

# Training is more than just qualifications

**Dorothy Tudor**, technical director of TCC, a training and consultancy provider, looks at our examination-heavy environment and considers the advantages and risks of 'trial by examination'

When you put your staff onto an expensive, external training course, just what do you hope to gain? Undying gratitude for giving them a week out of the office? Badges of honour saying that they 'passed the test'? Or a significant improvement in employee performance leading to measurable benefits?

It is really tough these days to find a training course which is not linked with examination, from IT Service Management (ITSM or ITIL) to PRINCE2 and beyond. It may be a multiple choice paper, where facts and terminology have to be recalled, or a scenario

based test telling of an imaginary company with more problems than you can possibly fix in a few hours of painful writing. With luck, you may discover an examination such as 'DSDM Practitioner' which actually acknowledges experience and assesses evidence of real work.

In training, it has always been accepted as good practice to test that learning has occurred and that positive results have accrued (for example using the Kirkpatrick model inset). Qualifications themselves are an invaluable aid to the hiring process, as well as an objective means of assessing staff skills. However, there is a risk associated with the examination culture. The perceived need to pass the exam may unduly focus training on the examination and detract from the goal of enabling the trainee to perform better in their job.

The emergence of accrediting organisations such as APM Group and the British Computer Society (BCS) offer the assurance of a minimum standard of training. However, the downside is that accredita-

tion can commoditise training, giving the perception that all training providers will deliver the same product.

So when choosing a training provider, don't simply ask: "What is your percentage examination pass rate?" Discuss the training material – is it purely examination-focused or will it be useful as reference material for doing the job? Ask about the tutors – do they have experience in doing the job that the training is intended to improve? Ask whether the training is interactive, with case study work and opportunities for delegates to practice new skills. Then, when the training event is over, use the Kirkpatrick model to ensure that the training has added business value and made a real difference.

For more information on training which looks beyond the qualifications, please contact:

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## Kirkpatrick's (1959) four levels of the evaluation model measure:

- **reaction** - what the student thought and felt about the training
- **learning** - the resulting increase in knowledge or capability
- **behaviour** - extent of improvement in behaviour and capability in the workplace
- **results** - the effects on the business or environment resulting from the student's performance