is on to improve. According to the Industrial Society, "Commitment to training evaluation has risen markedly in the past two years, and is now set to rise steeply in the next two". Two in three organisations said their commitment to training evaluation had grown over the past two years and most expect it to grow further. A major drive for business efficiency lies behind the evaluation trend. As many as 75% said this was the major reason stimulus for assessing training. Senior managers also figure highly, with 37% of organisations citing them as a main factor behind more systematic training evaluation.

Nevertheless, there are still problems with evaluation. Assessment methods are still relatively basic, and organisations are finding it hard to quantify the effects of training spend. One in three firms said they could measure training results in terms of quantity or customer satisfaction and one in four could measure some financial benefits. By contrast, less than one in seven said they could assess staff costs or the time they saved as a result of training. Three in four organisations could not put a financial value on their training.

Results of this and previous surveys suggest confusion among senior managers over the precise links between training and business planning. Half the respondents to the survey listed better links between training and business strategy as a benefit of training evaluation. Directors have to be committed to linking training to business, if the rest of the organisation is to do the same. Senior management can show this commitment to training only if they lead by example. If they want to establish their firms as learning organisations they have to take the concept on for themselves.

The report stresses the importance to senior management of the central link between training goals and business goals. The recommendation is for them to start by evaluating a training programme before it begins. Comment is made that 'It is important to get across the fact that training does not mean just courses. It can be any form of development'.