

Training Daze



Skill4
International

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Companies continue to invest money in training, yet the results often fail to reach even modest expectations. Skill4 International's Barry Hazelwood looks at the ten best ways to waste your training budget.

Our experience in implementing global training projects, often in parallel with other change initiatives that the client is undertaking, shows that the contrasts, in terms of their reception and success, are often stark. A clear and disturbing picture has begun to emerge of how businesses continue to waste vast sums on training and communication that just does not work, particularly if it has an international aspect.

Perhaps it's the case that people are *deliberately* trying to squander their resources.

If so, what are the best ways to waste your training budget?

1. Don't bother to get management buy-in

The First Law of organisational behaviour states: *"If the boss shows interest in it, it gets done."* Training is about enabling performance improvement and senior managers responsible for broad business goals – such as improving sales revenues, service levels, profitability or changing product focus – must throw their weight behind making it happen.

This means: involvement in determining training content and provider; motivating and enabling participants to attend training events; being there to kick-off events; and, longer term, *sticking with it!* Otherwise, it quickly becomes just another wound in 'death by a thousand initiatives'.

It's vital that local country management are brought on board too, otherwise they can corrupt or even ambush the message as it moves from your language into theirs. Your provider should help you with both these issues.

2. Leave organisational obstacles lying around

The corollary of the First Law is *"If the boss rewards it, it gets done first."* Pity the poor salesman who is exhorted and trained to use interactive, consultative skills to deliver better *quality* business, but is rewarded on short term revenue and activity measures. Similarly, how about the component manager who has conflicting targets on pick rates, stock control and customer service?

Checking the appetite for training at 'street level' is also vital. Managers may resent training because it takes key staff off-line, or see it as implied criticism of their current operation. Their view may be short sighted, but it needs addressing at the outset.

Leave any of this clutter lying around and your training will surely trip and fall. A provider who has experience of major implementations will help you identify the clutter and help you eliminate it or at least minimise its impact.

3. Rely on the classroom changing everything

Whisper this (the type of trainer who is a platform guru or diva does not like to hear it), but a few days in a classroom will not, on its own, change behaviour long-term. It's fine if you want a 'sheep dip' that will require constant cyclical repetition. It's also OK if you want a 'warm bath', to bolster short-term morale and motivation.

If however you want your people to have transferable skills that they can implement, they will need intermediate reinforcement of some sort.

E-learning can have a role in this, but is better at reinforcing learnt knowledge than skills. The best skills reinforcement is practice and on-job coaching, for the first few weeks following training. It's then possible to experiment and assimilate the new skills 'elegantly'. This approach delivers the greatest long-term payoff in

results.

Look for a provider who can give you a range of options in the languages and locations you require.

4. Believe that training will be the panacea for all your problems

Antibiotics will not mend a broken leg. Organisations, like the body, are complex entities in which things can go wrong. Training will frequently help solve a problem but by itself will rarely provide the complete solution. It's back again to point two and your provider being able to help you identify and deal with other issues impacting on the project.

5. Buy training on price, not value

Lecture-style, en masse training, delivered over short time-spans can be fun and offer valid insights; it can explain '*what* to do'. Self-directed e-learning has its place too, but is notoriously difficult to control and cannot replicate the texture of a live classroom event. Training to develop skills – the '*how* to do it' - comprises repeated iterations of input, practice, feedback and review. It requires expensive resources - time and individual attention from talented people! Without this, the insights remain mere concepts.

Remember what my Scottish granny used to say: "He who buys cheap, buys twice!" Jobbing trainers, local 'hired guns', might look cost effective, but the risks are substantial – see point seven.



6. Confuse international consistency with sameness

If you are in a real hurry to waste your budget, try this one - nothing runs away with money like a poor international implementation.

Your global customers will only see you as an international company if you deal with them in the same style across borders and regions. So, this says that you should export the training identically, irrespective of the country, right? Wrong! It is not consistency of *input* you need, it is consistency of *output*.

Certainly the methodology, concepts and standard of delivery must be of a uniformly high quality. However, in many countries and cultures it will only work if it is delivered in local language by local people who themselves work there and can take account of local commercial custom and practice.

Using translation services that are not resident in the country concerned also risks creating subtle cultural inconsistencies that will jar with the audience. All of these problems will reduce the credibility of the message and generate resistance.

7. Use local 'hired guns' to deliver for you

Jobbing trainers can be found cheaply throughout the world, but without central control all sorts of nasty things can happen. How do you know they will deliver the message consistently? If they need to translate your material, what is going to get lost or corrupted? What if they don't have the gravitas or skills to interact effectively with your people?

Will they actually be any good? Even if they are, what will they do with your content once the project is over? How will you prevent them from pirating it, or even selling it to your competitors?

8. Use generic materials and exercises

Generic content relies on learners being able to integrate it into their own working life and apply it. Generic examples and practice exercises lead learners to question the training's relevance and generate resistance. However, a supplier who is skilled at customising exercises and materials to reflect the participants' real world will get you a bigger (and quicker) 'bang for your buck'.

9. Don't evaluate and review

A good driver looks in the mirror regularly. Let's face it, even the best training provider rarely gets the programme 100% 'spot on', first time. You may see ways to adapt the training once in action and, anyway, the world constantly moves on. Fail to look back and assess, and you fail to respond to change. A reputable training provider will always demand review opportunities and will have the ability to provide pre, during and post-project statistics in a variety of forms, analysed in a variety of ways.

10. Expect your providers to do as they are told

You should expect rigour and candour from your provider. If they meekly respond to stated needs without challenging underlying assumptions and goals, what real value do they add? You surely don't hire them just so that you can push them around; you must have plenty of your own people you could push around for free?

But of course – I was forgetting - you want to waste your budget.

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publisher Skill4 International
telephone +44 (0)1709 521234
facsimile +44 (0)1709 710065
email info@skill4.com