# Assessing Training Processes – Meeting the Needs of HR and Safety

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Often times we think of the departments of the company as being hierarchically isolated on the organizational chart.  This unfortunately creates isolation and unnecessary duplication in many efforts; including training.  The relationship between the safety group and the human resources (HR) group is extremely important in the knowledge, skills, and abilities development of our employees.  Both the safety group and HR are usually very involved in the employee education and training and in the new hire orientation process in which all new employees participate. We need to break down the barriers and avoid isolation.  Training assessment and development needs to be a shared effort by HR and safety.  Managing employee development is a key to a safe workplace.  The workplace serious injury rate and fatality rate are high in Canada and worker competency is an issue the HR department and safety department need to tackle this issue together.

Education, training and career development are all traditionally part of HR's responsibility.  It is common that HR maintains a matrix of training and career development for all employees.  It is also true that all new employees spend some time with HR when they first join the company, even if it just to have the new employee sign up for payroll.  The safety group also drives a program of training; confined space, respiratory protection, joint workplace health and safety committee work and of course WHMIS (to name but a few of the courses offered by the safety group).  Imagine the multiplier effect if these two groups got together and assessed training needs and cooperatively developed an employee education, training, and competency development and assessment process.  A cooperative effort would likely result in reduced risk, greater corporate efficiency and improved safety performance.

It is hard to imagine that a company can run a meaningful training program without having completed a needs analysis.  If your company has never completed a training need assessment there are many factors that will drive the need. Change is the biggest driver and change is ever constant.

The traditional HR driver for training development and implementation is new hire orientation and the need for ongoing career development. A seasonal hiring spree or significant changes in workforce numbers should be a driver to examine what you have been doing with respect to new hire training and creates an opportunity to make change for the better.  A noted change in employee demographics may provide the need for a new training program.  As the demographic mix of the workforce changes there is a need to look carefully at the modes and methods of training offered.  We need to recognize that the expectations of the Veterans, Baby Boomers, Gen-X and Millenials are different.
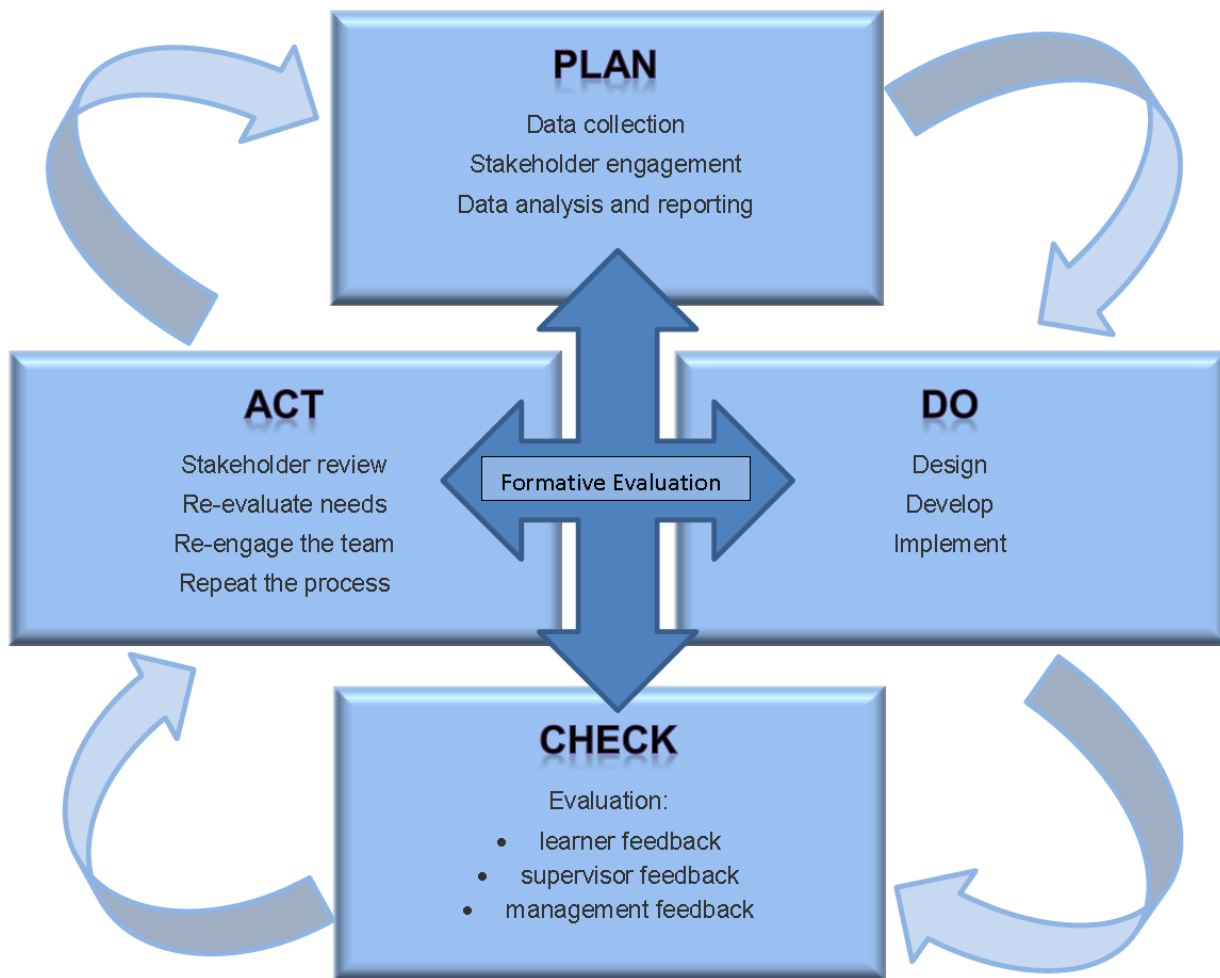
The safety drivers for training includes keeping up with changes in occupational health and safety regulations.  A serious incident or a rash of no-loss incidents may indicate a need to review work process or procedure and this drives the need for training.  A pattern of similar deficiencies noted during workplace inspections may also be indicative of a training deficiency. Production problems or quality issues would be similarly linked to a training improvement opportunity.  Further these production and quality issues are leading indicators of a faulty work process that may put workers at risk of injury.

