

# Recipe for making training stick

Billions of pounds are spent on training in the UK every year but organisations are failing to benefit despite signs that management development is beginning to make a difference in nearly a quarter of workplaces. **Cheryl Buggy** examines why 75 per cent of training appears to be wasted and what organisations can do to make it pay

**WE HAVE** all been there, haven't we? We come out of a training session in various states of enthusiasm from thoughtful to enlightened, pledging to change our lives for the better from now on.

Then reality sets in, maybe the next day or during the course of the next week. The holding pattern of e-mails, endless meetings, urgent problems and insistent deadlines overwhelms us and somehow the good intentions fade like early morning mist. Before you know it all that new knowledge has evaporated.

Twenty-three and a half billion pounds are invested in training by UK organisations, large and small, each year. Yet the evidence for the payback on such investment is quite shockingly low. Research shows that generally only 10 to 23 per cent of people actually do anything differently as a result of undertaking training. Why? What goes wrong?

If we track the journey of training, it usually starts with a need being identified, followed by the appointment of a trainer, either internal or external, to design and deliver a course. And that can be very much the end of the journey for many participants.

Having experienced the training, they are pretty much left to their own devices in terms of applying whatever they have learnt. The problem is knowledge on its own means very little; it is how you apply that knowledge that counts, and that's wisdom!

So, how can you get it right and ensure that any investment in training sticks?

According to author and trainer Scott Blanchard, vice president of The Ken Blanchard Companies, it is possible to make training very sticky indeed. "If you set training up well and offer support for a period of time afterwards you can find that 75 per cent to 90 per cent of the learning embeds."

## Anticipation

The problem is that many busy people don't set aside enough time to prepare to learn. We can all probably identify with the individual who looks in their diary at the end of a hectic, stressful day only to realise that the training course they booked all those months ago is happening the next day.

They perhaps feel that they can't afford a day out of the office but in the end they go and probably spend half the time worrying about work instead of concentrating on what is happening in the training room.

Scott Blanchard says: "The key first step is to encourage delegates to create a sense of anticipation



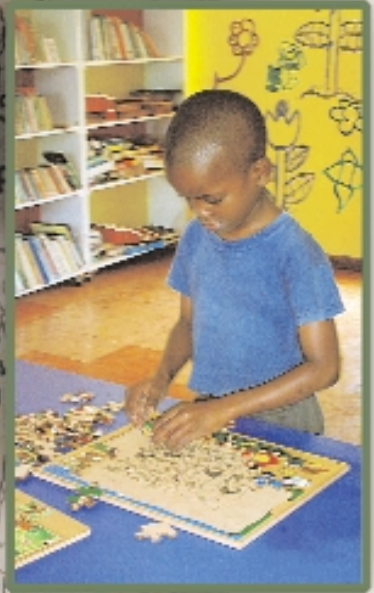
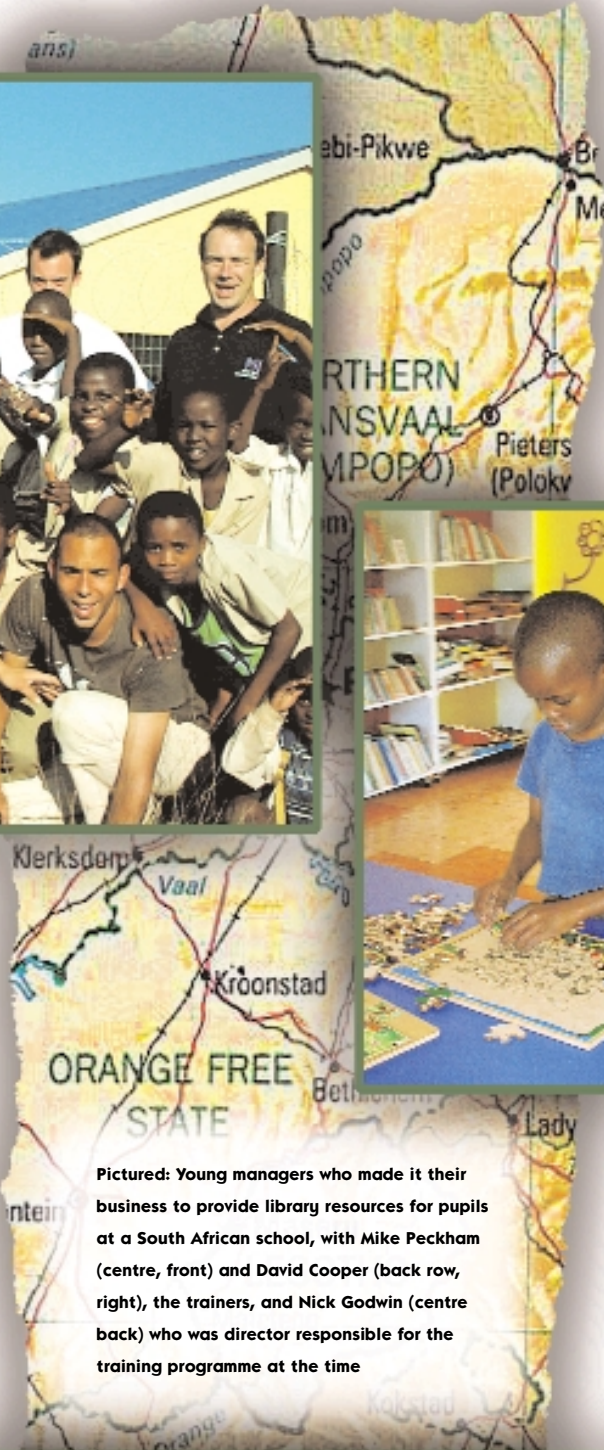
and relevance before they enter the training room. Get them to ask themselves 'What am I going to learn?' and 'What am I planning to get out of this?' Far too often you find people on courses because they have been told to come and are not quite sure why, or they turn up, unprepared, simply looking forward to the doughnuts!"

