An overview of inservice education

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In this article, the author presents a brief review of the four basic components of inservice educational offerings: utility or need, content, presentation, and evaluation. For specific information regarding the AANA standards for inservice continuing education programs for nurse anesthetists, refer to the 1980 AANA Continuing Education Manual, or contact the AANA Continuing Education Department.

The rapidly changing character and the increased complexity of our society demands continued updating of one's professional knowledge, understanding, and skills. It is evident that any improvement in standards and expectations cannot be met without the constant involvement of knowledgeable and skillful professionals engaged in the continuing education process. Inservice education is a primary area for serious consideration in meeting the needs of our society through this ongoing growth development.1, 2, 3

Inservice education has gained rapid popularity in the past few years as a valuable means of educating people in a given institution by using the most recent facts, methods, and ideas in their particular function or role.3 It is not financially feasible for an establishment to educate all employees extramurally at its own expense. The absence of personnel from their assigned functions also detracts from the efficient operation of the facility. A practical solution is, therefore, to provide educational programs on the premises.4

Goals for inservice education

When planning inservice education, the inservice staff of an institution must recognize the personal needs of the individual in the program, as well as the educational needs.5 They realize that developing an employee in both such aspects will enhance the individual's potential to be more responsible and productive. Therefore, institutions establish goals for inservice education to fulfill both needs of the employee as well as to achieve the objectives, goals, and aims of the institution. Thus, the following five goals should be included in the offerings of any inservice education department:

1. To develop greater understanding of special purposes and functions of the institution by the employee.
2. To enhance the personal confidence and self worth of each employee.
3. To develop greater competency in the employee's role.
4. To develop greater competency in the employee's skills and techniques.
5. To develop greater competency in the employee's area of responsibility.6

Some organizations find it financially reasonable to select a few key employees to attend educational workshops, seminars, and courses in other locations. On their return, these employees can
then impart to their co-workers the knowledge obtained. Other institutions prefer hiring professional educators to determine their particular educational needs and to implement methods of inservice education so as to improve the knowledge, understanding, and skills of employees. The type of arrangement preferred by a given establishment is not the most important issue. Rather, the pertinent factors are utility and/or need, content, presentation, and useful evaluation in an inservice education department.

These four factors must be approached in a systematic manner. First, the teacher must recognize the need and/or purpose for the inservice program. Secondly, he or she must have the appropriate material and knowledge to meet the objectives, goals, and aims of the course offered. Thirdly, the presentation of available material is of paramount importance. The purpose and need for the study may be readily known, but unless the material is properly presented in an interesting and organized fashion, the effort of the instructor is futile. Lastly, evaluation of the activity to determine its value is extremely important. Because of the eminent individual worth of these four factors in inservice education, it is generally agreed that considerable forethought should be entertained in each area prior to the implementation of a program.

Preliminary planning

The most significant element in preliminary work for an educational endeavor is adequate determination of the learning needs of each employee. This includes an understanding of needs as perceived by both the employee and the employer. The inservice educational planner must have an acute awareness and understanding of the employee's needs and the significance of the relationship between the employee and his or her needs. An inservice program that is incomprehensible to employees will not succeed. Furthermore, without adequate insight into the reasonable relationship between the educational program and its need, it would be unrealistic to expect an enthusiastic response from the participants.

The process of determining needs provides an opportunity to consult with key people in the institution and to involve them in the assessment of needs and the shaping of the educational activity. More than 100 years ago, Abraham Lincoln began an address with these words: "If we could first know where we are, and whither we are tending, we could judge better what to do, and how to do it." The two-way communication established through such consultation is an excellent start in following Lincoln's advice.

Once the need or needs have been identified, learning objectives must be designed to organize the educational activity and measure the success of the program. The terminal behavior reveals whether or not the learning endeavor has resulted in changing specific aspects of employee performance for the better. Thus, it is important that objectives be set forth in performance terms. In so doing, the true worth of the program may be determined.

Since objectives are such an important part of the planning of programs, it might be well to look at objectives in greater detail. The objective should be stated in terms of what the participant in the educational endeavor should be able to do when he or she has completed the instruction. The objective is a statement describing a behavior outcome, rather than a behavioral process or procedure. It describes results rather than the means of achieving those results. Thus, objectives are useful in providing a sound basis for: (1) the selection or designing of instructional content and procedures; (2) evaluating or assessing the success of the instruction, and (3) organizing the student/employee's own efforts and activities for the accomplishment of the important instructional intents.

The actual fashioning of the presentation is the step that naturally follows the determination of learning needs and the setting of learning objectives. The presentation can take many forms: an orientation session, a meeting on clinical skills for nursing personnel, a demonstration of new equipment, or an institution-wide supervisory development program, to name but a few. In each case, the extent, quality, and permanency of learning by employees will be strongly influenced by the care taken in designing the learning experience.

When designing a program outline, eight principles must constantly be borne in mind by the inservice planner:

1. Learning depends on motivation. The desire to learn must come ultimately from the learner himself.

2. Learning depends upon a capacity to learn. Educational planning for adult employees must proceed on the assumption that people retain their capacity to learn at any age and do not diminish this capacity.

3. Learning depends upon past and current experience. Teachers must be ready to cope with a wide range of participant capabilities.
4. Learning depends upon active involvement of the learner. Action is fundamental in the creation and maintenance of interest in learning new knowledge and skills.

5. Learning is enhanced by problem-solving. It is best to emphasize ways to cope with familiar difficulties.

6. Learning effectiveness is dependent upon feedback. The basic intention of feedback is to motivate learning.

7. Learning is enhanced by an informal atmosphere and the freedom to make mistakes. Informality and democratic treatment are not ends in themselves; they are conditions which permit productive learning to occur more readily.

8. Learning is augmented by novelty, variety, and challenge. Engaging and maintaining the interest of participants are fundamentals to any effective educational meeting. The key to adult education is the desire to learn that which is brought to the educational situation. Our need to know and to extend considerably, our capacity to know gives rise to education. Consequently, this process should be designed to nurture that desire in every feasible way.

Evaluation

Within an educational frame of reference, evaluation means the determination of the value of a training or educational activity, as seen and judged by the participants, supervisors, and instructors. Supervisors and instructors are able to observe the participants in practical on-the-job situations. Evaluation can be a complex process, which may account for the brief treatment given to it in many programs. The difficulties in performing useful evaluations tend to be glossed over and often the easy way out is taken—this being not to evaluate at all.

Evaluation is not merely a single act or event but an entire process. It is an intrinsic part of the interrelated activities of: determining needs, establishing learning objectives, conducting the program, and measuring the end results. Evaluation should not be skinned over lightly if it is to be of any use. Effective evaluation can be extremely valuable to program participants, planners, instructors, and to others in the participant's work environment. Therefore, careful evaluation is an essential part of any inservice program and must satisfy several basic criteria:

1. Evaluation must facilitate self-evaluation. The most fundamentally important outcome is what happens within the learner himself.
2. Evaluation must encompass every objective.
3. Evaluation must facilitate learning and teaching.
4. Evaluation must produce records appropriate to the purposes for which records are essential. These records should establish objective achievement or failure, and guidelines for future programs, presentations and speakers. It is important that the records be good so that whenever they are needed they can deliver exactly that information which is truly significant.
5. Evaluation must provide continuing feedback into the larger questions of curriculum development and educational policy. The institutions can measure their investment value by this feedback.

Summary

The development of human resources must be regarded by the administration of any institution as a major strategy for achieving its goals. The major components of this strategy are education and training. The inservice educational programs can assist and support the institution and its ever-changing needs by implementing current curricula, projecting future needs, and influencing the performance quality of its employees.

REFERENCES


ADDITIONAL READING

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