

# Chapter V

## TRAKS Model: A Strategic Framework for IT Training in Hierarchical Organizations<sup>1</sup>

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Introduction of new information technology (IT) in organizations is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for organizational success. The effective adoption and use of IT by organizations is dependent to a large measure on the strategic planning for using the technology, including long-term planning for training the organizational members. Despite the strategic nature of technology training in organizations, most existing studies on technology training address only the operational issues, for example, training needs assessment, learning, delivery methods, and so forth. The strategic concerns of IT training for enhancing business productivity are largely not addressed by the current literature. To address this gap, we explore the strategic role of IT training in hierarchical organizations. We synthesize various ideas in the literature on change management, training needs analysis and IT adoption to evolve a 'strategic IT training framework' for hierarchical organizations, namely the TRAKS model. The proposed framework recognizes the differences in IT training requirements for different levels of employees. Further, the model suggests tracking training requirements based on attitudes, knowledge, and skills for different segments of employees and planning training accordingly. The study provides an actionable and comprehensive tool, which can be used for systematically planning IT training for enhancing productivity of organizations.*

## INTRODUCTION

New information technology (IT) introduction in an organization is a necessary but not sufficient condition for its effective adoption, usage, and implementation. For the new technology to make an impact on the organizational performance, it has to be used effectively in a planned manner (Devaraj & Kohli, 2003). The capability to effectively absorb and use the new technology depends to a large measure on the learnability and absorptive capacity of the organization (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990). For developing such an organizational capability, it is imperative to realize the importance of training and treat it as a strategic objective for achieving long term organizational success (Gallivan et al., 2005; Kang & Santhanam, 2003; Swartz, 2006). Despite the need for conceptualizing technology training as a strategic concern, most existing studies on technology training address the operational issues of training process, for example, training needs assessment (Nelson et al., 1995), learning styles (Bostrom et al., 1990), and delivery methods (Compeau & Higgins, 1995; Sein & Bostrom, 1989). The strategic issues related to IT training (e.g., what kind of training is required for employees? Should the training given to all employees be similar in content and delivery?) remain relatively unexplored in past research. In this chapter, we explore these strategic concerns of IT training for hierarchical organizations<sup>2</sup>. We reiterate the strategic objectives of IT training which are usually lost sight of in the mundane and routine training activities in organizations.

### Need for Systematic IT Training

In most organizations, IT training is a matter of chance rather than a planned initiative. In contrast to this practice, the definition of training refers to a planned effort by a company to facilitate the learning of specific knowledge, skills or

behaviors that employees need to be successful in their current job (Goldstein, 1992). The pressure for better training is expanding due to the increasingly popular view that people, rather than technology, represent the primary source of enduring competitive advantage (Ford, 1997). Although the need for training is being realized by many organizations, in many cases, the training for “new technology” is not in tandem with organizational requirements. Some employees do receive IT training but it is mostly a result of the personal initiative of that particular employee, in the field of his or her interest. This field may or may not be of direct consequence to his or her job. In some cases, it is the mere persuasion of the “training provider” which initiates the training nominations from these firms. Consequently, the content and context of IT training is often decided by the “training provider” and not by the firm. This results in incongruence between training outcomes and organizational requirements. Effective training has to be in consonance with existing organizational structures and practices. There is a need to consider the interface between the organizational system and training for the outcome to be fruitful and effective (Goldstein, 1992; London, 1989; Vonk, 2006).

In many cases, IT training is thought of as a “necessary evil” and not as a strategic tool for enhancing productivity. For example, Indian Railways, which is one of the biggest employers in the world with over 1.6 million employees, does not have a systematic IT training program for its employees, though it is one of the biggest users of IT resources. Employees are imparted with IT training on the basis of their emergent ‘skill needs,’ rather than as a part of a well thought strategic plan. Some firms are proactive in realizing the importance of IT training, but are still not able to plan their training modules systematically for want of “critical knowledge” about the “who and what” of IT training, that is, which employees should be trained in what aspects for better leveraging IT resources. An example where the firm’s

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