

The importance of training in maintenance management

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1. INTRODUCTION

Training = investment? Yes or No?

I will begin this article with a provocative notion, or a call for reflection. According to Wikipedia, investment is "the application of capital with the expectation of a future benefit." Will investing in training have future benefits? Absolutely, provided that the training sufficiently matches the needs of the business and personnel.

Nowadays we often hear the term "human capital", and many of us probably wonder what this actually means. According to the same source, Wikipedia, "it is the set of knowledge, skills and attitudes that favor carrying out work in order to produce economic value". Is human capital the most important asset for an organization? The question remains.

Betting on training means investing in competitiveness, productivity, profitability, quality and growth.

On several occasions, I've found that training, alongside maintenance activities, has proven to be an irritating necessity for organizations. There is taboo surrounding the advantages that could result from training, largely due to fear from some bosses that lower ranked personnel may become more knowledgeable on the topic than them. As the old saying goes - "information is power"; so how can this stop time being wasted? Several answers could be listed here, however this is not the purpose of this article. Rather, the objective of this paper is to help organizations realize the need to invest in personal and professional training, enabling them to discover its benefits and positive impacts on their company.

I have found that countries boasting the highest education levels are the most effective in reacting to times of adversity. Whilst they are the quickest in finding solutions to problems, the opposite to this is also true. However, it remains to be seen which side our own nation will be on... the winning team or the losing one?

Note: Companies must continuously offer training to at least 10% of their workers and each worker has the right to at least 35 hours of training per year.

2. ADVANTAGES OF TRAINING

Arguably, one of the most common reasons for "betting" on professional training is as a response to the legal obligation to invest in training employees. This should not be the main reason for offering training, as mentioned above, because this training should focus on meeting the real needs and demands of the company in question.

It occurred to me that a possible reason for resisting training is due to the possibility that you may "invest in the person, and tomorrow it will go away". According to Richard Branson (founder of the Virgin group): "train people well enough so that they can go out, treat them well enough so that they don't want to."

Let's look at some of the advantages of investing in professional training:

- **Personal and professional evolution and growth:** The person feels valued as an employee worthy of being bet on by the company for the future.
- **Differentiation in the market:** Training can help make a difference as there is a focus on qualifying the individual.
- **Appealing company:** Have you ever found it difficult to hire staff because they do not apply for jobs, or are not available? Make the company attractive by betting on people. " It is not the customers who come first, it is the employees. If you take care of your employees, they will take care of your customers" Richard Branson.
- **Knowledge update and validation:** Have you ever felt that something has changed and you haven't even noticed? Information flows faster than the speed of light. Keep up to date, stay on top of the market.
- **Productivity and profitability:** Did you know that low qualification levels can be directly reflected in people's productivity and profitability?
- **Legal compliance:** This is more advantageous (as far as I am concerned) than the other points made above. That shouldn't just be for "abiding by the rules".

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3. IMPACT OF TRAINING ON ORGANIZATIONS (AND PEOPLE)

One of the challenges that companies face these days is keeping their employees motivated and committed to their company.

For employees

It's likely that one of the reasons for the lack of motivation or commitment is that employees do not consider themselves an integral part of companies. In other words, they see themselves as "replaceable" and not "central". On the other hand, it can also be due to people's lack of ambition, or lack of knowledge on how to progress in their careers, or them wanting to start their own business and progression the careers of their own personnel rather than their own.

For companies

It probably involves not finding the right people. According to Jim Collins in his book "From Good to Excellent", companies must first decide the 'who'... then the 'what'. People are not the most important asset of a company, but the right people can be key. In the field of maintenance, the strategy will be no different.

To find the right people, it is necessary to promote desirable and appealing conditions that stimulate commitment and motivation. Undoubtedly, professional (and personal) training can make a major difference. Anyone can be the "right person" as long as they want to.

Let's look at some of the positive impacts on companies and personnel when there is a focus on training (for the company and its employees):

- **"Company-employee" connection:** Through group dynamics that promote the connection between company and employee.
- **Motivation:** The person feels part of the company.
- **Safety:** There is less of that 'betting' feeling on the person in terms of their longevity at the company and their ability to produce quality work;
- **Interpersonal relationships:** It promotes the connection between colleagues, making teams more united and solid. On the other hand, it also fosters better interactions with customers and suppliers, as well as with management.
- **Self-esteem and confidence:** The more you evolve, the more responsibility you can handle. The more responsibility, the greater the pride you feel within the company. It is that "sense of pride" we feel when climbing up the ladder of knowledge.
- **Realization:** It pushes people to challenge themselves. There is room for people to

brainstorm new ideas and projects. There is that feeling of personal and professional growth.

