

Learning on the Run 14: Enhance Training to Support Cultural Change

How to support cultural change when the initial request is for employee training?

The Request. A Committee from a State Department of Transportation conducted an RFP process to help design and deliver customized training in customer service and basic conflict management. The entire department would participate in groups of 20 in a half-day training session. The Committee consisted of a Manager, a respected Senior Engineer and a Senior Assistant who reported to the Department Director. The scope of work was essentially skills training to maximize everyone's satisfaction during interactions with the public via phone, public meetings, on-site inspections and encounters during maintenance and construction.

Larger Context. Within the last 6 months, the Department had completed an audit of citizen complaints that provided some direction for improvement. At the same time, the Department Director sponsored a Customer Service Initiative that was meant to institutionalize an improvement in the quality of the service that was delivered and inform citizens of their return on investment. Two components of that Initiative was the development of a systematic yearly citizen survey and an all-employee training that the Committee was responsible for.

Consulting Intervention. In our initial discussions with the Committee, we reiterated their immediate requirements for a training intervention. We also noted that the big picture goal of this "important strategic initiative" was to maximize public satisfaction and improve the Department's reputation. We asked specific questions about the big picture goals and the leadership strategy for accomplishing those. For example, we asked how involved in this initiative were the Directors of each division. After our discussions, we all understood that this was more a cultural change intervention than a curriculum development effort. We all agreed that more engagement by the senior leadership of the Department was probable warranted. Subsequently, the Division Directors became more engaged. Their role included: Building draft customer service standards and best practices for employee input; Sponsoring role model staff to help facilitate the training; Kicking off each training session with a short Q & A about the Customer Service Initiative; Participating in the training themselves; Reviewing feedback collected post-training; And following up with commitments for division-specific action steps.

Last Line. Probing for the larger context and desired organizational changes can lead to enhanced interventions that go beyond an initial training delivery request.