As well as ensuring delegates attend in the right frame of mind to begin the task of making training stick, the aims, objectives and content of any training also have to be very well considered. As Abraham Lincoln said: "If I had six hours to cut down a tree I would spend the first five hours sharpening the axe."

Philip Moon of ProSeminar, runs a programme of short courses in partnership with the Chartered Management Institute. He says it's important to keep it real. "Training must be rooted in the 'real' world of work, and wholly relevant to the experiences of participants. Therefore the trainer needs to know the business and know how to help people identify the actions they can take as a result of what they learn and this needs to happen throughout the programme. Constant links need to be made."

## Experience

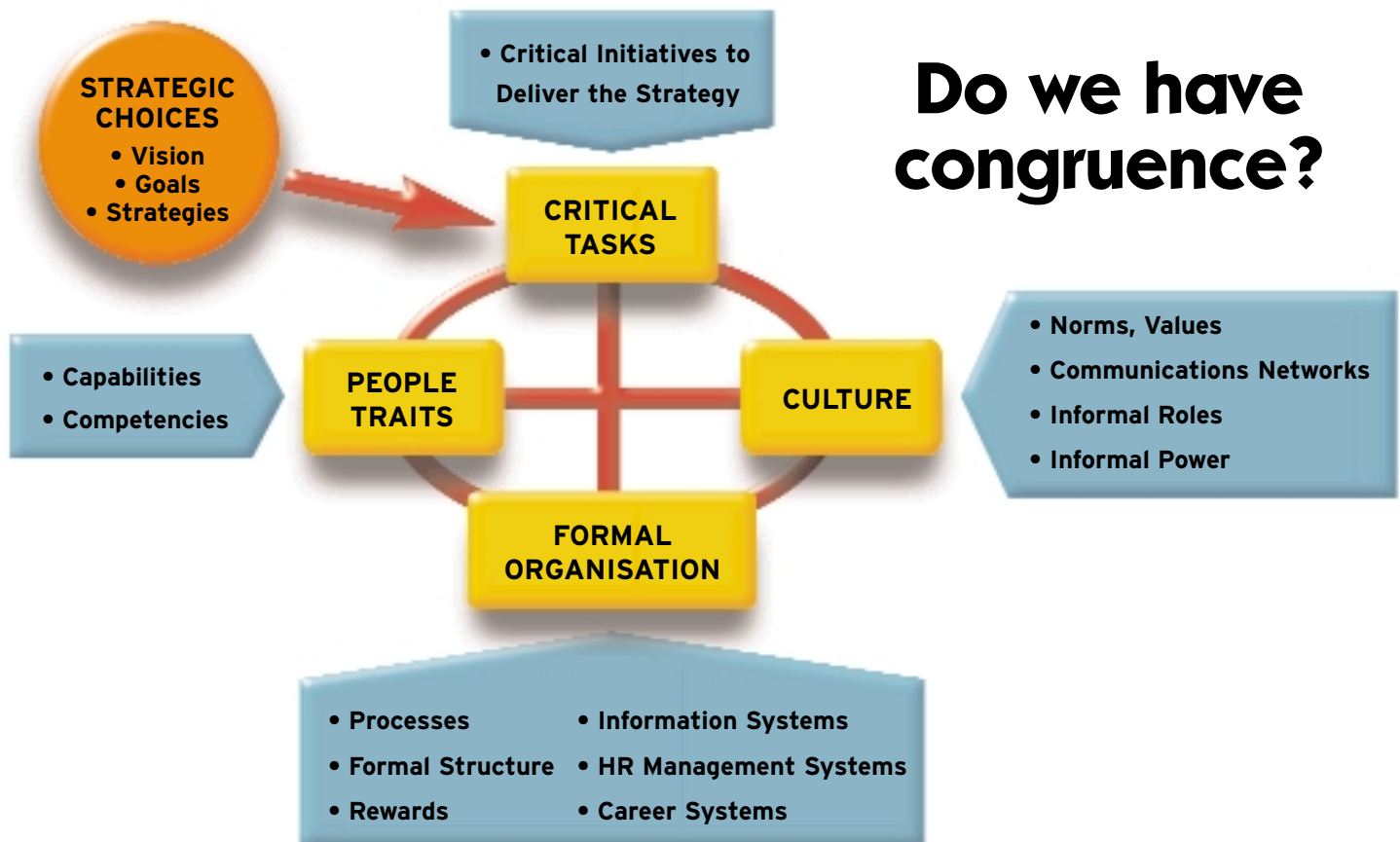
An innovative training programme run recently by David Cooper and Mike Peckham of PSA Training & Development Ltd, based in Chepstow, really was a practical learning experience. Their remit from clients The Diamond Trading Company, part of the



