

SIGNIFICANCE OF DETERMINING ASSESSMENT NEEDS AND TRAINING IN THE SERVICE SECTOR

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Abstract

Training plays a vital role in the success of organizations in the service sector. Profitability of this sector can depend to a great extent on the service of its employees. Before any kind of training is delivered they are required to identify the training needs within their organizations in order to succeed and attain the desired outcomes of the training program. This article discusses the importance of determining training needs within the service sector in order to improve the training delivery and achievement of maximum benefit for the return on investment. Different methods of determining and assessing the training needs are also discussed which may be helpful to organizations to assess upgrade their training and development programs

Key words: Training needs analysis, service sector.

1. Introduction

Even in midst of continued financial crisis and difficult economic environment, organizations do not deny the importance of well trained and qualified employees to meet their objectives and raise profits. The service sector has come to rely on training to develop their professional and technical competencies of their employees in order to increase profitability and promote their reputation by improving service. One of the major reasons why training often fails to contribute to organizational success may be due to the reason that its content is not being targeted to organizational needs and goals. Training is most effective when it addresses the specific training needs of banks and financial organizations. In order to ensure that training has the maximum effect it should be well designed and targeted towards the right employees. Individual training needs are often identified by employees, supervisors and managers and should include training which is needed to effectively perform assigned or planned duties. This type of training generally produces an immediate or short-term return on the training investment in form of improved performance, increase in sales and achieving assigned targets.

Conducting a well planned Training Needs Analysis will determine how many employees of the organization should be certified with their appropriate education and training paths. In addition, this process will also allow comprehensive customization of training programs for all departments to meet the training and development needs of the employees to meet the market competitiveness. A training needs assessment could be the initial stage in meeting the challenges of resource and time constraints which could also be done by conducting a pre training assessment. A training needs assessment would ensure that training programs are focused and appropriate. For sure, training cannot be conducted just for the sake of it, it is a luxury that no organization can really afford, especially the nonprofit organizations. Some problems are often perceived as training problems when they are not. Organizations do not have the expertise to conduct in-depth needs analysis to determine what the real training issues are, or the money to hire someone to conduct individual analysis. Until specific training needs are isolated, it will be business as usual and no value-added changes in performance will occur.

2. Training Needs Assessment

Training needs assessment can be as simple as asking an employee what training programs they would like to undertake in order to improve themselves, to as complex as developing an individualized training plan for every employee in the organization in the department where they work so as to update their skills. Organizations need to select appropriate training needs assessment approaches and tools in order to ascertain the needs and requirements of the employees. Training needs assessment should be conducted for all employees to create a superior workforce by focussing in the areas of weakness and developing them through training. Training needs assessment is a tool utilized to identify what educational courses or activities could be provided to management and employees to improve their management skills and work productivity. Focus should be placed on needs rather than believing that it is a necessity.

3. How is a training needs assessment performed?

Training assessment should determine exactly where training is needed. It would not be wise to implement a companywide training effort without concentrating resources where they are needed most. An internal audit /training needs analysis will help point out areas that may benefit from training. A skill inventory of the employee can be maintained which can help determine the skills possessed by the employees in general. This inventory will also help the organization determine what skills are available now and what skills are needed for future development. There are several techniques that can be utilized individually or in combination with each other in order to assess the training needs .

a. Conducting meetings with management

Since most supervisors are involved with the planning of projects and the future strategic plans, they know what will be needed to fulfill the vision of the organization. They should be able to communicate where their employee's current abilities lie and what more is needed to get them to the next level for new goals to fulfill their target and meet deadlines.

b. Conducting meeting with employees

Employees should be encouraged to discuss the difficulties they may be facing during their daily routine and what type of training would make their job easier and more efficient. Emphasis should be given to keep them focused on what they need rather than what they want.

c. Conducting formal and informal surveys with employees.

Conducting surveys could be beneficial because many people can be questioned in a short span of time. Moreover they also provide the employees with the opportunity to acknowledge their needs on paper which they may be too embarrassed to admit needing in a face-to-face meeting. Most frequently Employee Opinion Surveys and 360 degree Peer Review Surveys are conducted to provide the most valid and useful information regarding the training needs of employees.

d. Conducting focus groups discussions with selected groups.

Focus groups discussions may be conducted to facilitate group interaction, these kind of discussion allows the assessors to discover details regarding their target audience. Brainstorming is encouraged allowing for an exchange of new ideas and a revelation of what training may be needed could be very helpful to pen down the learning outcomes of the training programs.

e. Evaluate company Strategies and Objectives

A brief review of the organizations past and where they are heading for in the future may reveal valuable information for training. A comparative analysis should be made of what employees are currently doing and what will be expected of them as the company continues to grow and expand . Comparative work output charts will be helpful to determine the level of improvement in the employee from time to time.

