



Planning a Workshop

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Discuss how to plan a successful training programme

Planning a Workshop

Preparing the Essentials

Psychology research tells us that **an adult's attention span is a little less than an hour**. However, we also know that attention spans are getting shorter. Bob Pike, a master trainer in America, said that some years ago his team redesigned their training to change activities about every fifteen minutes. Then they adjusted down to ten minutes, and now they are at about seven minutes, which roughly matches how often a television show breaks for commercials.

What significance does this have for us as trainers or facilitators?

We must break up our training day into manageable segments if we want to keep people's attention. Since many learners come to us interested and motivated to learn, we can probably be safe by preparing longer segments (no more than 15 minutes). This does not mean that you have to change subjects every segment, but it does mean that you have to engage people at least that often: ask a question, use a gesture, start an activity, etc.

Giving a workshop isn't like stopping by somebody's desk to chat with them. There are risks. There are expectations. You and the knowledge you bring to the session are exposed for every participant to see and judge. While your workshop is an event in and of itself, learning is not an event. Learning is a process that unfolds over time, and our training has to reflect that. **Approach every workshop you deliver as a project.**

Preparation involves these activities:

- A needs assessment
- A determination of what you are to cover and in what detail it needs to be covered
- How much time will be allotted to the training
- How and when participants will be informed that the training is taking place.

Sometimes this will be done for you, yet you still will want to know these details yourself. The needs assessment is the most important as it will identify the objectives of the training session, and may provide the other details, too. That is the basis for the preparation from here onward: making certain the training meets the objectives that have been identified.

Planning for Success

There are six components to any training plan.

Who?

There are several people that you may need to speak with in order to prepare a thorough training plan, including:

- Participants
- Supervisors
- Senior managers
- The person who has requested and/or is paying for the training

Why?

Next, we will set **objectives**, the reasons for doing the workshop and the desired outcomes. The steps for this are:

- Seek input
- Determine whether objectives are doable
- Prioritize in order of importance
- Organize materials to support objectives

What?

Next, think about the **content**; the agenda or learning points to be covered. The material will be influenced by several factors, such as the trainees' motivation to attend training (was it their own idea or a mandatory course?), their learning style, and the trainer's preferred training style. Other factors will include available resources, time available, and the trainer's skill level.

How?

Once you know what you are going to train, you need to determine how to present it. Here are some ideas:

Methods and Activities	Structures
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rounds• Brainstorming• Video• Role play• Problem solving• Group discussion• Demonstration• Case study• Other•	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One on one• Small group• Large group• Pairs• Individual work

When choosing your training methods, don't forget to keep learning styles and objectives in mind. You want a varied approach that will teach the material required in an engaging manner.

When?

Now, think about **timing**.

- How long will your workshop be?
- How long will each segment of your workshop be?

The depth of content you can provide will depend on how much time you have and training priorities.

Bringing it All Together

Finally, assess the learning plan:

- Objectives
- Methods
- Timing
- Quality
- How it feels

Make revisions and repeat the process as necessary to complete your training plan.

Anticipating Challenges

Being Prepared

Every group will present its own challenges. As well, you will find yourself delivering in a slightly different manner if you have five people than you might if you had 15 or 50.

Whoever they are and however many they are, you will want to have some idea of how they feel about the training. **It will help if you know the answers to these questions:**

- Who are the people in the group? Male or female or both?
- Do you know them? Do they know each other?
- How long have they been with the organization?
- What job function and level of seniority do they have?
- What previous training have they had?
- What are their language levels like? (Are they fluent in English, for example, or learning the language? If learning, what stages are their oral, written, and reading skills at?)
- What will be their attitude toward the training? What are their expectations? (Whenever possible, ask this of their managers as well.)

You can never know too much about the group you are about to work with. Information helps you avoid unpleasant surprises and helps you adjust your plan before you are standing in front of an audience.

What might you do differently if you have someone in your group who cannot speak your language of instruction?

This can be difficult if there is nobody in the room who can act as translator. However, these things can help:

- Lots of illustrations or videos as training aids
- Pairing this individual with different people during the day so everybody shares the communication challenge
- Working one-on-one with them after class

What might you do differently if you have someone in your group who is legally blind?

Most legally blind individuals have some sight. If this is the case large, legible lettering on flip charts or PowerPoint. If the visually impaired person can hear, learn to describe what others are seeing and read questions from the manual before assigning them. Most importantly, remember to ask them what will be most helpful.

What if you have someone who is severely disabled?

Generally individuals who are severely disabled with have an attendant in the classroom with them. Ask both the individual and their attendant what will be most helpful to them.

What if you have someone who has a limited ability to read or write?

People with low literacy levels are usually very fearful of even coming to a workshop. They want to avoid humiliation at all costs. Sometimes you can overcome obstacles by:

- Spending more time in open discussion and less time on individual exercises
- Reading or repeating questions before people form discussion teams
- Pairing the individual with a buddy who is aware of the difficulty and can work with them

Preparing Visual Aids

PowerPoint Slides

PowerPoint slides are one of the most popular presentation and training tools in use today. They are easy to create and update, and most programs make it easy to generate instructor and student notes. They are also reusable and efficient.

However, there can be too much of a good thing. To make sure your PowerPoint slides work for you, keep these tips in mind.

- Use a consistent theme (colors, fonts, and styles).
- Make sure you use a large font.
- Keep graphics and animations to a minimum.
- Use a projector rather than showing the slides off your computer screen.

- List talking points on the slides – don't read off of them.
- Practice, practice, practice!

Also, make sure you always have a backup plan, such as a printout of your slides that you can transfer to flip chart, whiteboard, or overhead.

Video (Digital, VCR, or DVD)

Videos are another popular training tool. They are portable and easy to use. However, although they can be stimulating, audiences tend to drift off if they are too long.

As a solution, make sure you preview the video to make sure it is of the appropriate quality and length. You may want to cue up certain portions, rather than showing the whole thing. You may also want to develop an exercise (such as a role play, case study, or discussion sheet) for participants to complete after the video.

Once again, make sure you have a backup plan in case the video equipment is missing or broken.

Flip Charts

You will find flip charts in almost every training room. Although they are flexible and easy to use, they are too small for more than 20 people. To ensure your flip chart is readable, buy lined paper, or lightly draw lines in pencil before the workshop. You can also pre-write some pages and tuck them away for when you need them. As well, you can remove and tape up different pages of the flip chart for reference throughout the session.

When writing on flip charts, make sure you use dark blue, black, or brown ink for writing. Save the brighter colors for highlighting and arrows. As well, use the top two thirds of the page only, to make sure all participants can see the information.

Make sure you have plenty of paper, tape, and extra markers available.

Whiteboard or Chalkboard

Whiteboards and chalkboards are also inexpensive, flexible, and easy to use. Chalkboards are less commonly used, since they are messy and some people are allergic to chalk.

For either method, make sure you write clearly and in large letters. For the whiteboard, remember the same color guidelines as for flip charts (blue, brown, or black ink for writing; brighter colors for highlighting or drawing).

Make sure that you have plenty of chalk or markers and several erasers handy.

Smart boards

These electronic whiteboards are installed in many classroom and conference rooms. They allow you to write electronically by using a keyboard (or hooking up your laptop) and making notes like you would on a flip chart. This format allows you to highlight information, display slides or graphics, and conserve paper.

To ensure that your presentation is professional and effective, make sure that you know how to properly use the board before your session starts. One issue that we have come across is that the smart board is often mounted on the wall directly behind the projector screen, making it very difficult for the trainer to switch back and forth between the two. They are also sometimes quite small, making them difficult to use with large groups.

Further Reading:

