

Séntrel skills management

Chris Wilton discusses how skills audits add a new objectivity to skills management - making it central to the delivery of business objectives

Ask those of us in the training profession the best way to discover where people's skills are short, and you'll get the answer "run a Training Needs Analysis" (TNA). That seems a logical enough response, but is it? On closer examination, it relies on a number of assumptions.

In particular, using a TNA assumes that the aim of the exercise is to get people trained as efficiently as possible. This approaches the issue of understanding people's skills and the needs of their jobs from the viewpoint of the training department. A TNA is essentially an administrative tool. It finds the right people for the right course, and if done well will also group the delegates and help schedule them, but ultimately the point of the exercise is to get people efficiently on to the right course.

The organisation, however, might see this differently. If we really want to increase a person's skills, then why aren't we measuring them? Why not ask ourselves a different question - what skills do people need to do their jobs, and do they have them? In other words, why not run a Skills Audit (SA) instead of a TNA?

Of course, this could be just a semantic nicety, a case of acronym inflation. Surely a TNA and an SA are the same thing?

Yes and no. Yes, they often produce the same result - a need for training. There are, however, several key differences. The key difference is that whereas a TNA aims to get people trained efficiently, an SA aims to understand people's skills in relation to their jobs. This difference is more than semantic. It moves the issue of skills out of the training and HR departments and makes them central to the business as a whole.

Most organisations spend at least 60% of their

overhead on payroll, and yet they have no real idea what the people they're paying can do. The executive board would not tolerate this state of affairs with their organisation's machinery - they would know exactly its capacity. They wouldn't tolerate it with their buildings - they would know exactly what can be done in each property. The only reason they tolerate it with their people is that they have never been presented with an alternative, and the benefits that it can bring.

A Skills Audit is that alternative. If repeated regularly, it provides an ongoing view of company readiness. It is, in fact, the way a company knows whether it really can do what it claims. In other words, it's a business tool, helping managers make decisions day-to-day, rather than a tool kept in the training department to make sure that the department is processing enough people efficiently.

Most managers don't realise it, but they are woefully under informed about the skills of the people in their organisation. They soon appreciate, however, what they can accomplish with an ongoing Skills Audit. You need someone to fill a space on a project team? Rather than taking days - usually through a succession of phone calls and e-mails - to find that person who speaks French, has presentational skills, and knows your company's product set, you can find the person in seconds in the skills database (if they exist!).

Similarly, if someone's due on maternity leave, you can search for the person best able to fill her slot, and schedule training ahead of time to ensure that they're able to hit the ground running when needed. Key personnel, who possess unique skill sets, can be identified as risks, and a succession plan introduced before they suddenly become unavailable. In large organisations, job titles can be consolidated



Séntrel's key benefits

- Leverages investment within CRM, quality monitoring, skills routing and workforce management
- Aligns and optimises resources to meet business objectives and operational needs
- Increases staff productivity and utilisation
- Improves staff retention
- Optimises training effectiveness
- Improves risk and compliance management

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around a commonly agreed set of skills, and career structures introduced. Recruiters can - at last - speak a common language with the various departments they serve, and both be sure that candidates are sought with the correct skills for the job.

What does it require to run a Skills Audit? Only putting all the pieces together. The technology to store and access the data exists, and is in use. The necessary skills frameworks (including e-skills UK's SFIA and Call2Contact frameworks) are established in the marketplace. It does take some savvy to implement an SA, but nothing that a training or HR department can't learn. It doesn't even take much time - probably no more than 30 minutes for each employee to set themselves up, and 15 more per month to update their skills profile.

The employees themselves are not a stumbling block, either. At last their skills development programme is no longer a piece of paper filed and forgotten in the 12 months before the next annual review. Instead, it's visible to their manager, and to his or her manager, and has concrete dates and targets on it which both manager and employee are accountable for. And the managers themselves, once convinced of the benefits of having the data on tap, will ensure that their staff keep it up-to-date.

And then the training and HR departments, rather than having to run a piecemeal TNA each time a new project comes along, will find that the collection of skills data has done it for them. Once you know the skills objectives a person has, and where they are now, the skills gap analysis can immediately trigger a training need. Roll up all those personal development plans and you get an organisation-wide TNA - all prepared in advance by the managers. Now that has to be worth something.

*Written By Chris Wilton
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For more information on how Séntrel - skills management could benefit your contact centre and organisation, or to arrange a demonstration, phone our sales team,

call +61 (3) 9239 5600

Séntrel typically provides ROI by:

- reducing overhead costs by better staff utilisation
- improving agent productivity
- more effective staff recruitment
- improving agent retention
- using training resources more efficiently
- reducing resources required for skills, training and recruitment administration

QPC - customer service transformation - consulting, workforce optimisation, training and development

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