NjP *Journal of Organizational Behavior Education 17.*

Promo 1st Version

Designing an Online Training Program: A Pilot Experiential Learning Exercise

Duygu Gulseren and Ayesha Tabassum
School of Human Resources Management, York University, Canada

Abstract. Experiential learning activities are becoming increasingly popular in management courses. Acknowledging the need for in-class experiential activities in the field of management in general and organizational development and human resources management in particular, this teaching article introduces a pilot training design activity we developed for our students in our Occupational Health and Safety course as a part of the undergraduate Human Resources Management curriculum at a Canadian university. Students are invited to design and deliver a training program on technostress reduction for remote workers. They used the instructional systems design framework. We collected data from real-life remote workers using the Kirkpatrick's training evaluation outcomes. We presented the results of the training evaluation component as an in-class demonstration. In this teaching article, we provide details about our pilot in-class experiential activity and share the corresponding materials.

Keywords: training design, instructional systems design, organizational development, technostress, remote work.

1. Introduction

Training is an essential tool for organizations and a core competency in many fields including organizational behavior, management, and human resources. Estimates show that organizations can spend up to $200 billion on training and development annually (e.g., Bunch 2007). While some of these programs can be outsourced by organizations, a great majority of them are designed and delivered by organizational members such as in-house technical experts or organizational development personnel (e.g., Cohen *et al.* 2001; Crumpton 2011; Kumar *et al.* 2017). There could be multiple reasons to offer in-house training such as the idiosyncratic context and needs of an organization, availability of in-house expertise, or cost effectiveness (Kelloway *et al.* 2021). Therefore, from technical personnel to management, individuals from a wide range of backgrounds may be required to design and deliver a training module at some point in their work lives.

In the following experiential education exercise, we provided our students, who are registered in an online undergraduate course on occupational health and safety, a practical opportunity to design, deliver, and evaluate a training program

under our guidance. The objective of this course is to introduce fundamental knowledge on how organizations can keep their employees healthy and safe. Training is an essential tool for organizational development, which is a core competency in organizational behavior education. In relation to this matter, our course objectives included the design, delivery, and evaluation of technostress reduction training.

Subsequently, the objective of the experiential activity presented in this paper is to have students experiment with training design and delivery under limited instruction and reflect on their decisions, processes, and outcomes. As discussed above, we argue that an experiential training development activity was important in this course because training is a complex, practical, and necessary skill in the context of organizational development. Engaging in a hands-on activity would not only allow students to experience possible practical problems that are overlooked in theoretical discussions, but also encourage them to devise solutions based on their learning. Furthermore, data collection is an essential element of training evaluation. Analyzing the data collected in the results of the training module developed by the students could also give them personalized feedback on what worked in their program and why. Ultimately, such individualized feedback could facilitate a rich self-reflection and discussion session.

The training module students developed focused on the topic of technostress (Tarafdar *et al.* 2015) for remote workers. Among the different training development and evaluation frameworks, students focused on the Instructional Systems Design framework (Molenda 2009) which focuses on both design and evaluation aspects of training, popularity in practice, and alignment with the course content. In the next section, we will briefly introduce the topics of technostress and the Instructional Systems Design model. Then, we will present our experiential learning activity. Technostress is an emerging topic in modern organizations and is an increasing concern for employees across a wide range of occupations and industries. Thus, we believe that the experiential learning activity, instructions we give to students, and the materials we provide can be easily used to teach them about training (or organizational interventions in general), design, evaluation, and stress management in organizational behavior and human resources courses.

2. Background

Technostress and Remote Workers

Technostress, defined as a specific form of stress experienced by employees as a result of using technology for work (Tarafdar *et al.* 2015), is a modern occupational hazard faced by employees across different industries, including instructors who teach online courses. Research has suggested that technostress creators are the stressors associated with technostress (Tarafdar *et al.* 2007).

Tarafdar *et al.* (2007) identified and defined five dimensions of technostress creators: techno-overload, techno-invasion, techno-complexity, techno-insecurity, and techno-uncertainty. In developing our technostress reduction intervention, we have included *techno-overload* and *techno-invasion*, which are identified as two major dimensions of technostress creators (Bahamondes-Rosado *et al.* 2023). Techno-overload refers to the demands on employees to work faster and longer while leveraging the support of technology, whereas techno-invasion describes the invasive effects of using technology on the individual's private life (Ragu-Nathan *et al.* 2008). Past research suggests that technostress creators are responsible for lower performance and satisfaction, higher anxiety (Fernández-Fernández *et al.* 2023), higher work-family conflict (Harris *et al.* 2022), and impaired well-being (Pfaffinger *et al.* 2022).

