Chapter XIII

A Three-Tier Technology Training Strategy in a Dynamic Business Environment

Albert H. Huang
University of the Pacific, USA

ABSTRACT

As end-user training becomes increasingly important in today’s technology-intensive business environment, progressive companies remain alert to find ways to provide their end users with timely training and resources. This paper describes an innovative training strategy adopted by one midsize organization to provide its end users with adequate, flexible, and responsive training. The paper then compares the three-tier strategy with other models described in technology training literature. Managers who supervise technology end users in organizations comparable to the one in the study may find the three-tier strategy workable and may want to use it in their own training programs to facilitate training and improve end-user skills. Researchers and scholars may find that the idea of three-tier training generates new opportunities for research.
INTRODUCTION

Existing studies on end-user technology training emphasize the training process: Research efforts have focused on needs assessment (Nelson et al., 1995), trainee learning styles (Bostrom et al., 1990), and delivery methods (Sein & Bostrom, 1989; Compeau & Higgins, 1995). Although such studies are important in understanding the operational issues of the training process, they do not address higher-level strategic concerns. Without a training strategy, it will prove difficult for trainers and organizations to devise an effective program to support end users and meet business objectives, because employers and trainers will only be able to design training programs based on their personal experiences (Sein et al., 1999).

In a dynamic business environment, business organizations need to address issues such as: How much training is enough? Should organizations blanket-train all end users on every application, or should they be selective? How often should an organization train its end users? Because employees’ productive work time in a highly competitive market is too precious to be lavished on unjustified training, organizations also need to determine the cost-benefit ratio of training time to productive work time. Thus, employers face related issues such as: Can organizations justify the hiring of employees without adequate technology skills and then provide them training and how will they train employees with little or no technical know-how? To answer these questions, employers desperately need a training strategy.

The purpose of this paper is to show how one company developed a training strategy that would answer these questions. The paper first describes the challenges modern businesses face in supplying technology users with adequate training. It then describes some unique difficulties that one midsize financial organization faced and the three-tier approach they adopted to solve their training problems. The following section discusses the advantages of the study strategy and compares it to other models described in literature. Finally, it proposes further opportunities for research using the three-tier training model.

Definition and Scope of Technology Training

Traditionally, technology training has been an important part of end-user support. Technology training is defined as the process of transferring required knowledge and operational skills to users of information technology. The fundamental purpose of technology training is to produce users with practical skills that enable them to use technology applications. A more ambitious goal of technology training is to create motivated users who can apply learned skills and knowledge to their jobs, and who can continue to learn as skill and technology requirements change (Sein et al., 1999).
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