**Pictured: Young managers who made it their business to provide library resources for pupils at a South African school, with Mike Peckham (centre, front) and David Cooper (back row, right), the trainers, and Nick Godwin (centre back) who was director responsible for the training programme at the time**



# Do we have congruence?



A typical congruence model used by Novartis to plan corporate education programmes

De Beers Group, was to ‘grow’ the leadership skills of young managers at a time when the organisation was going through big changes.

"We had to find out where the potential leaders were coming from, how to develop them once they were identified, how to manage the context, and how to get under the skins of the people to get a real sense of what made them tick," say Cooper

and Peckham.

At the start of the course each participant was set the task of determining a challenge for the group within set criteria. Just one challenge was selected and everybody then had to back that one. They had three months to put together the business plan, form the management structure, raise the funds, make the project a reality and then the business had to be closed down and the learning ‘unpacked’.

At each step of the way the young managers had time to personally reflect on the ‘who, what, when, why and how’ questions. They did all of this in their own time as well as their day jobs. It stopped being a course and a game, and became something far more profound. As well as enhancing their management the skills, the end result of their labours, which they got involved in actually building, was a sustainable resources library established in a remote school in South Africa.

Cooper and Peckham came up with the concept for the experiential learning programme because they wanted to create a safe rehearsal ground, not theory but practice, where participants could flex their management and leadership muscles, set their own curriculum then be guided and coached through the experience.

"We did this because when we asked successful managers how they had learnt to become managers they answered 'through experience'," say Cooper

## WHAT MAKES A GOOD TRAINER?

1. Appreciate the diversity of participants
2. Research and make sure you can hit the WIIFM buttons (what's in it for me?)
3. Get the pitch right
4. Use a variety of learning styles
5. Meet needs and offer opportunities
6. Be a good and intuitive listener
7. Be challenging and thought-provoking
8. Offer opportunities for participants to make sense of past and current experiences
9. Get understanding that this is about developing strengths as well as addressing weaknesses
10. Be constantly mindful and ask: What are we developing people to do?
11. Develop rapport.

Checklist by Philip Moon, ProSeminar

and Peckham. "Rehearsal is a key part of training. It gives you a chance to make mistakes and see if you can pull it round when it goes wrong. You might know all the notes on a page but it does not make a symphony!

