

Training Delivery and Evaluation for a Government Regulatory Firm (C)

Asian Journal of Management Cases
15(1) 50–58

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Management Sciences
SAGE Publications

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DOI: 10.1177/0972820117744688

<http://journals.sagepub.com/home/ajc>



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Abstract

Western State Electricity Regulatory Commission (WSERC) had launched a series of trainings to enhance the managerial capabilities of its employees. This case presents the challenges of designing and conducting trainings for a rapidly expanding small organization. In order to conduct the trainings, training groups were formed and a training plan was made to sequence the trainings based on the objectives and expected outcomes. Training modules incorporated a mix of methods such as lecture, presentation, videos, games, cases, activities, instruments and hand-outs. There were many hindrances to the implementation of the training programme as per the plan. New entrants to the firm were also made a part of the training groups without TNA. There were inordinate delays and interruptions that at times had to be escalated to the senior levels. Over a period of time, the trainings were appreciated but differences and challenges emerged causing roadblocks in the journey of WSERC to become a learning organization. This case focuses on the challenges faced by an organization when the commitment and buy-in from the employees is not sustained. It brings to the fore the role of senior management to have continued focus on any intervention.

Keywords

Behavioural training, training design, training schedule, training methods, training evaluation

Discussion Questions

1. What were the challenges faced by WSERC and ISBAR in the conduct of the training programmes? How could things have been done differently?
2. Evaluate the training approach used by the faculty of ISBAR against the principles of adult learning.

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Note: This case is based on a real organization. As requested, the name of the organization and the characters have been disguised to protect the organization's identity.

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3. Evaluate the role of senior management in building a learning culture in the organization.
4. Comment on the readiness of WSERC for the mentoring initiative.

Western State Electricity Regulatory Commission (WSERC) had conducted a training needs analysis (TNA) in September 2011 through external consultants to identify competency gaps among its employees and consultants. Based on the TNA report, the training programmes were considered precursors to a mentoring programme to enable transfer of knowledge and skills from experienced personnel to the new hires. It was decided to launch the training programmes for all employees and associates (advisors, regulatory staff and junior regulatory staff), irrespective of the nature of their employment contract. The International School of Business Administration and Research (ISBAR) was appointed as the training partner to design, deliver and evaluate the attitudinal and managerial training programmes.

Training Design

On receiving the mandate for training, the first task was to club the trainee groups based on the competency gaps identified from the TNA to form a reasonable batch size to deliver the training programmes. Groups were formed to maintain uniformity of participants in terms of education, designation and years of experience. The trainers could thus address and customize the programmes as per the specific needs of individual trainee groups. For instance, the training programme on ‘Enhancing Individual Effectiveness’ was customized for junior regulatory staff (JRS) and regulatory staff (RS); a separate design was used for the administrative staff as the content was different for different levels of employees.

Trainers were identified based on their expertise and experience from the business school faculty. The profile of trainees, the expectation of WSERC from the trainees, objectives of the training programmes, expected outcomes, etc. were shared with the faculty. As per the training schedule, all faculty trainers prepared a detailed and standardized programme outline with the help of templates for programme outline, presentation and handouts. A training day would have four sessions of ninety minutes each, two in the forenoon and two in the afternoon. Tea and lunch breaks were placed between sessions to reduce trainer and trainee fatigue and encourage informal discussions among participants.

A final training schedule in consultation with WSERC was prepared (excerpts from the schedule are mentioned in Exhibit 1). This schedule used a progressive approach to skill building. Training programmes on self-exploration and individual skills were scheduled before training programmes on interpersonal and leadership skills. Detailed requirements regarding logistics, infrastructure arrangements such as clustered seating of trainees, training rooms, scheduling, training material, trainee handouts and hospitality arrangements, etc. were discussed and decided upon beforehand for the smooth delivery of the trainings.

