So What Do They Think? Preliminary Results of a Qualitative Study of the Perceptions of Training

Saul Carliner, PhD, CTDP
Associate Professor
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec
saul.carliner@concordia.ca
http://saulcarliner.blogspot.com

Colleen Bernard
PhD Student, Concordia University
Instructional Designer
Bombardier Aircraft Training
Montreal, Quebec
Colleen.Bernard@aero.bombardier.com
Agenda

- Background
- Literature review
- Methodology
- Preliminary results
- Possible conclusions
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What do people really think about trainers?

- Concerns about status have driven trainers to:
  - Promote services under a variety of other names
  - Launch certification programs
  - Re-envision the value proposition

- Most of these actions intended to improve our status

- But no studies have empirically assessed perceptions, or tracked changes to it
What the literature says about perceptions of training events

- Utility drives perceptions (Giangreco, Sebastiano & Peccei 2009, Velada & Caetano 2007)

- Good trainer performance does not compensate for poor courseware (Giangreco, Sebastiano & Peccei, 2009).

- Workers prefer concrete to theoretical material (Fragoulis, Valkanos, & Fkiriym, 2008).

- Workers have poor perceptions of training that seems to be a corporate sell-job (Dymock & McCarthy, 2006, Amoaka-Gyampah, 2004) though stressing the personal benefits raises perceptions (Dymock & McCarthy 2006).

What the Literature Says about Perceptions of the Training Function

- In some organizations, training takes an increasingly strategic role (Sambrook, 2001)
- But conflicting perceptions among workers and management:
  - Employees’ perceptions of training depended on their roles (Dymock & McCarthy 2006, Amaoka-Gyampah 2004), education levels and occupations (Westbrook & Veale, 2001)
  - More experienced workers tended to see training as less strategic to their needs than less experienced workers (Coetzer, 2007)
  - Concerns exist about training employees who might leave the organization (Huque & Vyas 2008, Klein 2001)
- Disconnects exist between perceived training needs and training and services provided (Skinner, Saunders & Beresford 2004, Huque & Vyas 2008)
- Despite efforts to link training to financial benefits, the empirical evidence does not demonstrate such a link; it only links to HR measures (Tharenou, Saks & Moore, 2007)
Methodology

- **Research questions**: what are the perceptions of training and what drives those perceptions among users of these services?

- **Participants**: 3 levels (when available) of staff in IT organizations in small, medium and large organizations, ideally 1 government agency, 1 nonprofit organization, and 1 corporation

- **Method**: Structured interviews

- **Analysis**:
  - Analyze responses by question for breadth of comments and their frequency
  - From this analysis, generate hypotheses about perceptions of training
Preliminary Findings

- The dominant “brand name” for the work is Training
  - 2/3 of those responding
  - 1 felt training refers to classroom instruction
  - 1 used the term Training Provider
  - 1 mentioned learning

- Training is essential for current and future positions (dominant pattern)
  - 1 who felt otherwise is preparing for retirement
Participants perceive high support for Training

- Workers on the whole rated themselves and their employers more supportive than their managers.
- Many who felt managers were not supportive had had requests denied.
- Weak pattern of participants who feel their employer isn't supportive; feel that funding and time for training is restricted and that managers are primarily focused on meeting an arbitrary goal (16 hours per year in one of the sites).
The perceived value proposition of Training is improving or maintaining professional skills

- Weak patterns identified these benefits:
  - Building knowledge
  - Promoting development (researchers’ term): networking, advancement

- Performance only mentioned by 2 participants
We have not yet completed the data collection, nor analyzed all responses

- Thoughts about modes of training (at first glance, relevance is important):
  - Self-study tutorials
  - Classroom
  - Webinars
  - Conferences

- Thoughts about trainers (at first glance, expertise in subject matter taught and ability to apply it within learners’ contexts seem key)
We also need to investigate an important emerging pattern

- When participants receive an opportunity to go to Training, many do not receive a corresponding adjustment to their workload
- This is consistent with findings in the literature review
Possible Conclusions

- The name Training seems to have *brand equity*
- Customers of Training perceive the value of training as developing individual skills rather than improving performance at other levels of the organization
- These workers believe that Training plays a key role in current and future jobs (will analyze by age)
Possible Implications

More broadly, suggests that customers have a view of Training that is increasingly at odds with the views that workplace learning practitioners and researches have of ourselves.
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Let’s discuss this further.