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Integrating Technology for Library Staff

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According to the most recent statistics provided by the American Society of Training and Development (ASTD) the top 10 percent of companies surveyed train 98.4 percent of employees in their organizations. Author of the study Mark Van Buren states, "The top 10 percent of companies surveyed, or 'Training Investment Leaders' also spent an average of $1,665 on training per eligible employee�Training Investment Leaders have made learning a central focus of organization-wide efforts to stay competitive and deliver results in the New Economy."

Such statistics as much reflect library needs as private sector ones. As graduate schools concentrate their education efforts on training MLS graduates increasingly fluent in information technology, the attraction of work in the private sector becomes more alluring. In addition, some librarians/information technologists are increasingly unwilling to work in direct public service, resulting in a constant cry of short staffing from both public and academic libraries.

Is continuing technology education and training a cure-all for the hiring and retention of library staff? Certainly not. Can it be an important element in the hiring and retention of library staff? Perhaps. Remember the trainer's axiom: "If you're not helping them learn, you're helping them leave."

Southeast Florida Library Information Network (SEFLIN) designed a technology training program for library staff to address both these issues, while improving hiring and retention of qualified staff. If the opportunity for staff to receive technology training on a continuous basis is accepted and promoted by the library, the rewards may well be measured in increased staff hiring and a higher retention of qualified staff, thus leading to the provision of the best customer service. Life in the ever-changing environment of the library may not appear so daunting when familiarity and knowledge evolve into the confidence to perform one's duties ably.

SEFLIN, Florida's largest library cooperative, is a membership organization of Southeast Florida libraries that are located in Broward, Martin, Miami-Dade, Monroe, and Palm Beach counties. SEFLIN members represent more than 150 academic, public, and school libraries.

Planning for Technology Training Using A Mix of Market Research Methods

SEFLIN planners knew that, for the technology training program to be successful, it must "fit" the climate of its member libraries and it must directly respond to its member library staff's needs. They knew that any library network about to undergo the rigors of planning a fully-integrated technology training program must ponder a number of questions. Using the tools of market research to discover the actual technology needs of the library's internal customers provided SEFLIN's technology training team with the information upon which to define the training program.

Decision-maker Interviews and Focus Groups.

First, they posed questions to the library administration regarding the climate for a staff technology training program. These questions were asked during one-on-one interview or focus groups comprised of administrators and managers, which built support and understanding among decision-makers, yielded valuable information, and served to assist the technology training team in their successful creation of the staff questionnaire. In the interviews and focus groups, SEFLIN planners asked:

- Who is the target audience?
- What are the staff skills?
- What is the staff's motivation level?
- What kind of training has staff specifically requested?
- What kinds of definite, perceptible information is available that indicates training was needed?
- In the past, how was training delivered?
- Has training traditionally been onsite or offsite?
- How successful has technology training been in the past?
- If training has not been successful, why hasn't it?
- Is there enough money in the budget to fund a training program?
- Is funding incorporated into the annual budget as a regular line item or must capital be raised to finance the program?
- What methods of training are planning to be employed?
- How does the staff learn most effectively?
- What is to be included in the training program?
- What are the successful outcomes of a training program?

Upon analysis of responses to these questions, with some direct follow-up by the technology training team as needed, a number of key activities in the planning and implementation of the program were designed.

Technology training planning team.

SEFLIN organized a representative training team. At its initial meeting, the team established their timeline, team duties, and meeting schedule. They agreed to meet regularly in order to create, administer, analyze and report the findings of the survey.

Library workplace technology training facilities survey.

In order to establish locations where "dedicated" classes (classes held on specific technology topics in specific locations) would be accommodated, the planning team visited proposed sites to identify appropriate technology training facilities to be used in the

program. Before visiting, the team produced a checklist of parameters. (See "Evaluating the Technology Training Facility".)

Research on technology training.

Research into the best current practices in technology training provided the planning team with recent articles on instructional design of technology programs in the workplace and the manner in which it could best be employed in the creation of this training program. Research uncovered narratives on the value of such a program and a wealth of statistical information on how technology training is currently being used in the workplace and projections for the future. (See "Core Technology Competencies".)

Staff questionnaire on technology training needs.

The questionnaire team created a technology needs assessment questionnaire and tested it on select staff prior to finalizing it for distribution to the entire staff. Because the questionnaire would be one concentrating on technology, and there would, undoubtedly, be those who would have difficulty if the questionnaire were made available only electronically, the questionnaire team distributed it in print. (See the questionnaire created and administered by the SEFLIN Technology Training Team.)

During the interviews, library directors had suggested that the training program be made available to all staff, so anonymous questionnaires were sent to 3,000 potential respondents working in 25 member libraries/library systems; they were given 30 days to return the questionnaires which took no more than 15 minutes to complete.

Since the staff of SEFLIN-member libraries work in jobs with disparate titles and functions, the goal in constructing the questionnaire was to make certain it was built for clarity and ease of use. It was important to ascertain the range of technological abilities from the simplest to the more esoteric in order to design a technology training program applicable to all library staff including top management, middle management, professional librarians, paraprofessionals, clerical and support staff, facilities staff and part time employees.

