

program design issues have addressed such diverse populations as firefighters, forklift operators, healthcare workers, surgeons, architects and designers, as well as others working in high-technology jobs.¹ At this point, an organization following effective HRD practices will have completed Phase I of the training and HRD process—needs assessment—and will have data that indicate:

1. Where the training or HRD program is needed
2. What kind of training or HRD program is needed
3. Who needs to be trained
4. The conditions under which training will occur

In addition, the needs identified will have been prioritized so that senior management and the HRD staff know which programs or issues require attention and resources. As mentioned previously, it may also be the case that the needs assessment reveals that some “non-training intervention” is needed, i.e., changes in organizational structure, incentives, staffing, or some other management system. As Andrew Jefferson and colleagues recently wrote, training is not a panacea to fix managerial issues such as poor motivation, unclear expectations, or lack of recognition and rewards.²

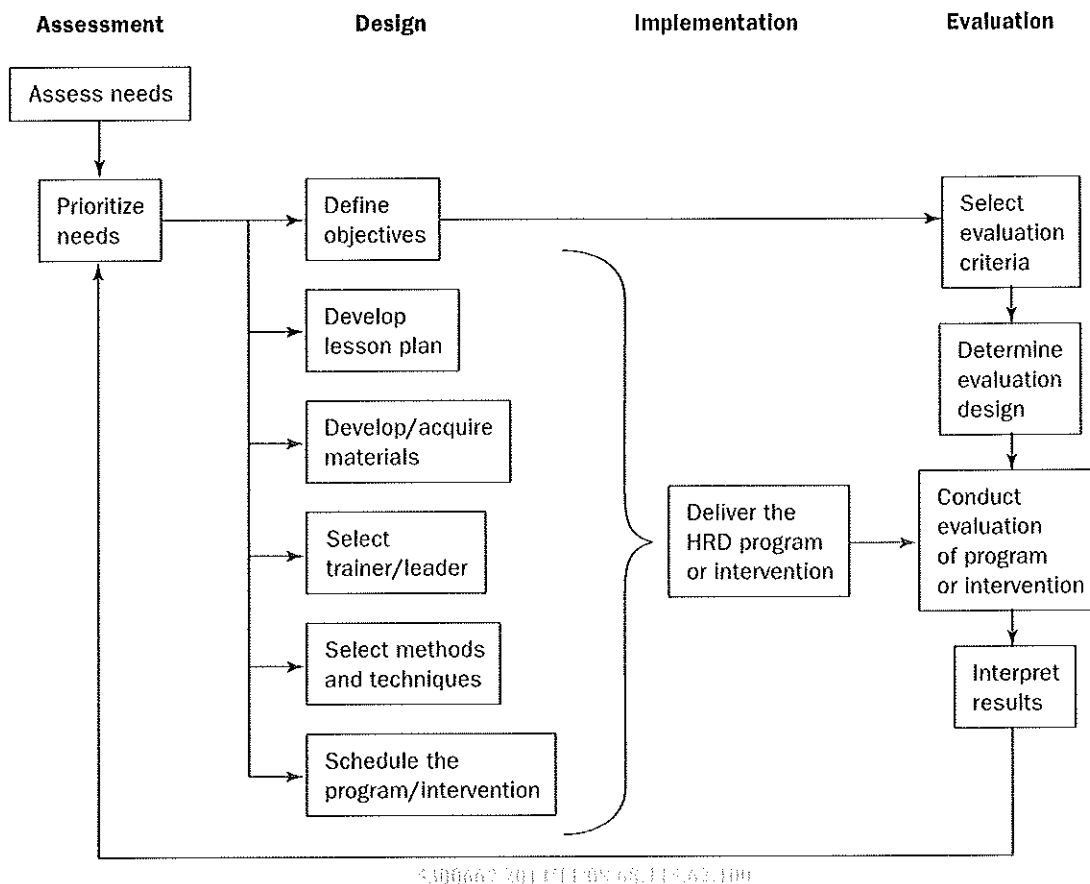
We recognize that in some cases the availability of needs assessment data may be limited. Although HRD practitioners may feel that it will be difficult to design effective training programs, sometimes they must improvise and make the best of such suboptimal situations. At the same time, every effort should be made to persuade management of the importance of conducting needs analysis and prioritizing HRD needs, as time and resources allow.³

Armed with needs assessment data, the focus now turns to designing an effective HRD program. The key activities involved in designing an HRD program are:

