

**SWP 53/90 EXPLORING THE ENVIRONMENT, DISCOVERING  
LEARNING RESOURCES AND CREATING LOW COST  
TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT - PART 2**

**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, August 1990**

**Copyright: Elkin 1990**



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

## **Part Two**

**Graham Elkin**

**University of Otago Business School**

**Visiting Fellow, Cranfield School of Management**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Part One of this article discussed the importance of focussing upon learning rather than teaching and upon learner control of learning rather than trainer control. A model for identifying learning opportunities was developed. It encouraged a search for people, documents, places, things and cash which may be used to produce learning at the level of the workgroup, the factory or plant, the market place and the wider society ( Fig 1 below). Part one gave examples of the use of people as learning resources.

**Fig 2 from part 1 repeated here as Fig 1**

Part Two continues with example of low cost training using documents, places, things and cash. It concludes with suggestions for minimising and recovering the costs of training production and design by Do-It-Yourself techniques and selling-on training and facilities.

## **DOCUMENTS AND OTHER INFORMATION AS LEARNING RESOURCES**

All of us live in a world where information can be overwhelming. Information does not always lead to learning. I still shudder to remember joining BP when I was 18 and being given a Fortran manual to read to understand computers. Presumably people did learn some of the information that was in the manual as a result of someone turning the manual into a learning experience. I wasn't one of them. Information needs to be mediated into learning to make it valuable. The role of the trainer is to provide the mediation.

### **Documents : *In the Workplace.***

Almost all places of work have recorded information in some form that can be turned into a learning package.

#### ***Example 5: The Harrods Credit Sales Procedures***

At Harrods there were very complicated procedures for sanctioning credit and cheques in departments. Hundreds of thousands of pounds were being lost as a result of documentation that could not be used to charge goods due to errors in checking by staff.

The procedures were described in a manual kept in each the department. The rules were taught in induction training. The manual became an in department learning resource. Simple training instructions were written and a collection of Visa slips, cheques, in House credit cards etc incorporated in it containing mistakes. Individuals were able to test their own progress and success at the systems. Faced with problems to solve individuals made sense of the manual. Being located in the department meant the work individual had people to ask as well as the manual. A final set of materials were available to test final competence.

### **Documents: *In the wider plant or company.***

#### ***Example 6: Profit and Expenses***

There was a need to teach Department Managers in House of Fraser to understand the structure of the profit reporting form used for the measurement of each department store's performance. An expense coding guide existed which was held in each profit centre. A simple two page introduction was written by a trainer with the help of the Head Office Chief Accountant. It described the system and the rationale behind its structure with examples. A series of illustrative items were provided. Managers were asked to code the expenses and check the answers against a set held by the local store accountant. The local accountant was also expected to give advice and to check final mastery by providing the final set of test items.

The same guide was used to explore strategies of increasing profit with Store General Managers. This time the results for two stores were given on the profit forms and the managers asked to make comparisons and recommendations as to those items that need investigating.

A rather sterile photocopied listing of codes and explanations became an effective learning device .

There are large numbers of reports, presentations, manuals and guides which can be the source of low cost training if handled well.

Annual accounts and other shareholder documents can provide the basis of a learning package for newcomers of various levels. Experience suggests that they will need mediating with some learning activity to be useful

**Documents: from *The Market Place***

When new legislation arises enterprises may be able to use documents produced by trade bodies and other consortia to which they belong. Suppliers and manufacturers often produce promotional and product information. If it is regularly collected and categorised in a particular department, it can be adapted to comparison exercises for individual learning. A key move is to ensure that product information is disseminated widely.

**Documents: from *the Wider Society***

Most of the bodies who can provide people to help with training will supply large amounts of documentation. Government agencies have been profligate in their distribution of paper in the wake of legislation. In some cases there seems to be no limit to what can be obtained for nothing. The material will need to be added to if they are to be good learning aids.

For a trainers own development the ACAS work Research Unit is a most helpful source of abstracts and Human Resource information.

***Example 7: The Management Update***

One way of encouraging self-development in managers is to build the habit of reading to keep up professionally. It can start with little expense. The distribution of business related material plus some self development ideas and exercises to managers with some form of response required to some of the material is a start. Material can come from the trainers scanning of the media, from journals taken by other managers or by inviting contributions and acknowledging them. The Management Update produced within House of Fraser was on a monthly basis and always included provocative as well as trade material.

If other regular communications exist then it may be possible to include training material on a regular basis. In-house journal producers are usually pleased to have a regular supply of material.

## **PLACES AS LEARNING RESOURCES**

Places are only of interest because of the other resources that are there. They are listed separately to make the point that much learning can take place away from the job or a training room.

