

Training the Trainers: An Experiential Exercise for HRM Training

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Abstract

A key Human Resources Management task for organizations is training and development. When an applicant with the needed knowledge and skills cannot be found by recruitment, the organization must train a current employee. In this experiential exercise, students are given a training topic and tasked with creating and delivering a training experience for the other students in the class. The exercise includes instructions for students, a list of training topics, and a sample grade sheet.

Keywords: Experiential exercise, training

Training and Development in Organizations

A key Human Resources Management task for organizations is training and development. The market size of the workplace training industry increased steadily between 2009 and 2019 in North America, reaching an estimated value of \$169 billion (Statista, 2022). Across all industries, organizations with 100-999 employees spent about \$1,678 per employee, organizations with 1,000-9,999 employees spent about \$581 per employee, and companies with 10,000 employees or more spent \$924 per employee on training (Spencer, 2021).

There are many situations where organizations need to train their employees. When recruiting applicants, an applicant with the needed knowledge and skills to do the job sometimes cannot be found, and then the organization must train a current employee to be qualified for the position. An organization may also prefer to hire from within and train an internal candidate for the job. Customers, technology, and jobs are constantly changing, so workers must be trained in the new knowledge or skills that they need to do their jobs effectively. An organization focused on the development of its employees' knowledge and skills is a "Learning Organization" an organization made up of employees skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge (Garvin, Edmondson, & Gino, 2008; Senge, 2014; Senge, 2006).

There are multiple models for the development and evaluation of training program effectiveness. The traditional Kirkpatrick Model (Kirkpatrick, 1959; La Duke, 2017; Smidt, Balandin, Sigafos, & Reed, 2009) focuses on evaluating four *outcomes* of a training program: reaction, learning, behavior, and results. Other models focus on the *processes* involved in

training program development and evaluation, including Instructional Systems Design – analysis, design, development, and implementation (Rosenberg, 1982; Myers, Watson, & Watson, 2008); ADDIE – analyze, design, develop, implement, and evaluate (Peterson, 2003); and the Successive Approximation Model – preparation phase, iterative design phase, and iterative development phase (Jung, Kim, Lee, & Shin, 2019).

In their review of training, Aguinis and Kraiger (2009) conclude that there is considerable support for the many benefits of training for individuals and teams, including performance, tacit skills, adaptive expertise, technical skills, self-management skills, cross-cultural adjustment, empowerment, communication, planning, and task coordination in teams. The authors also list the benefits of training for organizations and society. The benefits of training for organizations include improved organizational performance (e.g., profitability, effectiveness, productivity, operating revenue per employee) as well as other outcomes that relate directly (e.g., reduced costs and improved quality and quantity) or indirectly (e.g., employee retention, organization's reputation, social capital) to performance (Bishop, 1996). Ballot, Fakhfakh, and Taymaz (2006) showed how the benefits of investments in training are shared between the firm and the workers. The benefits of training for society are improved national economic performance and the inclusion of the country in powerful economic blocks (e.g., the European Union) when membership requires national programs of human capital development (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009).

Experiential exercises have a long history as useful ways to teach students. As far back as 1976, Certo (1976, p. 113) described the use of experiential exercises as “a growing trend in management education,” where individuals learn by doing and are “actively engaged in performance of a goal-oriented task and learn both from the performance itself and from evaluating that performance.” More recently, Kolb and Kolb (2005, p. 194) suggested that to improve learning in higher education, the primary focus should be on “engaging students in a process that best enhances their learning – a process that includes feedback of the effectiveness of their learning efforts.” In their meta-analysis of educational feedback research, Wisniewski, Zierer, & Hattie (2020) concluded that although there were multiple moderators, overall there was a medium effect of feedback on student learning.

Experiential learning has been used for a wide variety of purposes, such as teaching group problem-solving (Hedges, & Pedigo, 2002), creativity (Armstrong, 1999), diversity (Berger, 2001; Blanton, & Barbuto, 2005; Merta, Stringham, & Ponterotto, 1988), attribution theory (Paglis, 2008), leadership (Reilly, & Ehlinger, 2007; Sronce, & Arendt, 2009), managing intergroup behavior (Hunsaker, 2004), team building (Yanson & Mann, 2013), change management (McDonald, & Mansour-Cole, 2000), conflict management (Anakwe, & Purohit, 2006), and face-to-face versus computer-mediated communication (Mehra, 2010). The purpose of experiential learning is to go beyond just giving students information; students learn through experience, sometimes called the “Learn-Do” model. In the experiential exercise presented in this article, students learn about training by experiencing training, by being both a trainer and a trainee, i.e., doing training for the other students in the class and being trainees in other students' training exercises.

