

'The client recognized that training and development is a key business driver directly affecting the company's performance', explained Sarah. 'We used our expertise in this area to design a management development programme that focuses on enhancing the practical and relevant skills that are needed to take the organization forward. We ensured that the programme was aligned with company objectives and that the client's investment in its management team would deliver a tangible return on investment. This was, and had to be, a very business-driven process—i.e., linked to the business plan, the corporate objectives, and the skills development plan. Following clarification of the client's requirements, in terms of identifiable business needs, it was possible to identify three key themes. These were managing change, managing self, and managing resources. To assist with the detailed design it was agreed with the client to analyse the learning styles of the managers who would be attending the programme. This was done by issuing 'Personal Styles' Questionnaires. This then enabled us to produce a modular programme that reflected managers' learning preferences. This has the advantage of ensuring that the trainers can tailor the delivery of the programme to have maximum impact on the delegates. As part of our service we always research possible sources of funding, such as the Welsh Assembly Workforce Development Plan, Sector Skills Council, and Business in Focus. Very often there is support available for up to 50 per cent of the cost of commercial delivery, although maximum funding is only usually available for accredited programmes, such as those involving national vocational qualifications. Once the programme was designed and agreed it was rolled out on-site. We developed a flexible approach to the delivery of the programme to accommodate the client's business needs. All modules were delivered on site and included role play, case studies, and practical assignments, which were all linked to business issues and objectives. In total there were 12 modules, each lasting one day. So, for a typical manager the whole programme took twelve months to complete. Evaluation and review was at the end of each module using 'End of Module' Evaluation form linked to key performance indicators or KPIs. These were then collated and reported in graphical format. At the same time future requirements were identified'.

In terms of the results of the programme, Sarah explains that 'Managers acquired a portfolio of skills enabling them to manage change, cope constructively with conflict, develop and motivate their teams, delegate effectively, and solve problems effectively. Skills were immediately converted into practical experience within the business and action plans were used to enable managers to achieve business objectives. What was particularly noticeable was that increased individual performance and satisfaction levels resulting in improved team work. More generally, the corporate culture and values were both developed and reinforced. The programme highlighted the client's commitment to long-term career pathways and enabled better succession planning. There was a review of internal systems identifying areas for improvement and sharing of best practice, for example, the development of an integrated customer service strategy. 'Overall' concludes Sarah, 'by investing in the development of senior personnel the client has been able to cascade the training internally through coaching and mentoring the next management tier. This has led to a culture of continued learning and development within the organization'.

Case questions

1. Why might an organization use a training consultancy to design, and also deliver and evaluate, a major training and development programme? What are the potential benefits?
2. To what extent has Acorn adhered to good design practice in this case? Draw upon relevant theory, concepts, and models to support your answer.
3. Convert the programme objectives shown in box 1 into specific learning objectives.