Delay in Launching the Trainings

Anand Nair, the undersecretary, communicated the acceptance of the training schedule, though the dates were yet to be finalized. The lead trainers from ISBAR requested Anand to have a meeting to finalize the dates. On the day of the meeting, Deputy Director Administration and Finance, Raghu Chabre, accompanied Anand. In this meeting, the lead trainers from ISBAR were informed about a new cadre of people that had been recruited. Since WSERC had already been given the sanction to increase the number of regular employees, fifteen deputy directors (DDs) and three assistant directors (ADs) were recruited (Exhibit 2)

by the organization in the two months following the TNA. It was expected that the permanent staff comprising DDs and ADs would learn and gradually take over the role of the advisors. In fact, as per the new organization chart, the advisors were expected to report to the DDs (Exhibit 3). These DDs and ADs would also be part of the training programmes. Since this group had not participated in the TNA, the trainers were uncertain if the training identified would be relevant to the new recruits. However, a subsequent communication from Raghu made it clear that the DDs and ADs would be clubbed with the advisors' group and would attend all trainings that had been identified for the advisors. This also had an advantage of increasing the group size and providing a mix of permanent and contractual employees at the senior level. Being part of a common training programme could also be useful in integrating the two groups.

While there was a clear interest from the organization's side to begin the training schedule, it took almost six months for the actual training dates to be frozen. Multiple mails had to be sent from ISBAR to the DD, undersecretary, director administration and accounts (a new director who had joined after the TNA) and HR consultant of WSERC. Even the chairman had been surprised at the inordinate delay in the commencement of the training schedule. As he said, 'I do not understand the roadblocks in the training when the training calendar and its scope has already been approved.'

The chief reason cited for the delay was the number of training programmes identified through the TNA. The organization needed to balance the training schedule along with work commitment. Even within the training schedule, they needed to decide on the mix between behavioural, technical and commercial training. The ISBAR faculty suggested a ratio of 3:1:1 for attitudinal/behavioural, technical and commercial training for a balanced learning experience of the trainees. Finally, the Secretary, who was the final authority, made the following decision:

- Administrative staff would have four days of training every month to minimally disrupt the work of the organization.
- RS and JRS would have eight days of training every month (four working days and four Saturdays). The organization felt that since this group consisted of new employees whose employment was also contractual, they also needed to demonstrate their commitment towards their own development by investing some personal time in their training.
- Advisors, directors, DDs and ADs would have two days of training every month, as they were experienced in their jobs and roles and technically adept in their work. Their training was primarily aimed towards leadership and people development. Neha Jindal, DD administration, was identified by WSERC to coordinate all trainings for the organization.

Training Preparation

The lead trainers communicated the final training plan for WSERC to other faculty trainers of ISBAR. Each trainer identified appropriate content, games, cases, exercises, activities, video clips and other tools to be used during the training and also the material required for the same. They made participant handouts and powerpoint presentations based on their detailed session plan. It was decided that ISBAR would share training handouts with Neha one week ahead of the scheduled training programmes, who would then prepare a sufficient number of copies for each training programme. The last session each day would be followed by a feedback session. Neha was also responsible for the purchase of cases from case providers if trainers wished to use published management cases during some training programmes.

The Secretary had asked for the training content to be sent a week in advance so that WSERC could conduct an evaluation of the training content for its relevance to the organization. The lead trainers asked the Secretary if they had the internal expertise to evaluate training content that would be shared by the

faculty. The Secretary mentioned that in case they did not have internal expertise, they would organize external evaluation of the training content. He mentioned:

Trainers end up showing movies and conducting games and exercises in trainings but these don't necessarily meet our objectives. We want to make sure that the training imparted to our people is focused and of relevance to the participants.

He also proposed the formation of a subcommittee (including RS and JRS) to review the overall content, dates and duration of the training programme and its alignment with final training schedule/plan. In case of any discrepancy between handout and training plan, WSERC would initiate necessary corrective action to avoid error during actual delivery of training. The DD was asked to make all the necessary arrangements such as hospitality for trainees and trainers, infrastructure, logistics, etc.

Teething Troubles

The first behavioural training planned for the JRS and RS would be conducted by Dr Prachi Joshi—one of the lead trainers from ISBAR. On the day of the training, she reached WSERC half an hour before the scheduled time. Neha took her to the training room which had been earmarked for this purpose and was to be inaugurated that day. Prachi found that the training room did not have basic furniture such as chairs and tables. There were four chairs and a decorated table on a stage for the inauguration ceremony. Neha was busy coordinating for a laptop and portable LCD projector. The trainees were standing outside the room, looking confused. One of the JRSs quipped:

We have been chosen as the guinea pigs for this experiment of WSERC. We were informed only last evening that we would be attending a training programme today. We do not know the topic or relevance of this training that will be imparted to us today. We have come for the training because the Secretary has told us to do so.