To be prepared to do this exercise, students should have learned more than just what training programs are. The first step in developing a training program is job analysis, i.e., identification of the knowledge and skills needed for the job. O*NET, the nation's primary source of occupational information, is a useful resource for students to find out what the knowledge and skills are for any job. Also, students should have previously learned the following: (1) principles of learning (just-in-time training, motivation, feedback, practice, etc.), (2) types of training programs (on-the-Job, apprenticeship, classroom, simulation, experiential, etc.), and (3) evaluation of training programs (objective and subjective; Kirkpatrick's Model (1959) of participant reaction, learning, behavior, and results). It will also help students if they have been through prior training experiences so that they can apply what they have already learned from experience.

The Exercise

Place students into teams of 4 to 6 students and give each team a training topic from the list below (e.g., *Sexual Harassment*). Working together as a team, students create a short, 10-minute training experience for the rest of the students in the class. For a class of 35 students with seven five-student teams, the training itself will take 70 minutes, plus time for questions and feedback. For a three-hour class session, this will be enough time, but for a 50 or 75-minute class schedule, the training sessions can be spread over two class sessions. Also, the instructor may allow some in-class time for students to get started creating their training experience and coach the teams as they work. Then, have the students work on crafting their training experience outside of class, with the students meeting in person or virtually. An "Instructions for Students" handout or posting for a course software web page is shown in Appendix A.

There are multiple ways that the instructor can give the teams their training topics. The instructor can (randomly) assign topics to teams. The instructor could write the training topics on the back side of cards and then have each team pick "a card, any card." Or, the instructor could hand out a card to each team with a "draft order," and each team picks which training topic they want in number order (First, Second, etc.). Generally, students prefer the third method, it gives them some control over which topic they get.

In the exercise, as students work in teams to create their training experience, they are engaging in peer learning because they learn from each other without the immediate intervention of a teacher (Boud, Cohen, & Sampson, 1999). They learn from (1) being trained by other students and (2) training other students -- their peers. Research has shown that peer tutoring and cooperative learning can yield significant gains in academic achievement (Topping, 2005). An effective way to learn something is to do it yourself, in this case, "doing training" and "being trained."

To grade the assignment, the instructor can use the grade sheet provided (see Appendix B). The grading rubric matches the instructions given to students, so the students can see that they have been graded on what they have been tasked to do. Typically, instructors give teams their grades and feedback after the class, but there is another option -- "live grading." Immediately after the team has finished conducting their training session, the instructor meets with the team outside the classroom (to ensure privacy and to give the next team time to set up

for their training session). This puts some time pressure on the instructor, so the grading rubric needs to be clear and specific. It is useful to print the grade sheets with the grading rubric on one side and the “Instructions for Students” on the other, then give this sheet to the team when giving the team their grade. There are two advantages to live grading. First, the feedback can be given immediately. And second, when the class ends, the grading of the exercise has been completed, except for recording the grades.

Variations on the Exercise

Alternate Delivery Methods

This exercise was designed to have students do a lecture-based format for the training because students are likely to be familiar with this mode of training from other classes, but it is not the only way that training can be delivered. Alternatively, students can be tasked with creating a training experience using a variety of delivery modalities, such as using a show-and-tell approach or a timed exercise. Students could also create and post a training video (and learn more about the advantages and disadvantages of online versus in-person training). In the video, students could be actors illustrating the concepts to be learned. There are many examples of training videos that students can find on the Internet for guidance, or the instructor could make a video and students can use it as a template for one of their own. Students may also create and perform a skit to illustrate the learning points for the training topic. For the training topic “Interviewing Applicants,” one student could role-play an interviewer making illegal pre-employment inquiries, who is interrupted by a speaker who describes what the interviewer has done wrong, followed by a student role-playing an interviewer asking legal interview questions.

Although some of the training topics are focused on new content (e.g., for the topic of Compensation, trainees are to learn about Total Rewards, and how the FLSA affects compensation), other topics are focused on learning new skills. If instructors want students to focus on learning new skills, they can restrict the training topics to those that are focused on skill-building. For these topics, students might create an experiential exercise—creating an experiential exercise for this experiential exercise. For the training topic “Recruitment,” the trainers may help trainees create a job posting on social media.

