

**SWP 52/90 EXPLORING THE ENVIRONMENT, DISCOVERING  
LEARNING RESOURCES AND CREATING LOW COST  
TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT - PART 1**

**GRAHAM ELKIN**  
**Visiting Fellow (from University of Otago Business School)**  
**Cranfield School of Management**  
**Cranfield Institute of Technology**  
**Cranfield, Bedford MK43 OAL**  
**UK**

**(tel 0234 751122)**

**Forthcoming in The Training Officer, July 1990**

**Copyright: Elkin 1990**



# **EXPLORING THE ENVIRONMENT, DISCOVERING LEARNING RESOURCES AND CREATING LOW COST TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT:**

## **Part One.**

**Graham Elkin**

**University of Otago Business School**

**Visiting Fellow, Cranfield School of Management**

*Graham Elkin was Training and Development Controller for House of Fraser for 7 years until the mid 1980's. Being charged with developing a workforce of over 20,000 full time equivalent people in over 300 Department stores, shops and other locations in 3 countries, but with a limited budget, led to an approach to training which produced remarkably cost effective Human Resource Development. He has just completed 5 years as Director of the University of Otago (New Zealand) MBA and is currently on leave at Cranfield. In addition to his academic role he practices as a management consultant in New Zealand.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Most trainers believe they have insufficient budget to do all that needs to be done to develop the people and organisation for which they work. That feeling is not confined to small businesses or to any particular sector. It is widespread. It can lead to sense of powerlessness to achieve anything at all in the face of the many opportunities which cannot be taken.

The problem may be shortage of cash or corporate commitment. It may also be a lack of understanding by the trainer of how much can be achieved by good use of opportunities and resources not automatically seen as relevant to training.

This paper suggests some orientations which can lead to greater productivity in training however few the resources under a trainers control.

A clearly cost-effective contribution to the bottom line results of an enterprise often leads to an expansion of the contributing activity. If as a result of the changes in training orientation more is achieved, more resources may flow towards training.

A systematic model is suggested as the basis for searching for existing non-training resources that can be turned into learning opportunities to augment the investment in training. Some practical examples illustrate the way these approaches can add to the training effort by creating low cost but effective learning experiences.

## KEY ORIENTATIONS

### Individual learning not training

Trainers should not be pre-occupied with their role as teachers and instructors. They need to be concerned with effective learning. Learning is often defined as "*a relatively permanent change in behaviour as a result of experience*". Change of behaviour as a result of experience is part of everyone's life. It is not only common but also has a large element of randomness and trial and error. The task of a trainer is to encourage particular learning in a less than random way. It is a fundamental mistake to behave as if the only way to reduce the random nature of learning is to engage in one to one training or instructing by a trainer.

Trainer time is one of the most limiting factors for trainers. To use limited time largely, for example, on the repetition of routine information at induction, often for one or two employees at a time, is a very low return investment.

It is far more effective to design and facilitate low cost ways that newcomers learn without using so much trainer time and resources. The time saved can then be used to devise new ways for other needs to be met.

### Learner centred and controlled learning

Accepting not only a learner *centred* approach but also adopting a learner *controlled* strategy implies making learner a manager of their learning in a wider sense. It gives control of the whole process to the learner and the trainer from many routine activities.

The traditional role of the trainer and by implication the major investment of their time is as in Fig 1(i) (1990). The trainer is at the centre of the process using their time to make decisions, and controlling the activities of learners. The order, content, speed and assessment of learning are all under tutor control and management. So

is the assessment of success and access to resources for learning. Often the only resource available will be the tutor themselves.

This approach is very inefficient. It denies individual differences in learning styles and speeds and does not develop individual responsibility for learning.

It is better to place the learner at the centre of the process- allowing the individual to make many of the decisions concerning order, pace, resources used and initial assessment of learning. As Fig 1(ii) suggests, the role of the trainer becomes one of facilitating the management of learning by individuals.

Where individuals have been responsible for their own development they have usually been seen to learn faster and more effectively than in the traditional model- another advantage!

A further step is to develop the ability of line managers to carry out the facilitation of subordinates learning through learning contracts, mentoring and other devices adding to the training effort and freeing the trainer further.

**Fig 1**

**about here**

## **Facilitation and innovation**

With the orientations above the basic mission of a trainer remains the same. It is to identify the learning needs which if met would give the best cost-benefit return to the organisation. Having prioritised the needs, ways to meet them must be designed. The process of learning has to be facilitated and its effectiveness evaluated.

Creative conceptual skills are needed. So are high-order negotiating and "making it happen" skills. Implied is a willingness and ability to be totally at home with a whole variety of people, their objectives and technology. The role of an internal consultant with well developed process skills. Instructor skills and the choosing of external courses are no longer sufficient basis for a success as a trainer.