- **Productivity:** Qualifying people offers skills that promote increased productivity.

I'll leave you with this: on a scale of 1 to 10, quantify each of the points above. Where do you feel your technicians rank?

4. THE CHOICE OF TRAINING

Most HR departments factor in the needs of each company department and the company's strategic goals prior to defining their annual training plan; this is referred to as "specified training".

There is also a form of "general" training, usually delving into the behavioral, linguistic, and informative aspects of training. In essence, there is a focus on providing employees with knowledge and skills on issues that are not directly related to their day-to-day activities, though they can contribute on the whole to improving the individual's performance; these are referred to as 'soft skills' or 'essential skills'.

The role of the maintenance leader is also to encourage technicians to leave their comfort zone, promoting training in areas that differ from the technical aspect of work. In addition to this, they should listen to what the technicians may want to learn. Asking a broad question may open this discussion, for example: "What training would you like to attend this year?"

From the author's perspective, there are (at least) 3 questions to answer once a willingness to train has been shown:

- Why that course?
- What will the technician gain from the course?
- What will the company gain from that technician attending the course?

One thing is certain, people are hungry to train yet they are sometimes not encouraged to do so, given the necessary support by their managers. Did you know that in this new societal structure (as of March 2020), about 30% of company personnel have been looking for online training? This is likely the result of having to telecommute from home. Will this become the new norm?

I am a trainer, and it has always been a concern of mine to deepen my own knowledge and understanding across areas that are not only technical, so that I can put these newfound skills into practice (when possible) and pass on this information to my trainees. As a result, I will highlight 3 (three) outcomes that have encouraged me as a trainer to continue this trend:

- A trainee has progressed in their career after technical training.

- A trainee who replied to the question “How are you enjoying the training?” with “I learning a lot.”
- A trainee who responded with “thank you” after informing me that “in the last two years, we have been unable to undertake what we have just completed in the last two days.”

These were certainly not the only examples of positive responses, though these are the ones that immediately spring to mind. Reinforcement is key; investing in training brings short-term return on investment (ROI).

5. THE FORMATION FORM

As mentioned, there has been a growing demand for online training as a result of the our new way of life. Some people wonder when we will have face-to-face training again, whilst others prefer online training. There is something for everyone.

The ideal scenario is that when choosing a certain course, there is a sense of trust and connection between the student and the teacher.

Bear in mind that there is compulsory training to be given by manufacturers and legal representatives of the equipment. In terms of training for the sake of improving professional skills, this should be taught by those with accredited qualifications to do so. However, bear in mind that experts in fields similar to the area of training in question may also be qualified to teach the topic. To illustrate this, it does not make much sense to use Navaltik’s training services to explain the “operations with forklifts”, as it is not our area of expertise, however, if training in “maintenance management and organization” is something that would be of interest, Navaltik is a ‘market reference’ that can be turned to.

As with practically anything in life, there are pros and cons with both in-person and online training formats. Neither format is better or worse than the other. It is up to the trainee to choose according to their personal preferences and learning objectives from the course, alongside other conditions such as environment, travel, costs.

I will leave some aspects that distinguish between classroom training and online training:

Classroom Training

- Closer proximity and interaction between the trainer and the trainees, allowing a continuous stream of information and “feedback” between the two parties

- Questions can be answered when posed / conjured up
- Facilitation of motivation through live charismatic teaching and engaging training
- Instigating social interactions and real-time exchange of experiences
- The hours are “closed”

Online Training

- The interaction between trainer and trainees can be difficult to maneuver as availability of both to engage simultaneously may vary
- Anywhere (no travel barriers) and with flexible hours (available 24/7) allowing time optimization
- Learning at the pace of each trainee
- Requires more organization and willpower to complete courses
- Reduces the possibilities for socializing and exchanging experiences in real time

6. CONCLUSION

Reflecting on the introduction to this article, we may have a more objective and clear idea when pondering the notion that “training = investment”. It is clear that training people is an investment, with ROI reflected in several different ways, namely relating to changing levels in productivity, profitability, motivation, and so on.

Investing in training must be seen as a catalyst for promoting excellence in terms of personnel working standards, elevating the role of people to that of an invaluable asset for organizations.

There is a section of this article that refers to Jim Collins in the context of finding the right people; in essence, discovering, developing and retaining these people must be seen as a strategic priority.

The cost of losing people is as much or even greater than that of developing them. Think about it.

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