Instructor Demonstration

The instructor may model the training session that the students have been tasked with developing by demonstrating one of the training topics, either doing it live in class or making a recorded video that students can access. This is also a kind of training; the students will be able to see what is expected of them when they develop their own training session.

Alternative Topics

The instructor can vary the topics based on the course being taught. For example, in a “staffing” class, topics might include targeted recruiting, utilization analysis, adverse impact, interview methods, etc. In a compensation class, topics might include the Fair Labor Standards Act, option valuation, targeted incentives, job analysis, job evaluation, etc.

Additional Time to Prepare and Conduct the Training

The instructor may want students to create a more in-depth training experience than the 10-minute training described above and give teams more time in class (which the instructor can use to coach the teams) and outside of class to prepare, perhaps one or two weeks before the teams are to conduct the training. Or the instructor may want students to use a broader training topic than the ones listed here. For example, instead of “Age Discrimination,” the instructor can give students a training topic such as “Employment Discrimination,” which would include not only age discrimination, but also race, sex, and disability discrimination.

Evaluation of Training Outcomes

In addition to delivering training, the teams could be tasked with setting objectives for the training, and then evaluating whether the student-trainees met the objectives. Student-trainers may administer to the student-trainees a simple multiple-choice or true/false test or they can make a PowerPoint *Jeopardy!* to assess trainee learning, where students are given the answers and the trainees must come up with the questions. Templates to create *Jeopardy!* games can be easily found on the Internet in PowerPoint or Google Docs (e.g., Jeopardy Game 5-Topic Template - Google Docs).

To get an alternative view of the effectiveness of the training, the instructor may also use peer evaluation and collect feedback from the student-trainees (Falchikov, & Goldfinch, 2000; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Kollar & Fischer, 2010). Peer assessment encourages student autonomy and higher-order thinking skills (Bostock, 2000). Appendix C shows the grade sheet adapted for peer evaluations. For this exercise, the instructor may assign 30 points according to the Grade Sheet given below and assign another 10 points by aggregating the peer evaluations by the student-trainees, for a total of 40 points.

Another way to evaluate how effective the student training was is to have the student-trainers reflect on their own performance and collect self-evaluations from the team members on how well they thought they did in delivering the training experience. These results can be compared to how well the student-trainees thought that the training was delivered by the student-trainers (like student evaluations of faculty) to see whether there are disconnects between the teachers and the learners.

If part of the student’s grade is based on an evaluation of student-trainee learning, that would be an additional incentive for the student-trainers to develop and conduct an effective training session. This would be a desired learning outcome for students as they adopt the role of trainer. However, there may be a downside to this approach. Because all students will be both trainers and trainees, one possible outcome of the trainees’ evaluation is a fair and accurate evaluation of how well the training was delivered or there could be “logrolling” (originally, the trading of votes by legislators to secure favorable action on projects of interest to each one) where the trainees give high evaluations for all the training sessions, expecting to receive high evaluations, in turn, on their training, a kind of quid pro quo.

Grade Sheet

The grade sheet included here is a simple checklist. The instructor may modify the grade sheet to use ratings or a graphic rating scale (e.g., ++,+,+/-,-,--; 1-5; percent, A, B, C) or add space for comments.

Individual Exercise

The instructor can also make this an individual exercise rather than a team exercise. Either multiple students will have the same training topic (if the class size is large), or the instructor can develop additional training topics so that each student has a different topic. The list of training topics can be changed by the instructor to fit the instructor's learning goals, either by creating additional training topics or modifying the questions for the topics given below.

Extension of the Exercise Beyond HR Training

This experiential exercise was developed for use in a course in human resources management. However, the exercise in training can easily be adapted and used for training in other areas of business education. For example, in an MIS course, it could be adapted for training in, or understanding, the various conceptual methods used in systems analysis and design. In a finance course, it could be used for training related to various financial models or stock market trend analysis. The important point is that the exercise can be easily adapted to provide a framework for experiential learning that allows active engagement of students in the learning process.

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Appendix A

Instructions for Students (Student Handout or Posting)

Your team will choose one topic from the list below. First-come-first-serve on the topics, so that every team has a different topic. Create a six-slide PowerPoint presentation to use in training the employees (i.e., the students in the other teams).