1. Setting objectives
2. Selecting the trainer or vendor
3. Developing a lesson plan
4. Selecting program methods and techniques (including the appropriate use of technology)
5. Preparing materials
6. Scheduling the program⁴

Figure 5-1 shows where these activities fit within the training and HRD process model. It is important to stress at the outset that program design can be a lengthy process.⁵ HRD professionals must simultaneously accomplish several other critical tasks throughout the design process. These responsibilities are presented in the boxed insert on the next page. Although the focus of this chapter is on more pragmatic concerns relating to the six points just mentioned (and described in more detail in the following sections), the big picture responsibilities described by Ronald Sims are vital to the success of any program that results from such design efforts. Readers are well advised to keep these overarching responsibilities in mind as they design new HRD initiatives.⁶

FIGURE 5-1 Training and HRD Process Model



Assuming that an important need for training has been identified, the manager or HRD professional must then translate that need into a set of objectives. Objectives define what participants will be expected to learn or do as a result of participating in the HRD program or intervention. However, some managers and HRD professionals may be tempted to make a decision about whether to design the program internally or purchase the program or its key parts, that is, contract a consultant to serve as a trainer, buy program materials, and so on, *before* establishing objectives. In outside purchases, the organization typically uses the objectives developed by the vendor rather than defining its own. However, the chances of success are far greater if the organization identifies the HRD objectives first, before deciding whether to design or purchase the program. How can HRD professionals or top managers know what to buy when they haven't clearly defined what they want the program to accomplish?

Statements of HRD needs are often not detailed enough to be used as specific program outcomes. Rather, they state the problem at hand, and, ideally, include a diagnosis of the problem's causes. Objectives, in contrast, should state the *outcome* the program is intended to produce, including the specific performance expected, the conditions under which it will be performed, and the criteria to be used to judge whether the objective has been achieved.

Seven Overarching Responsibilities of HRD Professionals When Designing HRD Programs

Management professor Ronald Sims argues that training and development initiatives must emphasize “pivotal” employee competencies (or KSAOs, as we described them in Chapter 4). To do this, HRD professionals must engage in a number of significant actions, including the following:

1. Identify the kinds and levels of KSAOs that employees need to attain high levels of performance and achieve organizational results.
2. Develop and maintain organizational structures, conditions, and climates conducive to learning.
3. Generate and provide the necessary resources to conduct a program design.
4. Identify and provide access to off-the-job as well as on-the-job learning resources.
5. Provide individual assistance and feedback on various dimensions of individual performance.
6. Serve as role models and mentors to trainees and the organization in the pursuit of mastery of “pivotal” KSAOs.
7. Develop efficient learning processes that take into account individual learning styles, abilities, and work and life circumstances.

These types of responsibilities (especially points 2 and 3) cannot be completed without active support and involvement from top management. However, with the increasing focus on high performance from all organizations and employees, HRD professionals must ensure that every HRD initiative serves to meet the organization’s strategic goals and objectives. The previous activities must be carried out at the same time that other design issues are being addressed.

SOURCE: Reinventing Training and Development by Ronald R. Sims. Copyright © 1998 by Quorum Books. Reproduced by permission of ABC-CLIO, LLC.

DEFINING THE OBJECTIVES OF THE HRD INTERVENTION

Defining the objectives for the training or HRD program is one of the first things an HRD professional should do—after completing the needs assessment.⁷ Robert Mager defines an objective as a “description of a performance you want learners to be able to exhibit before you consider them competent.”⁸ As such, HRD or *training program objectives* describe the intent and the desired result of the HRD program. The results can be achieved in many ways (such as lectures, role play, and coaching), but this is not specified in the objective. Rather, objectives are used as the *basis* for determining which methods should be used to achieve the specified outcome.

As we have stated, objectives are essential to a successful training or HRD program. In addition to forming the basis for selecting the program content and methods, objectives are used by the organization to evaluate the program’s success, and they also help participants to focus their own attention and efforts during the program.⁹ In short, objectives tell you where the program is going and how to know when you have reached your desired target. As Mager put it rather humorously: “If you are not certain of where you are going you may very well end up somewhere else and not even know it.”¹⁰ The measurement and evaluation issues that we will cover in Chapter 7 are predicated on defining clear objectives in the design phase; without these, learning is less likely to occur, and evaluation less likely to succeed. For example, one study measured the impact of training on company performance among a sample of Chinese manufacturing organizations.¹¹