Prachi took stock of the situation and asked the trainees to fetch their own office chairs. A few tables lying outside the training room were pulled inside the room for the training. Neha had called their interior decorator to discuss the room arrangements with Prachi in terms of furniture requirements, electric fixtures, boards, etc. Prachi asked Neha to organize this discussion at a different time if required. While all this was going on, other WSERC employees, including the directors, had also gathered around the room. Many of them wanted to know when their training would commence. Prachi asked Neha to plan and share the detailed training plan internally so that people could plan their work accordingly.

After bringing some order to the room and amongst the amused trainees, the inauguration of the training programme took place with speeches and bouquets. In his speech, the Secretary welcomed everyone and mentioned that ISBAR had been guiding WSERC throughout the TNA process and would now anchor the attitudinal and behavioural training programmes for all employees of WSERC. He asked the participants if they were scared or curious to know what was happening. He assured them that they were in good hands:

We have had extensive discussions with the expert faculty of ISBAR and a lot of planning has gone into the whole training process. I am confident that this training initiative will help you in your work. It will upgrade your skills and competencies and foster your performance. All training programmes will be followed by practice of learning through assignments, practice on the job, etc. All of you will have to maintain personal logs of your learning, experimentation, etc. You will discuss your experiences with your superiors on a monthly basis to monitor your own growth. If you find that there are some gaps or lacunas or other needs that have to be met, please convey it to Neha so that a solution can be arranged.

He continued:

This training initiative had been the dream of the chairperson, and he is keen to ensure that this intervention is a success. I take this opportunity to once again welcome and congratulate Dr Prachi Joshi and her consultant team, and would like to give my best wishes to WSERC employees.

Next, it was Prachi's turn to speak. She thanked WSERC for giving ISBAR the opportunity to conduct this training. Addressing the participants, she said:

I am sure you will take this training as a learning opportunity and do your best to grasp as much as possible within the given time frame. Learning is important for our growth and will help in both our professional and personal lives. My colleagues and I will be your facilitators in this journey and I urge you to make the best use of this opportunity to enhance your knowledge, skills, and abilities. I also want to emphasize that today's delay should not be taken as the norm. All future training sessions will commence on time.

By the time the arrangements had been made and the inauguration was over, the time for the first session had already elapsed. In order to make up for this lost time, Prachi sought agreement from the participants and reduced the duration of breaks and extended the day by half an hour. After the schedule disruptions of the first day, Neha thanked Prachi for helping her out. She confessed that she had not done this kind of work before and was unaware of what was required to ensure smooth delivery of a training programme. She assured Prachi that all the arrangements for subsequent training programmes would be taken care of well ahead of time. The Registrar supported Neha and mentioned, 'This is the first time that WSERC is having any training programme and therefore some hiccups are to be expected.'

After the day's programme, Prachi met the Secretary who discussed the programme content with her. He had read the handout completely and sought clarification on a few points in it. Prachi also received the feedback from Neha that the Secretary had read the handouts of the first three trainings from cover to cover. Prachi gave this feedback to other faculty trainers in ISBAR and asked them to ensure that their handouts were submitted in time for perusal by the Secretary. However, there were some trainers from ISBAR who were unable to prepare the handouts on time. They wanted to carry the handouts with them on the day of the training. The Secretary did not appreciate this and his objections were communicated to Prachi. He only let up on the monitoring once he gained confidence in the expertise of the faculty of ISBAR.

Subsequent Trainings

As the trainings progressed with each group, the trainees found that the programmes challenged them in many ways. An atmosphere conducive to learning was created and the tone was set for continuous learning. The content became progressively more complex and required reflection and practice. There were lots of exercises, activities, administration of instruments, etc. which led to introspection and analysis amongst the participants. While the participants appreciated the depth and breadth of content and delivery, they were more used to knowledge-based learning. Though they enjoyed the experiential learning approach used by the facilitators, they found it difficult to reflect on the exercises and activities.

The organization initially demonstrated a commitment to the whole process as it was driven by the Chairman and Secretary. Training evaluation was captured through feedback forms (Exhibit 4) on a daily basis by ISBAR. The results were compiled and shared with Neha and the Secretary. The Secretary checked participant attendance and explanations were sought for absences. The managers or bosses of the trainees had to justify unavailability of participants to the Secretary. On an informal basis, the Secretary interacted with trainees to understand what they had learnt and if they were able to use it in their work.

Over a period of time, differences and challenges began emerging. While people were appreciative of the effort made by the organization, they were not sure of the approach adopted. One of the DDs protested, ‘Why should so much money and resources be spent on training the contractual staff? We are the permanent employees and should obtain the maximum benefit from the training programme and training budget.’ Since they had joined later, they were not aware of the vision of the chairman, who in his initial briefing to the consultants had said:

This sector is rife with untrained or inadequately trained manpower. My objective is to have trained manpower for the sector to improve its overall efficiency. Even if some of the people leave my organization after being trained, it will still be to our benefit. They will join utilities but will know how a regulatory body functions. Hence their interaction and communication with us will be more knowledge-driven and fruitful. Their petitions will be more focused and presented in an orderly format.

One of the challenging training programmes was leadership training conducted for directors/advisor group. The DDs and ADs had also joined this group. While the training provided a learning opportunity to all participants, differences of opinions between the advisors and regular employees were clearly visible in the training. The DDs and ADs had an average of five to seven years of work experience as compared to more than thirty years’ experience of the advisors. As per the new organizational chart, the advisors were expected to report to the DDs and ADs, who had neither the technical nor the managerial skills of the advisors. In fact, many of the DDs and ADs had no one reporting to them. While the advisors sat through all the training sessions, two of the directors—tariff and electrical engineering—absented themselves from many sessions, citing important work and meetings. The faculty trainer asked the directors to not miss out on the sessions since it set a poor example for others; however, things did not change.

After the initial training programmes were conducted, it was felt that the foundation for a robust mentoring initiative had been laid. Due to continuous trainings, participants were willing to try out new approaches to learning. A need to share had been established; willingness to share and mentor was now visible. Prachi was asked to schedule the mentoring trainings as early as possible. Since many new employees had joined WSERC, Prachi and Neerja (the second trainer from ISBAR) sought another meeting with Arun Nalwade to validate the objective and design of the mentoring programme.

Training Challenges

In the entire process of imparting attitudinal/behavioural training, some challenges were continuously faced, such as, rescheduling of a few training programmes, reduction in participant attendance, some trainers receiving low feedback, etc. In all, twenty-nine days of trainings were planned across various groups of people over a five-month period. Exhibit 5 provides details of the programmes planned, conducted and those that were finally not conducted by ISBAR. However, the entire schedule was discontinued after nineteen days.

One of the reasons mentioned by the organization was the increased work pressure for all participants and time commitments of the faculty from ISBAR. The three months during which programmes were conducted were a lean season for them, but then the work started piling up and people were reluctant to miss working days. One JRS mentioned, ‘We are not getting permission from our superiors to attend the training. Even when we attend the training, we keep getting called out to do some work for them.’ The faculty trainers of ISBAR were not available on the days when WSERC employees were free. The Secretary commented, ‘We should have a dynamic training calendar. As the client, we should be able to reschedule as per our convenience and the vendors should adjust.’ Over a period of time, some participants’ interest also started waning. As one of the administrative staff mentioned:

We have been trained as per the state government's rules and procedures. We know our work. The problem is that people have been sent from different government departments to work here and there is no smoothness in functioning. How will these trainings address this problem?

The second reason mentioned was that approval for the next phase of training programmes was not taken. Even though the budget had been decided, periodic approvals had to be taken for the release of funds. After the third month, this approval was not taken. A third reason cited was that since the mentoring initiative had been launched, people wanted to focus on activities required as part of the mentoring intervention.

The second and third legs of the training schedule (functional and commercial) were inordinately delayed due to improper arrangements. Many programmes got cancelled due to unavailability of trainers or lack of infrastructure arrangements. This led to additional challenges as the participants were unable to understand the need for behavioural training. One of the DDs commented, 'The JRS and RS are only developing their personality in WSERC. There is no functional training and therefore, we do not see any improvement or change in the work.' After deliberations, it was decided to conduct a 'Train the Trainer' programme for commercial and functional trainers. ISBAR was asked to submit a proposal for this programme. However, no subsequent action on the proposal was taken.