The questionnaire gathered important information about the continuing education and training needs of the staff. The questionnaire team analyzed the statistical data and the responses to the open-ended questions, which offered in-depth information useful in the design of the training program. Taking staff needs seriously and responding to them where appropriate also created an atmosphere of trust in SEFLIN. Advantages of using a questionnaire included anonymity, ease of completion, cost effectiveness, ease of analysis, familiarity of format, uniformity for all audiences, and non-intrusiveness.

Clarifying the nature and needs of the audience for training is one of the most important activities during the analysis phase of instuctional design. The SEFLIN questionnaire was constructed in such a manner that respondents answered according to their *perceived* performance levels in terms of:

- Skills – the ability to use one's knowledge effectively and readily in execution or performance
- Tasks – assigned pieces of work to be completed within a certain time
- Knowledge – acquaintance with or understanding of (in this case) specific

hardware/desktop applications.

Designing Implementation Based on the Research

The challenge of creating a fully-integrated technology training program for SEFLIN was to fully identify the various elements that intersected with one another so that staff were fully brought into the process. The result culminated in a technology training program that includes online, onsite, and vendor-based components.

Curriculum.

The next step for SEFLIN was to finalize the technology training curriculum. As questionnaire responses were tabulated, there was ample evidence that the technology training program must offer the widest array of courses available in order to accommodate widely-differing learning needs. SEFLIN's goal was to develop a training program that offered online and "live delivery" courseware that were complimentary in content, look and feel. Vendors supplying Web-based training had to furnish courses that provided some continuity with the vendor offering "dedicated" and "voucher" courses.

The team sought out multiple vendors so that product comparisons might be conducted. They tested products and made suggestions based on the parameters the planning team had established. SEFLIN planners contacted vendors and interviewed them, then selected a "Web-based" training vendor and a second vendor offering the ability to provide "live" technology training. This vendor offered both a "dedicated" class training curriculum and a "voucher" supported training program. The program was built incorporating three distinct delivery methods.

"Web-based" Training (a full curriculum of online delivery of technology training classes). SEFLIN selected ElementK, which currently offers two main types of courses: Self-Study and Instructor-Led. Self-Study courses are setup in an interactive, multimedia format for the students to take at their own pace. Instructor-Led courses, while still available online only, are taught by industry experts located remotely. The Instructor leadsdiscussions, posts lessons, gives assignments, quizzes, etc.

"Dedicated" class training (day-long, instructor-led classes on a specific topic held in one of five SEFLIN's member library technology training facilities. Current topics include HTML, Frontpage, Excel, Word, Access, Powerpoint, Publisher.

"Voucher" class training (vouchers for instructor-lead classes where library staff may attend a class at their convenience held at a vendor facility). SEFLIN contracted with CompUSA in purchasing a number of "vouchers" for use in the Continuing Education and Technology Training Program. Beginning January 2, 2001, vouchers may be used by anyone employed in a SEFLIN-member library, by obtaining the appropriate approval from their library to attend the class, visiting the CompUSA web site, selecting the class and location of that class (in the SEFLIN coverage area there are 5 CompUSA locations), phoning SEFLIN or sending a FAX indicating the class and location of the class, and remaining for the entire session to be given credit or a certificate of attendance.

Regarding the selection of the Web-based training vendor, the team decided on one with the ability to provide the following deliverables:

- "Pre-assessment" evaluation so that users may gauge their strong and weak points prior to registering for a particular training module.
- "Post-assessment" so that the users (and administrators) may gauge the success of each student.
- The most comprehensive selection of technology training courses available.
- Courses must be downloadable so that they may be taken at the user's convenience.
- Courses must be accessible for reference purposes so users need not take an entire course in order to answer a reference question.
- Courses must be able to be taken as many times as the user desires.
- Courses must be available for "continuing education" credits (CEUs).
- There must be an electronic reference library available so users may consult recognized reference sources for assistance when necessary.
- There must be an electronic and live "help desks" to assist users.
- There must be a selection of "instructor-led" classes as well as "self-study" courses so users may select the manner by which they may be more effectively trained.
- The vendor must offer a selection of new courses each month so users may avail themselves of the latest in technology training opportunities.

In selecting the vendor to provide the "live" technology training component of the program, SEFLIN required the following elements:

- The vendor must provide classes whose courseware is synchronous with that being offered by the Web-based training vendor.
- Instructors must be certified to teach their specialties.
- "Dedicated" classes may not be larger than twelve students.
- Because the coverage area is more than 5.1 million acres overall, vendors must offer training classes with the use of a voucher that must be accessible throughout the coverage area.
- Because staff turnover is fairly constant, the vendor must offer technology training to replacement staff at a cost of only the courseware.
- So that there remains flexibility in the technology training program, staff must be able to attend training with the use of a voucher at a vendor facility anywhere in the country.
- If necessary, staff must be able to repeat a class where a voucher has been redeemed at no cost.

