

8-Step Process for Creating a More Effective Workforce

by Rebecca L. Morgan, CSP, CMC

A more effective workforce is created by continual personal and organizational improvement. This comes from having individuals constantly looking for ways to work smarter — both individually and organizationally. These improvement efforts are often spawned from professional development activities that not only force them to examine their own processes, but provide tools and skills for implementation.

Long-lasting professional development does not come cheaply or without thoughtful effort. But the alternatives — none or poorly conceived and executed activities — can cost many times more. For you to get the highest ROI, many elements need to be determined — from determining clear, achievable objectives, to a plan for reinforcement.

Based on more than 25 years in the professional development field, I've seen some programs that worked, and many that didn't. I don't want you to waste your time or money so I developed an 8-step process to ensure success.

1. Clarify your desired outcomes

Determine what you're trying to accomplish: Leadership succession? A more customer-focused staff? A more cohesive team? Better functioning managers? Fewer customer complaints? More revenue per person or customer? Where do you want your people performing in 3, 6, 12 and 24 months?

What restrictions must be considered? Is the culture one of resistance to change? Does the culture encourage — or sabotage — professional growth? How is professional development fostered? How are training opportunities determined? What other development methods are employed? How are the new skills nurtured and reinforced? How does the organization support time for development? How is individual professional development tracked and rewarded?

It's critical to identify the desired outcomes and possible restrictions for any project and how you will know if the effort is successful.

2. Identify gaps

What is the performance of the group or individuals now? What do you want it to be? What performance measures are in place now? Are they sufficient? Are they really measuring the appropriate outcomes or do you need to put new metrics in place? How and what measures will be

gathered before the plan is launched?

Establish key ways to measure improvement in the target group's or individual's behavior. How will you see the results of the new or strengthened skills and behaviors? How often will this be measured?

If your people aren't performing as you want, why not? What gets in their way? Is it a skill issue or a motivation issue? What is your plan to close the gap? Gather feedback on each person's performance via a 360-degree assessment or other methods and build individual development plans.

3. Streamline individual & organizational processes

Individuals' performance is often hamstrung by ineffective organizational processes. First, look at how the organization's practices get in the way of optimal individual performance. Reduce the roadblocks for success. Then focus on enhancing each key of your talents' skill sets and making their personal processes most effective.

Are there organizational roadblocks that prevent your people from accomplishing more? Are there processes that haven't been challenged in years — or decades? Are your people incentivized to come up with new ways of working smarter?

How do you know if your organizational processes are helping or hindering productivity? We ask questions and help you challenge the status quo. We help you identify barriers and work through solutions with other departments or suppliers.

4. Enhance target group's skills

Determine how the target group's skills are best enhanced — if group or individual learning processes are better. If group sessions are optimal, offer optional self-study resources for those needing/wanting more development outside the group sessions. Create appropriate delivery mechanisms based on the needs of the target group (e.g., in-person group seminars, manager-led structured discussion guides for team training, teleseminars for remote groups, group video-learning coupled with discussion, individual study with manager, e-learning, tests for ability to apply information).

5. Increase individual's productivity

Adults learn through application and repetition. One-time hits of a learning experience are not nearly as valuable as a longer-term approach, with checking for understanding and application, then reinforcement. For longer-lasting results and higher ROI, development must take place over time.

Some ways to increase individual learning — and therefore productivity — include short learning experiences every other week, 30-minute manager-led discussions at staff meeting, 1-hour teleseminars every other week, 1-hour group video-learning brown bag lunch sessions, one-on-one coaching. This allows participants to apply key concepts regularly, rather than one long 1- to 5-day program with minimal application and impact.

Follow-up/reinforcement is critical to long-lasting development. With the target audiences' manager(s) outline a plan for internal coaching and feedback sessions. This could include bi-weekly individual coaching of participants, monthly teleseminars with all participants, quarterly in-person refreshers, or 6-month 360 feedback to determine if behaviors have changed.

6. Measure results

Measurement is key. Create benchmarks to let you know if what you are doing is working and with whom. Plan to make adjustments along the way.

7. Boost profits

Profits should increase as a result of increased effectiveness. Make sure that is one of the measurements that gets integrated into the metrics.

8. Celebrate success

Hard work deserves celebration. No effort is perfect, so celebrate successes along the way.

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