### *The Workplace*

Job rotation can provide a means of developing new skills represents a new place to learn.

### *The wider plant or company*

Visits to other departments for secondment or shorter visits may provide learning. Visits to areas which depend upon the output of the area in which people usually work can be particularly useful. Individuals can see the importance of some aspects of quality not previously understood and gain a wider perspective on their own job. Understanding of the total task of the enterprise rises and a sense of solidarity with the workgroup and the company can increase.

Being part of a company-wide project team or other interdisciplinary group can also produce changes in attitude and the growth of new skills such as leading or contributing..

### *The Market Place*

The competitors, customers and suppliers of an enterprise can be useful. Visits to see merchandise being made by selling staff can increase understanding of the benefits of products. In appropriate

cases visits to customers may be valuable.

Management trainees in House of Fraser were asked to assess the stores of competitors using criteria set down by company experts. They were asked to go then compare their own place of work and suggest changes.

Trade groups may offer useful opportunities. Young retailers groups, study tours and seminars.

### *The Wider Society*

Within society there are a number of places which can provide useful learning.

Toastmasters provide specialised training through groups that meet for breakfast or tea and practice communication skills. The cost of subscription is modest and far cheaper than the lost time and fees involved in professional courses. Paving a young managers membership may be a very cost effective investment.

Junior Chamber of Commerce and other similar organisations are also useful.

## **"THINGS" AS LEARNING RESOURCES**

### **Things: *In the Workplace***

Many items which are used for production and output can be used as learning aids. Machinery temporarily not in use for production can be used for the flexibility training of production staff. Errors and rejects can be used to show problems to new workers. They are easily turned into learning resources when matched with a fault spotting exercise. A collection of part complete items can be turned used for individuals to check their output against as they learn.

#### *Example 8: Using Stock and Point of sale terminals*

Three main areas of skill are required to be a successful sales person in a store- Selling skills, merchandise knowledge and systems skills.

During the periods when the stores were closed for training, staff were encouraged to take items of merchandise currently or newly on sale and use a simple card to record the features, advantages and benefits of the items. They were able to feel, see and where appropriate, hear and smell the merchandise. The department manager or other salespeople could then compare the answers with information from the buyer who purchased the item for the stores.

Using stock also enhanced the practice of selling skills during the shop floor training sessions. Individuals were able to practice all the steps in selling with each other and engage in role play and feedback exercises.

The use of computer point of sale terminals requires training. In some stores the suppliers of the equipment wrote in a facility that allowed practice transactions to be completed via a training key. Staff were able to use the terminals in the workplace for training.

### **Things: *In the wider plant or company.***

The same principle applies at the wider company level. Items purchased and used for other purposes can be pressed into service to aid learning. The House of Fraser computer centre was a substantial facility remote from all the stores. The IT staff were keen to raise awareness of the use of computer output in the stores. A modem was provided by the computer centre to the management training centre at no cost. The computer centre computerised a simulation of trading and profit which was used by managers on residential programmes. The computer resources

Stores selling video players were also able to use them to show video programmes.

Department stores print very large numbers of posters and tickets- on one side. They make excellent flipcharts.

*Example 9: The Induction Audio- Visual Presentation*

During the early 1980's the House of Fraser was engaged in an acrimonious and lengthy dispute with Lonrho who as a major shareholder called three extraordinary meetings of shareholders to replace some of the Directors. These meetings were held in a hotel in Glasgow. For one of these the Sales Director commissioned a multi-screen audio-visual programme to demonstrate the strong and dynamic nature of the company under its present management. It covered all the activities of the business in a very impressive manner.

The programme was put through a telecine machine by the agency who made it. It was then copied to video tape and used as a segment of induction in every store. Local segments and material were added and an impressive training aid had been created at almost no cost to the training function. Self assessing worksheets were written with instructions and questions to allow individuals to work unsupervised

**Things: from the Marketplace**

The most likely source of things to use in training is from suppliers. They may be prepared to make training aids showing the construction and manufacturing processes. Some may be models, video programmes of additional samples for training purposes.

**Things: from the Wider Society**

The wider world must contain things that are useful. Perhaps aids for first aid training from voluntary organisations. Possibly consumable items such as bandages and other equipment.

**CASH RESOURCES**

It may occasionally be possible to obtain cash from a variety of sources. More often the resources will be indirect and involve paying for something on behalf of the Training area or performing a service for nothing or a reduced charge.

### *In the Workplace*

At the levels of the workplace it may be possible to have items made for training purposes. If there is an apprentice workshop then perhaps their programme could include manufacturing items that are useful.

