

TRENDLINES

The Employers' Association's monthly whitepaper on essential Business/Human Resources practices

The Employers' Association (TEA) delivers reports for businesses that contain relevant and up-to-date information based on our work with hundreds of employers each month. TEA is known to produce a number of essential benchmark survey reports every year and we also compile data and observations that provide organizations practical perspectives on important business trends.

The Insight of Onsite Training

What you should know

Variety is the “spice of life” and when it comes to training and development solutions, there are ample choices from which to choose. The effectiveness and impact of the “right solution” delivered in the right format is directly influenced by one’s understanding of the problem it is designed to solve.

Like all processes, products, and services, training strategies change over time to deliver maximum value, provide the greatest impact, and to maintain ongoing relevance within a dynamic and changing world. Distance learning, e-learning, and other web-enabled structures have steadily evolved the past 15 years and since the COVID-19 pandemic, have moved into the “mainstream” now more than ever. In-person instruction virtually stopped in March 2020 and remained absent for months while Zoom, Microsoft Teams, WebEx and other on-line platforms became dominant in the live training space. This reality will continue to provide many unique opportunities for organizations to execute their training strategies while minimizing travel time and expenses and increasing their effectiveness. This Trendlines focuses on a particular and specialized approach to training we refer to as “onsite” training in which employees from one company participate together in a live training program designed specifically to address the needs of a group of employees (either in-person or virtually using a web-based platform). Onsite training programs are differentiated from live public training sessions attended by one or more employees from a *variety* of companies and is held in-person or virtually.

Making the strategic training decision to engage an entire team or department can create many benefits that sending one (or several) employees to a public training program cannot provide. Onsite learning can increase the application of key concepts and skills by establishing stronger expectations for demonstrating the skills learned and by helping to create a culture that is increasingly supportive of the training. With more commitment and follow-through on a larger scale, onsite learning can positively enable both individual and team performance – especially if the skills are shown to have a direct impact on desired organizational behavior.

Onsite learning builds a case for increased organizational relevance in two ways. First, the program topics can easily be correlated to desired business results (those to be improved by the training solution) AND the correlation can be communicated and focused upon throughout the implementation, from program announcement, through the facilitation of the program, and after the program in support of the follow-through strategy.

What we know

Since COVID-19 has moderated, we have observed an increase in all training formats, including both in-person and virtual. The largest increase has been with in-person, onsite training. Our members tell us that the live, in-person contact of an onsite program creates energy, enhances interpersonal relationships, and provides fundamental instruction that changes mindsets and improves behavior.

Several organizational factors contribute to their overall success of on-site training including a focus on how the program is positioned, how well the program is designed, and the alignment of content with organizational goals. The most important factor is the intentionality of the support that is available for learners to encourage application of newly acquired knowledge and skill. At TEA, we refer to these factor types temporally as Before, During, and After. Each of these contain intentional elements that must be available to promote the acquisition and utilization of knowledge and skills throughout the entire learning and development cycle.

An employee’s supervisor must play an active role in the development of staff. This role often includes helping the employee identify performance gaps than can be reduced or eliminated with training. Supervision also may simply reinforce the need to be aware of the training commitments made by the employee and reviewing or discussing them Before, During, and After the training has occurred. This awareness can provide many opportunities to coach, guide, and give helpful feedback to employees as they aspire to apply what they have learned.

Employee engagement with, and commitment to training concepts is much stronger when the reason for the training is clear to everyone, the learning objectives are perceived as relevant to the business, and when follow-up training support is provided consistently. We recognize that most adult learners place a high value on understanding the purpose and need for training. The “what’s in it for me” criterion is a clear driver of their commitment to a training event. With clarity, adult learners choose to participate and commit the vulnerability it takes for them to learn new concepts. Without it, resistance to learning can set in, even before the training program occurs. TEA Engagement Survey Reports provide detailed information about an organization’s strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement. Recently, we have noticed an increase in the number of onsite training commitments that have been based, in part, on the conclusions from our Engagement Surveys. Therefore, the business case for specific onsite training is stronger when based on reliable and accurate data.

What it means

One of the more compelling benefits of onsite training is the interpersonal connection and networking opportunities these programs provide. Learning new information and skills alongside peers within your workplace can provide rich opportunities to learn and practice in a business relevant context. Live onsite formats (both in-person and virtual) help learners build new, and better relationships throughout the learning experience by providing chances for trainees to become better acquainted and to practice skills with others they work alongside. This approach can also improve team functioning that cannot be achieved when one or two employees participate in an offsite, public workshop (where skills are learned but not as readily or easily applied).

Onsite training can deliver custom or personalized content to drive specific business-critical outcomes. This flexibility is an advantage to organizations that want more of their employees to demonstrate specific, culture-valued skills on a more consistent basis.

Onsite training can be less expensive and more convenient than responding to individual training needs by enrolling employees in public workshops. Most travel and expense costs have increased recently along with

other goods and services during these inflationary times. When travel time is reduced, employees can more easily maintain normal schedules and participate in onsite training programs with more energy, attention, and with less travel fatigue. This can encourage trainee engagement and overall learning effectiveness.

What you can do

Training decisions and investments can produce a return on investment by generating a positive impact on individuals and on a team’s performance and by facilitating improvements in overall operations or results. Savvy organizations readily acknowledge that employee training programs are not a “luxury” or a “nice to have” but are a necessity for attracting the best people from within a challenging labor market. Organizations are advised to invest in all types of training for their employees and pay particular attention to the systemic benefits of onsite training.

In-person and virtual onsite training can be planned and implemented strategically (and intentionally) when an organization attends to several key factors. These include:

- Clearly defining the need, audience, and business results the training program is expected to improve by obtaining accurate data using valid and reliable instruments and processes like organization or dept-wide surveys, focus groups, etc. The insights gained from organization-wide surveys are instrumental in revealing significant onsite training opportunities that, when appropriately addressed, can improve organizational performance and culture.
- Communicating the training need and training solution recommendations with suppliers, employees, and training program participants before, during, and after the training event.
- Organizing in-person and virtual onsite training sessions for employees who work together within the same function, and/or cross-functionally to increase the chances for transfer of training to everyday work situations, and to improve collaboration and productivity.
- Setting expectations for post training application of training content by making clear statements about use of the content at work, by following up training with content and skill-based “refreshers,” and by establishing performance-based objectives to foster on-the-job application. Since all training programs are intended to improve current or future capabilities, it is essential for training decision makers to set clear outcomes for the training investment so that it positively influences organizational strategy and related goals.