Finally technological change continues to accelerate and drive change in every workplace. Technology is changing how we work and the machines we use at work. With each major upgrade in equipment or the technology that runs the equipment there is an opportunity to re-set the training standards. This applies to both HR training and safety training.

The starting point of this corporate process improvement is an integrated training needs assessment process. A training needs assessment process serves as a diagnostic tool for determining what training needs to take place. So many companies offer a program of training without ever having completed a needs assessment. The starting point of a training needs assessment process is a survey or gap-analysis to determine what is being done by the HR and safety group and any other groups in the company doing training and determine what gaps exist. This survey gathers data to determine what training needs to be developed to help individuals and the organization accomplish their goals and objectives. This is an assessment that looks at employee and organizational knowledge, skills, and abilities, to identify any gaps or areas of need. The objective outcome of the analysis of the data is the identification of the gaps. Once the training needs are identified, then you need to determine and develop objectives to be accomplished by the required program of training. These objectives will form the criteria for measuring the success and utility of the training.

The first step is to inventory all the training that is currently being taken by employees. Look across your organizational chart and you will find that training is being organized and carried out at many levels within the company. Internal and external training resources are being tapped. In-class, hands-on and online training is being used. An inventory of training being taken is the first step in the training needs assessment. A completed company-wide inventory will yield surprising results.

The basic steps in a training needs assessment process follows the common PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) or Shewart cycle.

**PLAN**
Data collection
Stakeholder engagement
Data analysis and reporting

**ACT**
Stakeholder review
Re-evaluate needs
Re-engage the team
Repeat the process

Formative Evaluation

**DO**
Design
Develop
Implement

**CHECK**
Evaluation:
- learner feedback
- supervisor feedback
- management feedback

Plan – undertake the needs assessment, collect the data, engage the stakeholder group and begin the analysis.  A report of findings will be the result of this activity.

Do – Design the new program and its objectives and measures of success, develop the content, and implement the program (consider using a prototype test to create a fast feedback loop before fully rolling out the program).

Check – Evaluate the outcomes and compare them to the objectives.  Survey the learner, the supervisors and the management team to obtain their feedback.

Act – review the feedback and any other data collected, start the process again by re-engaging the stakeholders and re-evaluating their needs.

Often the most difficult part of the whole process is assessing the training needs.  The most common tools used to survey the company to assess training needs include conducting an employee needs assessment questionnaire.  This may be used in conjunction with employee interviews or an employee opinion survey or perception survey.  Often a compilation of information gathered from employee

performance appraisals, employee exit interviews, and employee complaints or grievances can provide some valuable insight.  Incident reports, inspection reports, quality reports and audit findings will also provide valuable data.  The managers and supervisors can offer insight and can also be tasked with the job to engage in specific job observation as a means of collecting valuable "real-time" data.  Finally, and often most valuable, is the use of a focus group of a collection of managers and supervisors brought together to brain-storm a new training, education and competency development process.  It may allow for some effective *Tabula Rosa* (blank slate) thinking needed to get a new architecture in place on which a truly effective all-encompassing training program can be built.

These survey tools provide the data needed to complete an analysis.  This analysis of the survey data can be performed jointly by the management team and most importantly the supervisors who are able to observe their staff and make recommendations for training based on performance issues or gaps between performance and objectives. This analysis should also be performed on an organization-wide level by HR and the safety group who can survey the organization to further identify needs.

It is important that new processes be put in place that foster cooperation and collective thinking when it comes to employee training. We need to break down the barriers and avoid isolation of the departments that drive corporate training.  The training assessment and development processes need to be a shared effort by HR and safety The HR and safety group need to work together.  Their cooperation A cooperative effort will likely result in reduced risk, greater corporate efficiency and improved safety performance.  If we are to make progress on reducing the workplace serious injury rate and fatality rate in Canada, worker competency needs to be a prominent issue that the HR department and safety department tackle together.

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