### *In the wider Plant or Company*

At this level it may possible to use the organisations resources informally to obtain services for which we would have to go outside. In-house printing and production facilities are one example. It may also be possible to ensure that major developments include provision to train the staff. Opening a new store with 500 staff may give an opportunity to ensure the design includes an area for training and money for training the staff. It may be possible to make the training area the last point on circulation lists for journals and magazines and for them to stored as training resources

### *The Market Place*

Just as manufacturers may partially fund advertising expenditure for stores advertising their merchandise, it is possible to obtain support for training staff in merchandise skills. The costs of hiring a venue, paying for travel and providing learning materials may be contributed by suppliers in some circumstances. The costs of a fashion show and its recording and distribution on video can also provide manufacturers with a chance to influence the commitment to their products in the stores.

#### *Example 10: The Diners Card.*

A large investment was being made in sales training behaviour modification programmes. The design called for individuals to receive a series of reinforcement cards. They were about the same size as credit cards and were to be kept in a wallet with transparent pockets. The wallet included a small pad to make it useful for note taking with customers. There was a cynical view that staff would dump the learning cards and use it for credit cards only. At small cost the number of pockets was increased and it was planned to put in a card showing that the pockets were for credit cards.

After writing to all the major credit card companies we were offered an unlimited supply of cards printed like Access cards. In addition we received £300 from Diners Club for including the ones they provided.

The House of Fraser management training centre had two complete lounges furnished by Ercol furniture to a retail value of £7,000. A press release and two discrete plaques were the only cost to the training department.

### **Cash : from the Wider Society**

Within the wider society there are many agencies which are seeking to change the world in some way or other. Many of them have large budgets. Central and local government economic, social and other agencies may wish to promote good practice, or provide information for experiments. EEC money may be available for particular regions, sectors of types of initiatives. Training for disadvantaged and other targeted groups may attract subsidy. Some agencies may fund pilot schemes or development costs.

## **REDUCING THE COSTS**

It is possible to reduce costs by all using resources well in the examples above. There are two further ways of reducing costs when new resources have to be produced.

### **Do it Yourself**

Trainers should always consider doing things themselves before buying a package. The development of new educational design skills enhances the expertise of the trainers. Most of the examples given so far emphasise the DIY approach.

#### ***Sales Training***

The Sales Director of the company came close to buying a Sale training programme that would initially have cost towards £1 million. The political impact of such a decision upon the credibility of the HRD area was so threatening that at the Management Board of the company the HRD controller said without thinking that his department could do it for half the price.

Over 4 years 7 training videos with behaviour modification programmes were made based on research carried out by an additional member of staff and the central training team. Over 100 locations were equipped for training and 20,000 staff trained and regularly reinforced. Advertising agencies were ignored as sources of production. A small company in Wolverhampton was chosen to work as part of a joint team to make the video. Only technical direction was provided. Learning objectives were written for every part of each eight part film. Scripting was done by moonlighting TV writers and all were produced on location in the stores.

Far from being home movie standard- the programmes were widely acclaimed in the industry in the U.K. AND OVERSEAS. The total cost was one third of the outside package and huge increases in the competence of trainers in design were also achieved.

## **Sell on as much as possible**

It is often possible to generate income from the investment in training.

The Sales Training programmes was so successful that they were sold to a consulting company who edited out the House of Fraser references, repackaged them and sold them to the most famous multiple retailer in the world. They were also subsequently sold by the consulting company in Australia and directly by House of Fraser in New Zealand.

### *The Training Resource Service.*

The TRS provided learning objectives, outline teaching notes, masters for learner materials and visual aids to every store on a monthly basis for use in training by first line managers. It also built up a bank of materials indexed for further use. The folder contained resources designed to simply show how to create learning experience, lead discussions and other key facilitatory activities.

The Drapers Chamber of Trade (DCT) agreed to subscribe on behalf of 1600 small retailers. The materials were merely printed on two kinds of paper- one for internal and one for DCT use. The binders were suitably different. DCT undertook distribution and paid a fee. The fee covered the purchase of a printing machine, the cost of an operator and ensured that the House of Fraser materials were produced for no cost at all.

Many facilities and services can be sold. Training rooms can be hired. A major contribution to the training budget was made by selling spare space at the residential centre.

The building of a bar-b- que in the wooded grounds for running children's parties and the selling of logs may have been over the top but they indicate a state of mind that is not.

## **CONCLUSION**

The trainer with next to nothing in the way of resources should not despair. The colleague with a comparative wealth of resources should face the same issue. The issue is how to maximise the benefit from what is available.