Towards the End

The faculty consultants of ISBAR were in constant touch with the WSERC management over the next six months. Each time, they were assured that the organization was interested in conducting the rest of the planned programmes and only needed some time to settle down. After some time, the faculty from ISBAR stopped writing and all discussion completely stopped. Even in his last communication, the Chairman continued to express willingness to complete the remaining trainings and reaffirmed his commitment to create a learning organization.

Exhibit I. Initial Training Plan Sent to WSERC

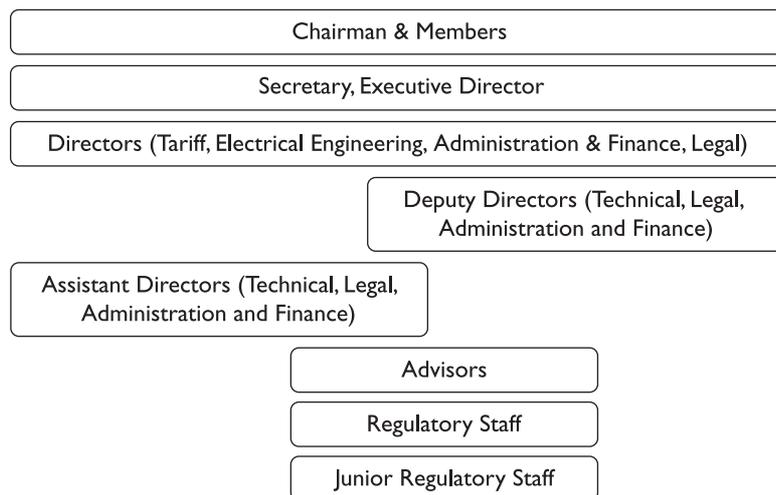
Groups	Training Programme	Indicative Contents	Duration in Days	No. of Participants	Dates
Directors/ Undersecretary/ Advisors	Leadership - managing and developing people	Effective leadership, nurturing leaders, motivating, providing feedback, delegation, goal setting, trust, and empowerment	2	13	May
RS & Section Officers	Developing people skills and becoming a leader	Understanding your own leadership style, leadership skills, giving feedback	3	13	September
RS & JRS	Planning & organizing	Planning, tracking, monitoring and reviewing, contingency planning, prioritization and time management	1	22	May
Section Officers & Admin Staff	Enhancing individual effectiveness, adaptability and task achievement	Etiquettes, SWOT, self-esteem, managing your emotions, goal setting, time management	3	10 +more	April

Source: Company documents.

Exhibit 2. Manpower Plan of WSERC

Name of Post	Posts Sanctioned	Posts Filled through	
		Nomination/Deputation	Vacant Posts
Chairperson	1	1	0
Member Commission	2	1	1
Secretary + Executive Director	2	1	1
Directors	6	3	3
Deputy Directors	16	15	1
Undersecretary + Assistant Directors + Section Officers	7	6	1
Support Staff (including IT support, personal assistants, clerks, peons etc.)	32	19 + 1	12

Source: Company documents.

Exhibit 3. Revised Organizational Chart of WSERC

Source: Company documents.

Exhibit 4. Training Evaluation Criteria

1. Session Design
2. Adequacy of Time
3. Session Objectives
4. Subject Knowledge
5. Communication Skills
6. Training Tools & Methodology
7. Query Handling
8. Handouts

Source: Company documents.

Exhibit 5. List of Trainings Planned and Actual Implementation

Group	Trainings Conducted		Trainings Not Conducted	
	Topic	No. of Days	Topic	No. of Days
RS/JRS	Enhancing individual effectiveness, adaptability, and task achievement	5	Teamwork	2
	Communication	2	Developing people skills and becoming a leader	3
	Creativity	1	Analytical ability	1
Section Officers & Staff	Enhancing individual effectiveness, adaptability, and task achievement	3	Planning & organizing	1
	Interpersonal communication	2		
	Planning, organizing & coordinating	1		
	Teamwork	1		
Directors/Dy Directors/Advisors	Leadership managing and developing people	2	Training on strategy and business processes	3
	Leading a team	2		

Source: Company documents.