Promote technology training program.

The SEFLIN planning team designed activities to promote the program including:

- Site visits to member libraries
- Presentations at annual and committee meetings
- Web site promotion on home page
- Campaign strategy meetings with vendors
- Promotional material handouts
- E-mail reminders

Prior to rollout.

During the negotiation phase of the project, vendors agreed to work with the training team to assist in establishing a publicity campaign for the program.

Upon designation of local "Training Administrators" (TAs) selected by library directors for each library or library system within the consortium, an informational kickoff meeting was scheduled, approximately one month prior to the rollout. This meeting included the lead SEFLIN TA, local TAs and the vendors. Goals of this meeting were to:

- Explain the project plan
- Agree on goals
- Explore the vendor offerings
- Explain TA responsibilities
- Identify contacts
- Distribute e-mail and telephone contact list
- Discuss maximum use of communication tools
- Identify and find solutions for any barriers to implementation
- Finalize timeline for implementation
- Schedule onsite training for interested staff

Two weeks prior to the rollout and continuing into the implementation period, the SEFLIN TA traveled to all of the libraries/library systems within the consortium and gave a presentation on the integrated technology training program to staff.

Besides serving as communications liaison between the SEFLIN TA and the library staff, the local TA's primary responsibility was to act as the "champion" of the integrated technology training program. This task is a continuous one and is of great importance to the success of the program. The local TAs shoulder the responsibility of promoting the values of the program to staff and may use various promotional tools to do so.

Registration procedures were put in place so that staff would be able to access and refer to a step-by-step process when registering for any element of the program.

Sign up.

The training began and was instantaneously embraced by library staff. Hundreds of vouchers were used. Hundreds of online classes were accessed. Many staff registered for "dedicated" classes throughout the SEFLIN region, held in SEFLIN member library technology training facilities.

Results.

Reporting and evaluation began almost immediately and a variety of reports are generated monthly to track usage of deliverables offered by the technology training program.

Thousands of technology training courses were accessed through the program. The term "access" is a key element in a fair evaluation of the means by which the program was utilized by staff. Since individuals all learn differently, it became paramount for the evaluation team to understand by what methods the training was being used. Instructor-led training, taught by a qualified trainer, is provided to staff either at a vendor

computer training facility or one located in a SEFLIN member institution. These courses are full-day ones where an individual receives specific training in a single subject in a very concentrated session. Online training courses are offered to staff 24/7 and are accessible whenever an individual can find the opportunity of logging into their individual pass-worded account from any computer.

The team discovered that not only were online courses accessed in order for an individual to complete an entire learning module on a specific subject, but they were also accessed either for reference purposes or to support knowledge gained through taking instructor-led courses. Thus, entire courses were more often taken through the instructor-led offerings of the program than through online offerings.

Through monthly analysis of usage statistics, it became quite clear that the online training courses served as a very important reference and support tool for those seeking information about the operation of a certain software package. Also, since the online vendor also offered a virtual reference library that could also be accessed by staff, these reference materials were highly used in lieu of purchasing or borrowing the print books when necessary.

Through the implementation of a "user evaluation survey" the team was able to fully realize how the program was used and who participated in it. The survey responses that were received represented a cross-section of staff that had participated either in parts of the program, dedicated courses, voucher/vendor courses or online classes, or in all segments of the program. Responses provided the technology training team with ample raw data from which to comment.

Key highlights of the survey responses to the multiple choice questions were as follows:

- 52% hold the MLS degree
- 70% were from public libraries
- 47% had more than 10 years of service
- 26% had more than 20 years of service
- Knowledge/skill levels before taking training: 67%
- Knowledge/skill levels after taking training: 92%
- Confidence/ability to use tech skills learned in training program: 65%
- Had the time to use tech skills learned in training program: 70%
- Able to access library resources to apply knowledge learned: 83%
- Training program improved daily performance on the job: 87%
- Training program improved overall job performance: 84%
- Effectiveness of delivery methods: "Voucher" classes: 93%, Dedicated classes: 86% , Online learning: 81%
- Overall program design and delivery: Excellent: 55% Good: 38% Average: 5%

Well-constructed, Ongoing Training: Not a Frill

In libraries today, where so much change continues to occur, well-constructed ongoing training not only addresses the needs of the moment but also the continuing training needs of staff with every imaginable level of ability. Continuous technology training designed to serve library staff is not a frill, but as an essential element designed to provide the libraries' people with the tools they require to perform at the very highest level of

service.

SEFLIN is grateful to the Florida State Library, through which LSTA grant funding was generously provided to support the technology training program, and its Board of Directors for providing vision, leadership and complete support to the technology training program.

See SEFLIN's "core technology competencies", "needs assessment survey results", "technology training evaluation survey results" and a reading list and tips for "Evaluating the Technology Training Facility", for more information.

Reference

Van Buren, Mark. State of the Industry, American Society for Training and Development: Alexandria, Va, 2001.

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