

Competency Based Training

By: Sharon Hendrickson

Competency Based Training (CBT) is an approach to educating employees that emphasizes what the employee must know specifically to be able to function on the job. It is a “no frills” approach to training. Unlike traditional training which includes theoretical concepts, CBT focuses on the specific role (task, job) that the employee performs for the company. This article addresses these questions: What are competencies? What is Competency Based Training? Why and When is CBT most effective?

What are competencies?

The term “competency” has been defined as “A cluster of related knowledge, skills, and attitudes that affects a major part of one’s job (a role or responsibility), that correlates with performance on the job, that can be measured against well-accepted standards, and that can be improved via training and development.” (Training magazine: July, 1996)

Laundry Cost Per Pound Example

Labor (HR) and benefits
+ Linen Replacement costs
+ Other non-labor cost-of-service
(i.e. utilities, chemicals, depreciation, etc.)
Cost per Pound

To be determined as competent in a particular skill, a person should be able to meet or exceed the prevailing standard of performance for that skill. Being judged competent does not mean that a person has reached a level of excellence. It does imply that they are sufficiently proficient in the skill to accomplish the task at hand.

The standards for competency are industry-determined standards that specify the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to be effective on the job in a particular industry or profession. Performance is what a person is required to do while standards are how well it is to be done.

What is Competency Based Training?

Competency Based Training emphasizes performance as opposed to theory, and aims at expected workplace outcomes, not just learning processes. CBT promotes what an employee needs to know to perform a

role (specific task, duty) according to the standard of performance required. This “standard of performance” defines the skills, knowledge, and behaviors (job performance) needed for the employee to successfully function on the job. The standard of performance is determined by a specific industry or organization’s needs.

KNOWLEDGE:

The formula for calculating Cost-Per-Pound.

SKILLS:

What figures to include in each category, how to calculate accurately, and what impact a change in one of those figures will have on the cost-per-pound.

ATTITUDE:

The ability to communicate linen loss to healthcare personnel to reduce replacement costs and thereby improve the facility cost-per-pound.

A Competency Based Training program addresses specific, measurable skills more so than traditional group based, time driven, generalized training. Traditional education and training help prepare people for life and work in general. But just because you have received “x” hours of education or training does not necessarily mean that a person has become competent in the skills that are needed in his/her particular role with the company. A CBT approach to training:

- focuses specifically on the skills needed to perform a certain role (task, job),
- accepts the employee’s current level of competency regardless of how it was obtained,
- is primarily concerned with the skills needed by a particular industry or organization, and
- allows that training can be accomplished in the workplace or at an offsite training facility.

Training methods in CBT are participative. There are few, if any, lectures and there is no “grading.” Participants in the training program are judged as “competent” or “not yet competent.” Continual feedback is provided by the CBT instructor. The instructor is more of a guide than just a provider of information. More training time is spent on individual or small group needs. The instructor continues working with individuals until they have mastered the required skill. Because the instruction is tied directly to observable performance, learners build confidence as they master specific competencies.

Why is CBT effective?

Some reasons why CBT is effective are:

- training is based on specific standardized procedures
- employee’s skills are measured to the same standard
- changes how you do something, not what you do.

The idea of traditional jobs has given way to specific outputs by employees. In other words, employees perform tasks which produce a specific outcome or result known as “outputs.” To approach work in this manner requires certain “competencies” and traits in workers to successfully achieve the outputs expected with the

measured standard of performance required. These “traits” include an employee’s body of knowledge, skills, and attitude. CBT moves a person beyond acquired knowledge. It changes what you do, not who you are. CBT sets forth the notion that each employee’s performance is measured by competency (or industry) standards instead of against other employees’ performance.

CBT insures that the training is designed to develop the skills which are necessary to meet job demands moving the person beyond knowledge to comprehension and application.

1. Task Skills – Being able to perform individual tasks such as folding a sheet.
2. Task Management Skills – Being able to manage a number of different tasks within the job such as unloading the washing machine, placing the material in the dryer, sorting, folding, etc.
3. Contingency Management Skills – Being able to respond to irregularities and breakdowns in routine such as machine breakdowns, an increase or decrease in work load.
4. Environment Skills – Being able to deal with the responsibilities and expectations of the work environment such as safety issues, keeping the work area clean, removing hazards, and obeying established company rules.

For Clarity:

To differentiate between competencies and standards of performance, think of competency as knowing or having the ability to perform a task; and standards of performance as how well those tasks must be performed.

For competency, a manager should have the knowledge, skills and attitude necessary to make the correct decisions, supervise the process with the actual workers, and have a desire to meet or exceed the standard required.

Conclusion

Without a doubt, investment in appropriate training for employees is paramount to successful work practice. The most valuable employees are those that are highly skilled and capable of making good choices and decisions. CBT coaches employees through on-the-job experiences which increases the employees' value to the company. An employee who is well-trained for a specific role or task is generally happier. They are more focused, confident and productive. They are less apt to have safety issues in the work environment. CBT also focuses on how to apply their newly acquired skills to new situations or environments which makes their capabilities transferable. CBT helps create a better workforce by meeting competency standards used industry wide and nationwide.

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