- Slide 1: Title Slide: Topic, Team Name, Team Members
- Slides 2-5: Training [4 key points]
- Slide 6: Summary: Learning Points & Takeaways [Summary]

The PowerPoint presentation may include a short video (you can make one yourselves or obtain one from the Internet—be sure to cite the source!). Better presentations will include more than just what you have learned already in the class. Presentation time limit: 10 minutes.

Training Topics:

1. *Sexual Harassment.* What is sexual harassment? What should you do if you are a victim? What should you do if one of your coworkers is a victim? What should an organization do to prevent sexual harassment?

2. *Age Discrimination.* What is age discrimination? What should you do if you are a victim? What should you do if one of your coworkers is a victim? What should an organization do to prevent age discrimination?

3. *Career Planning.* What is career planning? What should you do to plan your own career? What should you do to help one of your employees do career planning? What should an organization do to help employees do career planning?

4. *Positive Discipline.* What is progressive discipline? How is positive discipline different from Progressive Discipline? What are the steps a supervisor goes through with an employee when doing Positive Discipline? What is the desired outcome of Positive Discipline?

5. *Interviewing Applicants.* What are the different types of interviews? How useful are interviews for selecting applicants? What types of questions should an interviewer ask applicants during a selection interview? What types of questions should an interviewer NOT ask applicants during a selection interview (i.e., illegal pre-employment inquiries)?

6. *Repetitive Motion Injuries.* What are repetitive motion injuries? What are the most common causes? What are the costs of repetitive motion injuries? What can an organization do to prevent repetitive motion injuries?

7. *Retirement Readiness.* How do you sign up for your 401(k) plan? How do you decide which funds to put money into? How do you decide how much of each paycheck to invest? What is the difference between a Traditional IRA and a Roth IRA?

8. *Preparing for an International Assignment in London.* The employee will not have a car so how will they get to work? How do you obtain transportation? How much will it cost? How long will it take?

9. *Workforce Planning.* What is workforce planning and how is it done? What are the benefits of workforce planning? What can be done if there is a labor shortage? What can be done if there is a labor surplus?

10. *Recruitment.* What Social Media can be used to recruit applicants? For what kinds of jobs would recruiting using social media work best? What are the advantages of using Social Media for recruitment? What are the disadvantages?

11. *Writing Effective Job Descriptions and Job Specifications.* What content should be in the job description? What should be in the Job Specification? What online resources are available for helping write job descriptions? How are the job description and job specification used for recruiting?

12. *Compliance Issues.* How are the I-9 Form and E-Verify used? How is FMLA administered? How is HIPAA administered? How is COBRA administered?

13. *Performance Appraisal.* What are Performance Dimensions? What is a Graphic Rating Scale? What are common rating errors when managers use rating scales? What should an organization do to reduce rating errors?

14. *Safety.* What is OSHA and what does it do? What forms for tracking injury data does OSHA require companies to complete? What makes an incident a “recordable incident”? What are the most common kinds of OSHA safety violations?

15. *Compensation.* What is Total Rewards? How does the Fair Labor Standard Act affect compensation? What are the different kinds of Incentive Plans? What is the purpose of doing job evaluation?

16. *Employee Engagement.* What is Employee Engagement? How can an organization measure and monitor employee engagement? What factors drive employee engagement? What can an organization do to increase employee engagement?

Appendix B

Grade Sheet for the Instructor: HRM Training

Team:	HRM Training
Slide 1: Title Slide: Topic, Team Name, Team Members [1 point]	Comments: Score:
Slides 2-5: Training [20 points] Key Point #1: Key Point #2: Key Point #3: Key Point #4:	Comments: Score:
Slide 6: Summary: Learning Points & Takeaways [5 points]	Comments: Score:
Time Limit: 10 minutes [4 points] Start Time: End Time:	Comments: Score:
Total Score [30 team points]	Total Score:

Appendix C

Evaluation Sheet for the Trainees (Peer Evaluation): HRM Training

Team:	HRM Training
Slide 1: Title Slide: Topic, Team Name, Team Members [1 point]	Comments: Score:
Slides 2-5: Training [20 points] Key Point #1: Key Point #2: Key Point #3: Key Point #4:	Comments: Score:
Slide 6: Summary: Learning Points & Takeaways [5 points]	Comments: Score:
Time Limit: 10 minutes [4 points] Start Time: End Time:	Comments: Score:
Total Score [30 team points]	Total Score: