

FlexBulletin #66 – There’s training – then there’s TRAINING

April 15, 2012

Perhaps we’re seeing the hopeful shoots of spring. Maybe training offers a simple way to dust off flexibility that’s been a little dormant during the recession. Or it could be that just a modest tightening in the labor market has led people to resume more robust flexibility initiatives, starting with training. Whatever the source(s) of the recent interest we’ve seen, it’s worth looking at how the most effective forms of training can serve your purpose. And so we do below.



*In the meantime, many of our readers have told us they appreciate the **Bulletin** and have even created their own archive so they can refer to issues later. Others have told us they would appreciate some shorter, more graphical pieces that highlight some of our tools related to the **Bulletin** topics. Later this week you will get such a follow up email. The subject matter will be training tools, and the return address will be “rupertandcoDemo” rather than “rupertandcoFlexBulletin.” If you aren’t interested in seeing these, please delete. (If you unsubscribe, you will be removing yourself from the Bulletin list.)*

In the early days of flexibility – from the 1990s on – flexibility training meant live sessions, often 4-8 hours for managers and 2-4 hours for employees. A major value of this form of training was the interactivity it allowed. Serious concerns could be raised and put to rest and participants could be walked through, and practice the core procedures.

Those days are largely gone. Various forms of online training have replaced live sessions and the quality of these varies. While it is one thing to shrink the training domain from live to online sessions, we are struck by the frequent failure to take advantage of the many training opportunities in an initiative and create *integrated instructional systems*. We encourage designers of effective projects to consider the following:

- ◆ **GUIDELINES CAN BE A PROGRAM INTRO or a powerful training segment too**
- ◆ **AN ONLINE ORIENTATION PROCESS can offer strong procedural training**
- ◆ **OPTION TRAININGS GUIDE IMPLEMENTATION and can strengthen vital skills**
- ◆ **MONITORING SYSTEMS CAN ESTABLISH the effectiveness of training**
- ◆ **VIRTUAL COACHING OFFERS TARGETED, just-in-time training**

- ◆ **GUIDELINES CAN BE A PROGRAM INTRO or a powerful training segment too**

We have seen many dozen FWA guidelines over the years. Most of them cover what we would call the program elements: eligibility, principles, menu of options, proposal process, benefits implications, etc. Guidance on these matters is an important educational component of guidelines. But they omit significant training possibilities. Items to consider are:

- Case study process for proposing arrangements (procedural training)
- Self-assessment tool for managers on flexible management (development guide)
- Self-assessment tool for employees on self-managing (development guide)
- Self-assessment tool for each option (skill screening exercise)
- Tutorial on Mutual Respect skillset (core collaboration and management skills)

◆ ***AN ONLINE ORIENTATION PROCESS can offer strong procedural training***

Many initiatives skip this training tool and trust their guidelines to do the overview job. Because the proposal and decision-making process is central, behavioral and can be challenging, there is a valuable role to be played by online training. Among the elements it can include are:

- An interactive tool to define the business value of an arrangement
- Simulations of the decision-making process to prepare both managers and employees
- A video tool that demonstrates the different steps in a healthy process

◆ ***OPTION TRAININGS GUIDE IMPLEMENTATION and can strengthen vital skills***

Companies use different suppliers and offer different sets of options to help train their people to be successful in FWAs. Of those with online modules, most have some combination of telecommuting and remote work. (We believe it is important to fully support flexibility, and while offering tools for the offsite options, we consider it essential to support compressed schedules, job sharing and part-time as well.) Among common elements in more effective trainings are:

- Widespread use of multiple-choice, true-false and matching formats
- Different forms of case studies
- Simulations to test decision-making
- Sample “help desk” or troubleshooting challenges

◆ ***MONITORING SYSTEMS CAN ESTABLISH the effectiveness of training***

Most so-called tracking systems seem to end up with an ambivalent attitude toward evaluation. Whether or not one believes that using them to assess overall outcomes poses a burden for users, there should be little doubt that properly designed monitoring systems can measure the impact of and the need for training. Some training goals of this process can be:

- Establish baseline skill levels as part of the proposal/approval process
- Conduct regular assessments (30-60-90-180) and include an updated, brief skill review
- Drawing on the system data, assess competence in the employee's chosen option
- Link these findings to the Virtual Coaching system

◆ ***VIRTUAL COACHING OFFERS TARGETED, just-in-time training***

This relatively new function is dedicated to proactive training. It assumes that regular brief assessment and targeted online follow-up can promote continuous improvement. The system works off a significant database of essential management and self-management skills, characteristics associated with success in each option and a sequence for behavior change. The Virtual Coach's capabilities include:

- The ability to define key manager and employee flexibility skills
- The priority skills required to succeed in each option
- The capacity to generate brief assessment tools that identify areas for improvement
- The existence of sequences of action to train those facing problems
- A methodology for assessing satisfactory and unsatisfactory performance

Much of this training material exists in a modular fashion. Whether that consists of large elements such as the options training or the Virtual Coach tool or smaller modules that can be inserted into existing toolkits, your training capacity can be strengthened fairly easily.

Collaborative or Co Scheduling is a complete, innovative vehicle that offers significant “new model” features for organizations seeking a more effective approach to flexibility. As with any new model, it comes with core features and optional elements. Co Scheduling is a customizable approach. If all or part of this system could meet your needs, we would enjoy discussing the possibilities with you.

[Bulletin #61 – NEW Co Scheduling Tools](#)

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Best regards,
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