Innovative trainers have a radical approach to what can constitute learning experiences. They define the whole organisational world and beyond as possible contexts and content for learning. The world is a laboratory full of things, people, places and documents ready to be mediated into useful learning experiences.

## REDEFINING THE TRAINING ENVIRONMENT AND RESOURCES.

The time and money invested by trainers on training can be seen as expenditure to create an environment for learning- or to send people away to one. It is more productive to see the whole world as a potential experiential learning laboratory and the trainer as the one who can structure and create learning experiences from elements in it.

A systematic audit of the environment can identify resources, opportunities and experiences that can be utilised at low cost.

There are at least five categories of possible resources for learning. In addition to cash there are people, places, things, and documents and other information. Other categories may be helpful but it is more important to creatively search the environment than to develop a neat and perfect schema.

These five types of resources occur in a variety of differing contexts. The closest to the individual learner are in the workgroup setting. Others exist in the wider plant, company or enterprise context. Beyond the company there may be resources in the market place that the enterprise is active in. The wider society also has a large number of resources to tap.

Putting together the types of resources and the context in which they are found gives the model below (Fig 2). The model provides a basis for a systematic search for opportunities to create low cost learning.

It shows the individual at the centre of the learning environment with the contexts most accessible to the learner nearer the centre.

Creative educational technology and design may bring together resources from a variety of parts of the model.

**Fig 2**

**about here**

## CREATING LEARNING RESOURCES

### PEOPLE AS LEARNING RESOURCES

#### **People : *In the workgroup***

Almost all employees work with other people. Within the group that new employees join will be a reservoir of knowledge skills and attitudes. It may be possible to find a way to use this experience.

***Example 1: Illum***

At the Illum department store in Copenhagen, all new staff were given a fold-over card which fitted into a pocket. The card contained a schedule of items that the new person must become familiar with in the first day and the first week. Each department had a mentor. The mentor was an ordinary member of staff who was paid a small amount each week. The mentor was responsible for seeing that the newcomer did know all the prescribed things and signing them off. After one week the Training Officer became involved. The cost of the scheme was tiny. Subsequently in some British stores a badge showing the individual was a mentor was the only cost. Many volunteers were available. The process gave increased job satisfaction to the mentors and allowed training to take place in the workplace during quiet times. The trainer was spared much repetition.

A further development is to identify the member of staff in each area who had a natural flair for display or selling and involve them in on-the-job training. The role of the trainer is to provide the way of turning experience into learning and testing it.

***People: In the wider plant or company***

Most organisations have experts in marketing, people, production, finance and accounting. While these people are employed for their specialist expertise, they can be tapped as resources. The incentive for them is the lack of understanding of their area that leads to problems consuming their time. The time is seen as an investment. Specialists are often enthusiasts so may be pleased to talk about their area whether or not there are problems.

It is very important that learning experiences are designed to give the subject matter experts happy experiences as well as create effective learning. Experts who develop a skill at training work often come to value the change in routine and wider role. This can only happen if the learning is managed through exercises and feedback so as to be successful and non-threatening.

*Example 2 : The Coffee Shops*

One subsidiary operating 21 department stores, experienced continuous dissatisfaction with the performance of their in- store coffee shops. It was due to high food costs and poor food presentation. The training courses requested were impractical and too costly.

A trainer worked with an expert manager (the Regional Catering Manager) and with food suppliers. They produced assembly instructions and colour pictures for all the standard food lines and a programme that could be used by local managers to train new staff and continue monitoring standards.

The expert manager's time was free, the company advertising department produced the pictures and diagrams and a major supplier paid for the production costs.

Within many organisations there are also individuals with special expertise not required in their current jobs. It may be a hobby or a previous career. They are often very pleased to have the chance to use the skill or knowledge.

In my time with House of Fraser I uncovered a lawyer working in a store and an ex-professional photographer working in promotional design.

The lawyer was able to contribute to employment and consumer law sessions on management training courses. She was also able to monitor changes in legislation and to produce training guides, aids and resources.

The photographer regularly took pictures of West End stores for management courses concerning presentation of merchandise. He was also able to produce pictures and artwork for training materials.

Both did the work largely in their own time or along with their regular work. The only cost to the training function was the time to train them in presentation skills and to negotiate for their release with their line managers for some time.

***Example 3 Induction and Training of Security Staff.***

There was a need to train security staff in the law, company policy and the physical security of property. Security staff were employed in small numbers in a large number of locations. They also joined one at a time. Traditional training courses were again expensive and impractical.

The existence of a Security Controller in each division provided an opportunity. As six out of the seven had been ranking police officers, they represented expertise to utilise, provided it could be done so in the context of profitable management and good learning and educational design.