"We appreciate that effective training can't be an isolated activity. Nor can it be a 'one size fits all' approach. Training is about business development, so putting it in context is essential," say Cooper and Peckham. They suggest that anyone involved in organising training should ask themselves: 'What's the story behind the business? Where will the programme fit in? How is it relevant to the day-to-day reality of people's existence at work?'

"Every individual is unique; all have diverse experiences and needs, and speeds at which they take in new information and particular ways of then applying that new information. All this has to be taken into account when you design a training programme."

## Follow-up

The next step in the sticky training recipe is to follow up and embed the learning that has occurred. For knowledge to be put into action, Blanchard says there needs to be a plan. "The organisation needs to anticipate any problems and find appropriate solutions. Support and coaching for both individuals and groups for at least 30 days (after the training) needs to be in place. In that time, through practice and 'homework' new skills are honed to form new effective habits and behaviours."

Blanchard says leaders and managers have to see and make clear the relevance of the training to the company. They have to show it is of value and important. Furthermore there has to be an expectation of accountability, he says. "In that way delegates are going to listen even more keenly because they know they will have to apply and use what they are learning. They tend then to participate more fully and contribute to the creation of a better learning environment."

Michael Carroll, UK operations director of pharmaceuticals giant Novartis, places training very high on the priority list. "We see changing competencies as an enabler to help us achieve our long term plan to be as attractive and competitive as possible in our field.

"We make use of the congruence model (see diagram), amongst other tools, and ensure all development hangs off them.

"We focus on the importance of excellent communication to help our associates both see the big picture and take an active part in the journey. We constantly reinforce, celebrate and help people decide and deliver on their own development, direction and improvement via such things as

## THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR TRAINING NEED TO:

1. Establish what sort of training is needed and why
2. Ensure people are ready and expectant. Get them to consider how they can benefit from any training so that they are alert and proactive participants
3. Ensure training is specific and, preferably, experiential, meets needs and is rooted in the reality of the specific business.

Checklist by PSA Training & Development Ltd

employee surveys, appraisals and 360-degree feedback.

"The message from the top is that this is important, valued and an integral part of business for all, so much so that I and my senior management team always endeavour to practice what we preach and constantly address our own development needs," says Carroll.

Another tool available to ensure follow through has been developed by Cranfield-based training and development consultancy ASK Europe plc.

"Corporate education programmes have traditionally had a fatal flaw in that they stop too soon and do not help managers apply what they have learnt," says Robert Terry of ASK Europe. "The downstream effect is that their value in helping workers succeed is minimized and a high 'scrap rate' of unused learning is produced. However, times are changing and the world-class organisations are now recognising that proven follow through techniques can help them achieve a higher return on investment in training.

"If organisations are serious about changing the behaviours of their leaders they have to stop thinking about two-day workshops and start thinking about three and six month development programmes, active participation of line management in learning transfer and extensive use of follow through technology," says Terry.

The key to making training stick is in recognizing that it is a journey of preparation, meaningful content and continuing support and accountability. In a sense it is a never-ending journey; we are all 'works in progress' after all.

As a trainer myself, I have seen cynicism grow in employees who have received training and then not been given the opportunity to use their new-found knowledge. Similarly, I have seen how the fear culture of an organisation can stop individuals from flexing their creative muscles after training, with the result that the organisation runs the risk of stunting its own growth. Without practice you never make perfect, without mistakes you seldom move forward. It reminds me of a card I saw in a shop recently, which read: 'Show me somebody who has never made a mistake and I will show you somebody who has never made anything.'

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## Further Information

Scott Blanchard, The Ken Blanchard Companies – 020 85404; [www.kenblanchard.com](http://www.kenblanchard.com). Ken Blanchard is the co-author of *The One Minute Manager*, which has sold more than 13 million copies.

Philip Moon, ProSeminar - [www.proseminar.co.uk](http://www.proseminar.co.uk)

For information about Chartered Management Institute tailored programmes visit [www.managers.org/leadershipprogramme](http://www.managers.org/leadershipprogramme)

David Cooper and Mike Peckham, PSA Training & Development Ltd - 01291 627120;

[www.psa-training.co.uk](http://www.psa-training.co.uk). The company is a Chartered Management Institute approved centre, providing nationally accredited programmes

Robert Terry, ASK Europe plc, Cranfield