



Training Is Not Always the Answer

What is really getting in the way of performance?

When performance, behaviour or confidence is not where it needs to be, training is often the first solution people reach for.

Sometimes that is exactly right.

But if people already know what to do and still are not doing it, something else may be getting in the way.

The issue

Training can build knowledge, develop confidence, create consistency and give people a shared way of working.

But training is most effective when the issue is genuinely about knowledge, skill or confidence.

If the real barrier is unclear expectations, unrealistic workload, poor systems, inconsistent leadership or a culture where the desired behaviour is not reinforced, training alone is unlikely to create lasting change.

Kirkpatrick's evaluation model reminds us that learning should not only be judged by whether people enjoyed a session, but by whether it led to learning, behaviour change and results.

Transfer of learning research also highlights that workplace context matters. People need the right support, opportunity and environment to apply what they have learned.

Key Question

Before asking “**what training do people need?**”, ask:

What is really stopping people from doing what is needed?



A Practical Decision Guide

Before commissioning training, pause and diagnose the real issue

Training is often easier to commission than it is to diagnose the real problem.

It gives the organisation something visible to do but if the underlying issue is not a knowledge, skill or confidence gap, training may only address the surface.

What you are seeing	Training may help if ...	Also look at ...
People do not know what to do	There is a genuine knowledge gap	Whether expectations have been clearly communicated
People know what to do but are not doing it	They need practice, feedback or confidence	Motivation, workload, leadership follow-up and consequences
Performance is inconsistent	People need a shared standard or approach	Whether managers are reinforcing that standard consistently
Behaviour is poor	People need clarity about expected behaviours	Culture, accountability and what is tolerated
A new process is not being followed	People do not understand the process	Whether the process is realistic, accessible and supported
Managers avoid difficult conversations	They lack skill, confidence or a clear framework	Whether the organisation supports honest, fair accountability
Teams are not working well together	They need shared tools, language or space to reflect	Trust, purpose, roles, relationships and unresolved tension
Change is not landing	People do not understand the change or their role in it	Communication, involvement, capacity and emotional impact
Mistakes are repeated	People need clearer guidance or practice	Whether the system makes the right thing easy to do



Before Training, Explore the 5Cs

A simple diagnostic for understanding what is really getting in the way.

A useful learning needs conversation should look beyond the course title.

Instead of starting with “**What training shall we put on?**”, start with “**What are we trying to change?**”

Clarity: Do people know what is expected of them?

Ask:

- What exactly do we need people to do differently?
- Have we described this clearly?
- Do people understand what good looks like?

Capability: Do people have the knowledge, skill and confidence to do it?

Ask:

- What do people need to know?
- What do they need to be able to do?
- Where are the real skills or confidence gaps?

Capacity: Do people have the time, tools and resources to apply it?

Ask:

- Are workloads realistic?
- Do people have the right tools and support?
- Are systems helping or hindering?

Culture: Does the working environment support the desired behaviour?

Ask:

- What behaviours are currently rewarded?
- What behaviours are tolerated?
- Are leaders role-modelling what they expect?

Consequences: What happens when people do – or do not – act in the desired way?

Ask:

- Is the desired behaviour noticed and reinforced?
- What happens when people do not follow through?
- Are managers confident to follow up fairly?

If people **cannot** do something, training may help.

If people **can** do it but **do not**, something else may be getting in the way



Simply Wright

Making Training More Likely to Work

When training is the right answer, connect it to the workplace before, during and after the session.

Before Training

Be clear on the purpose.

- What behaviour or outcome needs to change?
- Why does this matter now?
- Who needs to be involved?
- What should managers do before the session?

During Training

Make it practical and relevant.

- Use real examples from people's work.
- Give people time to practice.
- Allow discussion, reflection and challenge.
- Help people identify what they will do differently.

After Training

Support transfer into practice.

- Managers should follow up in one-to-ones or team meetings.
- People need opportunities to apply the learning.
- Barriers should be identified and addressed.
- Progress should be reviewed, not assumed.

The next time the answer seems to be **“We need training”**, pause and ask: **What would need to be true in the workplace for people to actually use this learning?**

If the answer is unclear, the issue may not be only a training need. It may be a leadership, culture, system or organisational development issue.

Evidence base

Kirkpatrick Model — evaluation through reaction, learning, behaviour and results.

<https://www.kirkpatrickpartners.com/the-kirkpatrick-model/>

Baldwin and Ford: Transfer of Training — the role of trainee characteristics, training design and work environment in applying learning.

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1744-6570.1988.tb00632.x>

70:20:10 Model — a useful prompt for thinking beyond formal courses, while not treating the numbers as a fixed rule.

<https://www.ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively-articles/70-20-10-rule/>

CIPD Learning Evaluation, Impact and Transfer — practical guidance on linking learning to performance and evaluating impact.

<https://www.cipd.org/en/knowledge/factsheets/evaluating-learning-factsheet/>