A senior trainer convened a meeting with the Security Controllers and some Store Managers. They developed a training programme in 12 parts. Each part entailed reading some text, applying it or making an investigation and answering a set of questions. One example was concerning the security of premises. The text was provided by the company experts and the supplier to the company of alarms and locks. The exercise involved starting from the perimeter, of the property and completing a survey of all the precautions taken against intruders, fire and so on. It continued through the various methods of preventing theft and fraud by customers and staff.

The programme could be completed one step at a time as on going training or 12 steps over a short period. It was all done in the workplace. The individuals studied and were tested and signed off when the Divisional Manager visited the store. When all 12 were complete a company wide certificate was issued from the Head Office.

***People: In the Market Place***

At the market place level there are many potential people resources. Most organisations will be involved with suppliers, customers competitors and their allied organisations.

Organisations may belong to trade bodies who have experts. Suppliers may have experts who can be used to design or be part of training efforts. Suppliers who are or think they are competing with others for business may provide the time of their experts.

A major bespoke corsetry supplier to House of Fraser ran many course in corsetry fitting free to encourage the purchase of their products.

The provision and production of sales training aids can be undertaken with a trainer facilitating the work of the subject matter expert.

The Association for the Prevention of Theft in Shops (an industry body funded by donation and subscription) provided many speakers about the prevention of fraud. Major shopfitters gave demonstrations of lighting and shop fitting. Every market place has potential learning resource people.

### **People: *In the Wider Society***

In the wider society there are many people eager to carry out training for organisations. Often they are from single issue organisations, but a number mixed together dilute the intensity of that approach.

Government agencies will often help in the fields of employment. ACAS in Industrial Relations, The Health and Safety Executive on Safety, the Equal Opportunities Commission on Discrimination, agencies promoting the welfare of retired people for pre-retirement courses and counselling and so on.

Local Health Authorities and Community Services agencies area also worth considering. With young people the number of interested bodies is also considerable.

#### ***Example 4: Industrial Chaplains***

One resource unknown to many people is the 1500 full and part-time Industrial Chaplains. Provided at no cost to organisations as part of the work of the church, they can have a number of roles. A major producer of gaskets for the motor industry has a female chaplain who takes regular sessions every two weeks with young workers in the life skills areas. She is also involved in the induction process.

At a vehicle assembly plant in the midlands the chaplain is involved in the induction training of every group of newly recruited production workers.

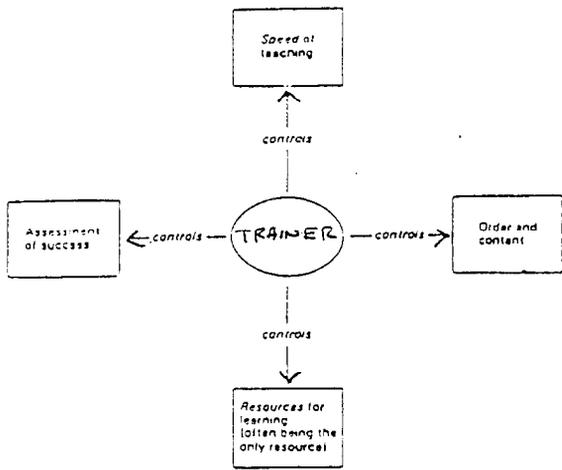
At the Head Office of one of the U.K.'s biggest building societies, the chaplain is part of the training work carried out by an occupational health team. In with low profile is the use of Industrial Chaplains. Another source of people are those involved in education. Students on sandwich courses, industrial placements, holiday placements and teachers wanting some experience can be high quality low cost resources.

One of the most powerful ways to move forward is to train line managers to facilitate learning as part of their everyday work. This may involve traditional instructor skills or developing their facilitation skills and providing resources. At the heyday of the industrial training boards every first line manager in the House of Fraser group (in excess of 2,500) was a trained instructor. All the stores opened 30 minutes late one day each week to allow them to conduct workplace training. At the time there were financial incentives to train trainers and instructors. The effect

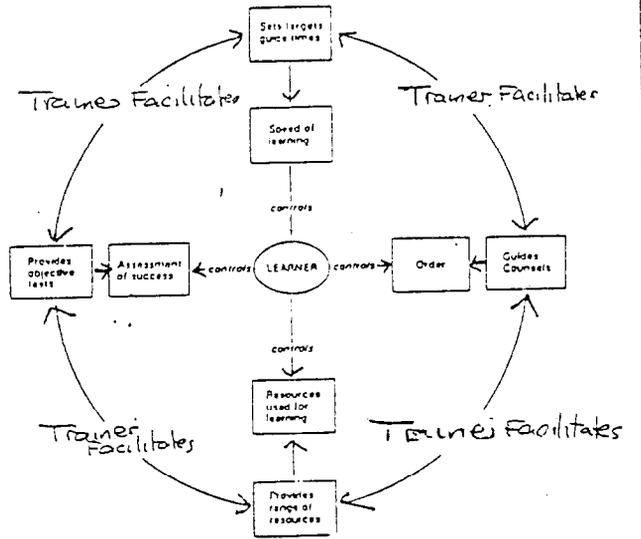
was to augment a national training staff numbered in tens with additional manpower. It was the equivalent of 20 additional full time trainers.

