



## TRAINING *For the Long Run*

### Assess needs, then address logistics.

Last month, I highlighted some of the potential costs and benefits of a post-commissioning training program. This month's column addresses the foundation for a systems approach to training: the objective assessment of training needs.

#### DETERMINE THE SCOPE

A training needs assessment determines the nature and scope of the training program and creates the context for instructional systems design. A training program based on vaguely defined needs or a dogmatic belief in the value of training is a gamble without a likely payoff.

A needs assessment answers the question of why training is needed and provides some certainty that the effort put into designing and implementing a training program will achieve the expected results. A needs assessment determines the need for training, identifies what training is needed, and examines the type and scope of resources needed to support a training program.

In situations such as commissioning, the need for training is obvious — the O&M staff is unfamiliar with new or reengineered building systems. However, the need for an ongoing training program bears closer examination. Before seizing upon training as the solution for systems performance deficiencies, it is important to be sure that those deficiencies result from a lack of required knowledge and skills on the part of the O&M staff. Training is not a “silver bullet.”

Many performance problems have root causes that training cannot remedy. Training is not a solution to problems caused by poor system design, a lack of resources, or understaffing. A needs assessment identifies performance measures, performance standards, and performance gaps, and determines whether the difference between “what is” and “what should be” can be minimized or eliminated through training.

A needs assessment provides specific answers about why training is needed. It also considers the “who, what, when, and where” of training. Information about the trainees and about the type, timing, and location of training informs the instructional systems design process and defines the nature and scope of the training program by identifying training capabilities and limitations.

#### WHAT TYPE OF TRAINING IS NEEDED?

The type of training needed depends upon the nature of the changes in equipment and technology, staffing and regulatory requirements, and the specific needs of the O&M staff. A comprehensive training program must provide the training necessary to meet all internal and external training requirements and at differing levels:

- Initial systems training is needed for new hires.
- Startup training is needed to support new systems, equipment, technology, and changes in O&M practices or procedures.
- Refresher training is needed periodically to prevent erosion of essential, but seldom used, knowledge and skills, and might be required by external regulatory or accreditation agencies.
- Proficiency training is needed to improve overall O&M staff expertise.
- Cross training is needed to provide staffing flexibility, enhance trainee job satisfaction, and provide advancement opportunities.
- Certification and recertification training is needed to fill critical positions and meet external regulatory requirements.

#### WHEN IS TRAINING NEEDED?

The timing of training impacts its effectiveness and its reception by the trainees. Trainees forget most of what they learn within a short period of time if they don't use it on the job. They are also less motivated to learn if they don't have an immediate need for new knowledge and skills. Therefore, training should be provided when it is needed, and not necessarily when it is most convenient or economical. Training is also more effective when conducted during normal working hours and completed without lengthy interruptions. Training time must be reasonable and must fit within the constraints imposed by work schedules and staffing requirements.

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#### WHERE SHOULD TRAINING TAKE PLACE?

The location of training depends upon who conducts it, as well as available training resources and selected delivery methods. It can be conducted onsite or at a local community college, technical school, or vendor facility. Likewise, training can be conducted by staff trainers, vendors, or college and technical school instructors. Resource identification provides budgetary information for determining the feasibility of using external trainers and facilities, or of acquiring high-end training aids and equipment, such as computer-based training modules and simulation software.

In next month's column, the discussion will shift to the process itself, beginning with the analysis of the jobs and tasks performed by the O&M staff. **ES**

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