Comparatively well resourced departments can tend to lose their rigour in maximising return on training investment - hard times can cause more careful consideration of the use of scarce resources and often necessity can

Attitudes are key to getting something started with few resources. A concern for learning is crucial, as is an understanding of the role of trainer as facilitator and learner as learning manager. With those orientations we can explore the environment systematically to produce learning experiences at low cost.

Examples have been quoted which illustrate the type of learning resources that can be produced. Although the examples are from a large company they are more significantly from a team which believe in creating value for money and was always short of budget. The idea of reducing costs by doing things ourselves and selling the results was introduced.

#### REFERENCE

Elkin, G.R.(1990). *Learner Centred Learning*, Training and Development (U.K.), Vol 8 No.5 p 21-23.

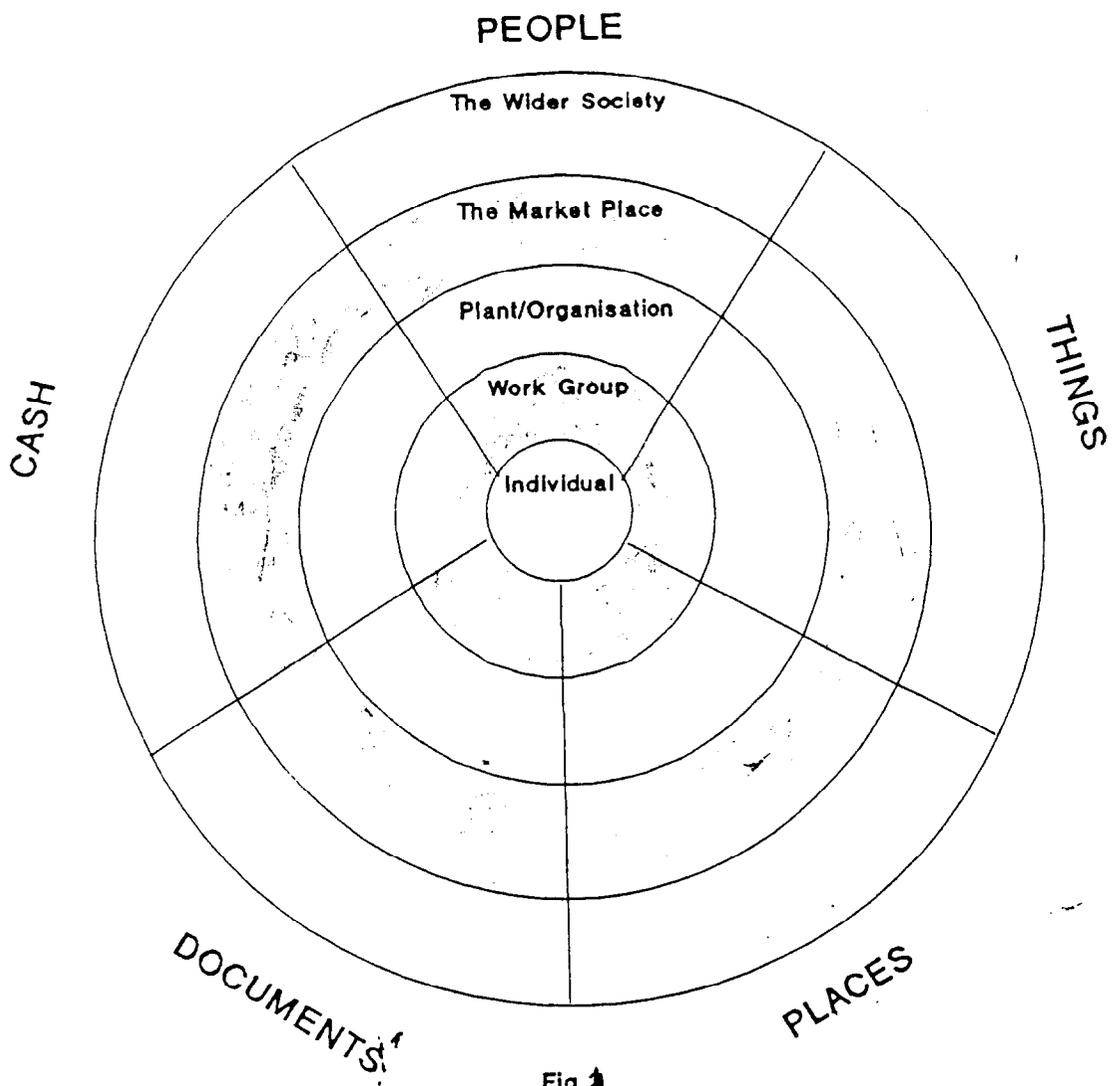


Fig 1

Redefining the Learning Environment and its Resources