The role of the training professionals was to devise materials to develop their skills and allow them to produce effective learning resources themselves. The Training Resource Service described later was developed to meet that need.

Fig 1



1.1 Trainer controlled Learning



1.2 Learner controlled learning

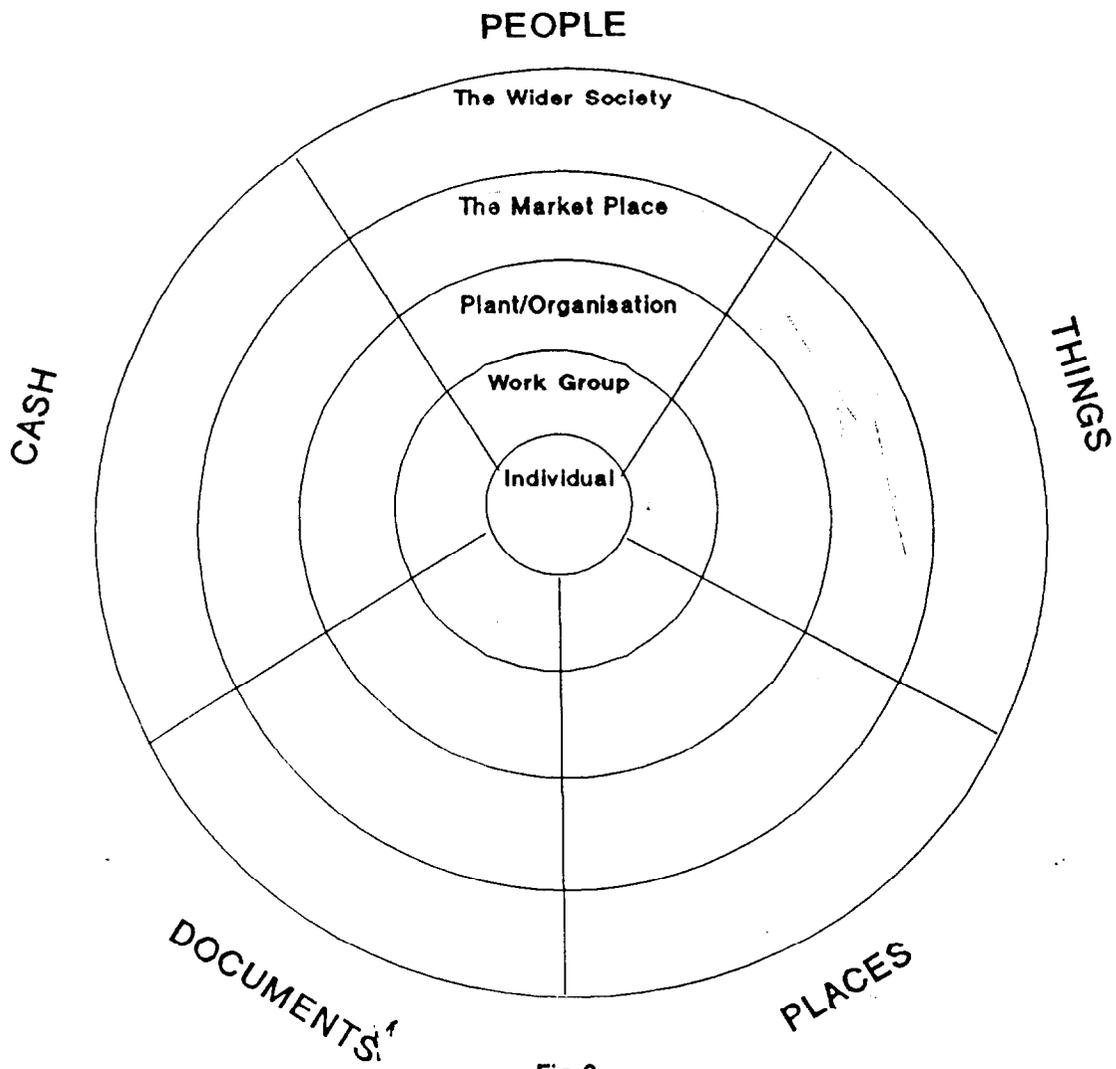


Fig 2

Redefining the Learning Environment and its Resources