

# Understanding Developmental Needs

## Helping Your People Reach Peak Performance

Most managers know that training is essential for team success. But many don't take the time to understand team members' individual needs, even though it is the only way to ensure that their people have the skills and knowledge they need to perform well and meet their objectives.

However, how do you know who needs what training? And how do you avoid wasting time and money on unnecessary training activities? In this article we'll explore the importance of understanding your people's developmental needs, and we'll look at a process that you can use to do this effectively.

## Why Understand Individual Needs?

Clearly, some training needs will be universal, and will apply to many, if not all, of your team members. However, everyone on your team is unique; they have different skills, different levels of understanding, and different responsibilities and objectives.

Therefore, training and development shouldn't follow a "one size fits all" approach if you want it to be effective. Instead, you need to take the time to understand the training that each individual needs, so that you can provide the right training for the right people. As well as improving performance, this saves time, resources, and money.

With this tailored approach, your people will also feel more empowered, and they'll be able to link what they learn to their own personal objectives. This boosts well-being and morale.

## Identifying Developmental Needs

The six steps below, which we've adapted from the American Society for Training and Development's Strategic Needs Analysis, will help you better understand people's training needs:

1. Reviewing team members' job descriptions.
2. Meeting with them.
3. Observing them at work.
4. Gathering additional data.
5. Analyzing and preparing data.
6. Determining action steps.

Let's look at each step in greater detail.

### Step 1: Review Team Members' Job Descriptions

Start by thinking about what work your team members should be doing – this will be defined by their [**job descriptions**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMM_64.htm) . Identify the skills that they may need to do things well.

#### Tip:

Job descriptions can get out of date. Before using them to think about training, ensure that they fairly reflect what individual team members actually do.

### Step 2: Meeting with Team Members

Your next step is to meet one-on-one with each member of your team. Your goal here is to have an open talk about the kind of training and development that they think they need to work effectively and develop their career.

They might not feel that they need any training at all, so it's important to be up front about your discussion. Use your [**emotional intelligence**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newCDV_59.htm) , as well as good questioning  and [**active listening**](https://www.mindtools.com/CommSkll/ActiveListening.htm) , to communicate with sensitivity and respect.

Ask the following questions to get a better understanding of your people's training needs:

* What challenges do you face every day?
* What is most frustrating about your role?
* What areas of your role, or the organization, do you wish you knew more about?
* What skills or additional training would help you work more productively or effectively?

Then, talk to them about what they would like to get out of additional training, and ask them to visualize the outcomes that they'd like to achieve. What does this future look like to them?

Also, find out more about their [**personal goals**](https://www.mindtools.com/page6.html) , and think about how well these goals align with the [**organization's objectives**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMM_94.htm) . Ideally, training and development will help them in both of these areas.

#### Tip 1:

You can pick up some important clues about people's needs by observing their [**body language**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/Body_Language.htm) . For instance, if they start to fidget and lower their eyes when you talk about their computer skills, it could indicate that they don't feel comfortable in this area.

#### Tip 2:

You may find it easier to incorporate this step into a [**feedback**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMM_98.htm)  session or appraisal.

### Step 3: Observing Team Members at Work

Next, keep an eye on how well your team members are doing with key tasks. (If appropriate, use an approach like [**Management by Walking Around**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMM_72.htm)  to do this.)

For instance, could they be quicker with key tasks, or are they procrastinating on projects? This might indicate that they're not confident in their abilities, or are not sufficiently well trained in key skill areas.

Try to be fair and straightforward when you do this. If team members know that you're watching them, they might act differently, but if they discover that you're watching secretly, it could damage the trust they have in you. So be sensitive, ask open questions, and, where appropriate, explain your actions.

#### Tip:

Once you've observed people working, it can be useful to confirm your assessment by setting specific, time-bound tasks that give them the opportunity to demonstrate their skills and abilities. Do this positively, though – don't set people up to fail.

### Step 4: Gathering Additional Data

If you approach data gathering in a sensitive way, you can learn a lot from others who work closely with the person you want to assess.

These people could include internal or external clients, past bosses, or even peers and co-workers.

Remember the following while gathering information from these sources:

* Make sure that you don't undermine the person's dignity, and that you respect the context. For example, in some cultures, it may be acceptable to talk openly to co-workers. In others, you will have to do this with a lot of sensitivity, if you do it at all.
* Avoid unfocused generalizations. Ask people to back up their comments with specific examples.

You can also use information from past appraisals or feedback sessions.

### Step 5: Analyzing and Preparing Data

Now, look closely at the information you gathered in the first four steps. What trends do you see? What skills did your team members say they needed? Are there any skills gaps?

Your goal here is to bring together the most relevant information, so that you can create a training plan for each team member.

### Step 6: Determining Action Steps

By now, you should have a good idea of the training and development that each person on your team needs. Your last step is to decide what you're going to do to make it happen.

There are several training and development options to consider:

* [**On-the-Job Training**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/on-the-job-training.htm)  – this is when team members shadow more experienced team members to learn a new skill. This type of training is easy and cost-effective to set up.
* [**Instructor-Led Training**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/instructor-led-training.htm)  – this is similar to a "class," where an experienced consultant, expert, or trainer teaches a group.
* **Online Training and E-Learning** – this can be particularly convenient and cost-effective.
* [**Cross-Training**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/cross-training.htm)  – this teaches team members how to perform the tasks of their colleagues. Cross-training helps you create a flexible team, and can lead to higher morale and job satisfaction.
* [**Active Training**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/active-training.htm)  – Active Training involves games, group learning, and practical exercises. This type of training is often effective, because it pushes people to get involved and be engaged.
* [**Mentoring**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newCDV_72.htm)  or [**Coaching**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMM_15.htm)  – these can be effective for helping your team members develop professionally and learn new skills.

Make sure that you take into account people's individual [**learning styles**](https://www.mindtools.com/mnemlsty.html)  before you commit to any one training program. Remember, everyone learns differently; your training will be most effective if you customize it to accommodate everyone's best learning style. A [**cost benefit analysis**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTED_08.htm)  might also be helpful here, especially if the training you're considering is expensive.

Also, help your team members [**get the most from their training**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newISS_88.htm) . Encourage them to arrive on time, take notes, and communicate with their instructor and each other, about what they have learned. It might also be helpful to perform a type of "[**after action review**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newPPM_73.htm) " to see how the training went.

#### Tip 1:

Our article on [**Engaging People in Learning**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/engaging-people-learning.htm)  has additional tips and strategies that you can use to get your team members excited about their training and development.

#### Tip 2:

You can also use a [**Training Needs Assessment**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMM_89.htm)  to identify your people's needs. This help you look at training and development from the perspective of your organization's objectives.

#### Tip 3:

Take our [**How Well Do You Develop Your People?**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/team-development.htm)  self-test to boost your overall people development skills.

## Key Points

Most managers understand that they need to train and develop their people to help them excel. However, it's hard to know where to begin, and sometimes it's even harder to know who needs what training.

Use this process to understand the training and development needs of your team:

1. Review people's job descriptions.
2. Meet with team members.
3. Observe team members at work.
4. Gather additional data.
5. Analyze and prepare data.
6. Determine action steps.

With this tailored approach, people will feel more empowered, and they'll be able to link what they learn to their own personal objectives.

This site teaches you the skills you need for a happy and successful career; and this is just one of many tools and resources that you'll find here at Mind Tools. Subscribe to our [**free newsletter**](https://www.mindtools.com/subscribe.htm?tag=upsp), or [**join the Mind Tools Club**](https://www.mindtools.com/signup/monthly/usd?trackingtag=upsp) and really supercharge your career!