Despite the importance of this emerging topic, there are limited intervention efforts to reduce technostress in organizational behavior literature. Rohwer *et al.* (2022) conducted a recent scoping review and synthesized the findings of 62 studies on technostress. These 62 papers reported the antecedents, risk factors, and resources needed for coping with technostress. However, authors reported the absence of technostress intervention studies, such as technostress management training evaluation. In other words, there is a lack of studies that either field-test the technostress interventions or evaluate technostress prevention measures directed towards employees and managers (please see Rohwer *et al.* 2022 for a comprehensive review on this topic). However, scholars have repeatedly highlighted the importance of individual and organizational-level interventions to mitigate technostress (e.g., clear communication, providing organizational support, self-education and training programs, mindfulness training, time and attention management strategies) (Mahboob & Khan 2016; Rohwer *et al.* 2021).

Technostress interventions for remote workers are critical since remote employees are particularly vulnerable to technostress (Ewers & Kangmennaang 2023; Taser *et al.* 2022). Remote workers often experience increased stress since they are largely dependent on technology and must cope with technological changes (Suh & Lee 2017). Further, the constraint of being available anytime and anywhere creates new hurdles for remote employees (Suh & Lee 2017). Given that exclusive remote or hybrid work setup is becoming the new normal in many sectors, organizations must develop measures to mitigate technostress related to remote work (Singh *et al.* 2022). Therefore, the current experiential education activity involves designing a technostress mitigation intervention using the instructional systems design.

Instructional Systems Design of Training

Instructional systems design is a method of developing education and training programs with an aim to enhance learner performance (Molenda 2009). The model is not only commonly used in curriculum design in the higher education setting (Banathy 2013; Romiszowski 2016), but also in workplace training such

as stress management interventions (Kelloway *et al.* 2021). The model categorizes training activities in three categories: needs analysis, training design and delivery, and training evaluation (Saks & Haccoun 2019).

The needs analysis component involves gathering information about the needs of the learners (i.e., employees in a workplace training context) as well as the context (e.g., organizational characteristics such as the organizational culture, leadership support, or job design) (Moore & Dutton 1978). Needs analysis can be performed in various ways. In an organizational training program, trainers can collect data from employees as well as managers about the work, work conditions, culture, and the needs of employees on the topic of training (Saks & Haccoun 2019). However, collecting organizational data is not the only method of needs analysis. Trainers can understand the needs of the learners by reviewing other types of evidence such as published research findings, results of public surveys, or policy documents (Rousseau & Gunia 2016).

The second stage of the Instructional Systems Design Model involves training design and delivery. Evidence collected during the needs analysis stage can help trainers make informed design decisions. These decisions include the training format (e.g., online or in-person training), duration (e.g., micro-dose training versus intense training), technology being used, and the specific content of the training program (Saks & Haccoun 2019). Moreover, depending on the collected data, trainers can decide whether to keep the training broad to appeal to different occupational groups or make the content tailored to the needs of specific groups of employees (Bishop 1998). Trainers follow their design-related decisions while delivering their content.

The last stage of the Instructional Systems Design Model is training evaluation. This stage is particularly critical because they provide opportunities for improving the training program by maximizing training transfer (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick 2016). The model involves collecting data on the baseline knowledge, attitudes, or skills of participants before and after the training and making a conclusion about the training program's added value by observing the change (Phillips & Phillips 2016). Because the change among employees across two or more different time points can also be caused by factors outside of the training program, such as organizational restructuring (Knight & Parker 2021), the golden standard of training evaluation includes comparing the change on the same variables in a control group across the same time points (e.g., Lynch *et al.* 2018; Roeser *et al.* 2013). This control group should be comparable to the group of employees who participated in the training (i.e., same occupational and sociodemographic backgrounds; Tamkin *et al.* 2002). This way, trainers can have more confidence in making conclusions about the impact of their training programs.

The use of instructional systems design is considered crucial to training success from a pedagogical point of view (Khalil & Elkhider 2016). Since instructional systems design applies systematic planning and the development of instructions and learning activities, this model can contribute to the success of