

Behavior Change

When it comes to assessing training's effectiveness, the best organizations move beyond simply measuring what is learned. After all, it's not called training if it doesn't change behavior. But how to best alter another's performance?

Our current thinking must change. In today's information age, most of a company's value exists not in factories, products and other physical assets, but instead in its employees' intelligence, skills and ideas. Yet, while the knowledge economy is fast upon us, many would argue that our business models for training remain locked in an industrial age. Employees, who work to create value by adopting best practices, testing new ideas and applying new theories, are not cogs in a machine easily tweaked for optimal output.

Consider how many training programs have at their base outmoded instructional design that regards employees as grist for the mill. Treated in much the same manner as other corporate assets in an industrial model, human capital is deemed a homogenous lump—infinately malleable for the tasks at hand. It's a view that MIT psychology professor and cognitive scientist Steven Pinker indirectly refutes in his latest work, *The Blank Slate* (Viking Press, 2002). Pinker strongly argues against the accepted dogma that human beings are born without minds containing innate traits.

Skinner was one such "blank-slater" who held strongly to an "optimistic" denial of human nature, writes Pinker. "Given Skinner's premise that undesirable behavior is not in the genes but a product of the environment, it follows that we should control that environment—for all we would be doing is replacing haphazard schedules of reinforcement by planned ones."

Perhaps in an industrial setting, where environs are easily controlled, processes are broken down to simple components, and outcomes are readily measured (widgets produced an hour), human capital is amenable. But work in the knowledge economy is creative in the true sense of the word; variables are always at play. Scientists, engineers, accountants, even members of the media, do not create value merely by optimizing work's "production line." Why then are training programs constantly cast as measures to correct a wrong, rather than to enhance a right? As one scholar put it, it's the difference between

"gap-filling" and "door-opening" interventions.

"Even Skinner's preferred method of operant conditioning required starving the organism to 80 percent of its free-feeding weight and confining it to a box where schedules of reinforcement were carefully controlled," writes Pinker. "The issue is not whether we can change human behavior, but at what cost."

It's one thing to try to move employees to a new place; quite another when they want to get there on their own. Such is the premise of workplace performance consultant Jon Katzenbach's new book out last month: *Why Pride Matters More Than Money* (Crown Publishing Group, 2003). Katzenbach believes that pride—and the knowledge of how to develop it as a motivational tool—is a critical management skill especially given today's slow-growth economy and disillusioned workforce.

Simply put, corporate reward strategies, training initiatives and employee motivation must all go hand in hand. For training to become a more effective tool in today's economy, it must do more than provide knowledge and enhance skills. If it is to significantly enhance business unit performance (and change behavior), training should be deployed to foster teamwork and instill pride as well.

Pay-for-performance schemes alone result in self-serving behavior and skin-deep organizational commitment. Katzenbach believes that people whose emotions are invested in a person, a group, a cause or a company often produce results that well exceed expectations—creating a force that allowed companies such as Apple, Pfizer and Hewlett-Packard "to reshape entire industries."

Training can tap into this resource to ultimately change behavior, but only by keeping individuals' emotional investments in mind. "People have inherent desires such as comfort, love, family, esteem, autonomy, aesthetics and self expression regardless of their history of reinforcement, and they suffer when the freedom to exercise their desires is thwarted," says Pinker. "But we cannot pretend that we can reshape behavior without infringing in some way on other people's freedom and happiness. Human nature is the reason we do not surrender our freedom to behavioral engineers."

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