Organizations in the service sector need to conduct training needs analysis to start program on the right track. This process can help the organization to:

- Identify learner needs, to produce customized training programs in order to boost performance levels.
- Identify any organizational issues that might create an impact on training, so as to strategize methods to overcome obstacles if any.
- Identify learner behaviors that need to be modified, so that they can be effectively addressed during training.
- Determine the direct performance path, so that time and money is not wasted and “over-training” is not conducted for unnecessary tasks.
- Determine the appropriate resources for your training programs well in advance .
- Establish best practices and standards for all future training programs for better results.

A training needs assessment is one of the most basic and common forms of assessment used by HRD professionals in the workplace (Gupta, 1999). Needs Assessments help to determine when training is the answer and when it is not. Assessment ensures that training programs have relevance to the people being trained. Gupta, in his book ‘A Practical Guide to Needs Assessment’, gives the following

overview of the training needs assessment: A needs assessment provides the information that is usually necessary for designing training programs. The basic purpose of a training needs assessment is two fold:

- To identify the knowledge and skills that people must possess in order to perform effectively on the job, and
- To prescribe appropriate interventions that can close these gaps.

According to Gupta there are two main reasons to conduct a training needs assessment:

- It ensures that training programs are developed based on identified needs; and
- It is relatively easy to implement (Gupta, 1999).

There are some performance problems can be addressed and improved by training, but there are some which the training can't fix. Training isn't the answer to a problem when it's used to cover up the symptoms (Rosner, 1999). A needs assessment avoids misdiagnosing a non-training problem as a training problem. The role of training needs assessment in the design of training programs has long been recognized in the organizational literature (Goldstein, 1991). This assessment will affects nearly all phases of the training process including determining specific training needs of individuals in the organization, and then selecting the most appropriate training content and delivery methods, evaluating the effectiveness of the training procedures before it is delivered. In addition, it can play an important role in assessing the organizational context regarding resources, management support, and other organizational environment that either hinder or facilitate the successful transfer of a training initiative. The nature of the training programs planned for the employees must be the result of a focused and disciplined process to determine what training is actually needed. It is important to remember that once the employee training is planned, the accomplishments should be recorded so that the results are known and outcome compared.

Training needs can be assessed and identified by analyzing three major human resource areas: the organization as a whole, the job characteristics and the needs of the individuals in that organization. Organizations begin by assessing the current status of the company - how it does, what it does best, and the abilities of your employees to do these tasks. This analysis provides some benchmarks against which the effectiveness of a training program can be evaluated. The organization should know where it wants to be in five years from its long-range strategic plan. What is needed is a training program to take your organization from here to there and to achieve its goals. A pre training and a post training test can be conducted to measure the effectiveness of the training program. Organizations must consider whether the organization is financially committed to supporting the training efforts. If not, any attempt to develop a good training program will be unsuccessful and unsatisfactory output from employees is bound to occur.

Training must be a stable, continuous part of an organizations strategy and growth plans. It must be a key factor and should play a vital role in the development and retention of employees at all levels. Although there may be costs associated with training, it is less than the cost you will incur when you will need to replace an employee who became disgruntled with your lack of support to his or her career development. A training program is an ideal starting point to take action when there is increase in turnover. It will also be a strong base for developing effective communication within an organization. An organization must have customized corporate training programs that target management teams and staff performance to maximize outcomes and enhance leadership skills.

3. Formulating Training Strategies

Once the training needs have been analyzed a number of strategies that can be used to support staff learning and self-improvement as well as organizational change should be set up. One of the best ways to incorporate new service delivery ideas is by visiting organizations that are known to be running unique or exemplary program services and analyzing if enough is being done in yours comparatively. By touring other programs, and meeting with their employment consultants, viewing direct service strategies or methods in action, and examining the benefits and outcomes that these programs produce for consumers might be an important course of action. Determining training goals is an important aspect of formulating training strategies in an organization, so as to relate directly to the needs determined by the assessment process. Course objectives should clearly state what behavior or skill will be changed as a result of the training and should relate to the goals, mission and strategic plan of the organization. Goals should include milestones and objectives to help take the employee from where they are today to where the organization wants them in the future. Setting training goals, helps to appraise and evaluate the training program and also to motivate employees. Employees should be encouraged to participate in setting goals in order to increases their probability of success.

Pre-service training or orientation programs are commonly used by organizations in the service sector to support the learning needs of new employees as well as introduce them to their organization. Initially each person should be involved in his / her plan. Research has shown that adults are found to learn best when they can are allowed identify and set their own goals and objectives. Some employees may also benefit from maintaining journals or diaries to record information about their job performance and professional experiences.

These self-appraisals can prove to be very important as they offer opportunities to record information about their perceived skill development needs, technical issues that they encounter on the job on daily or weekly basis, or new learning experiences needed to enhance job performance for their day to day core activity. A journal may be helpful specially to new employees or trainees who are learning their job. It provides a record of all discussion points for future references and meetings with supervisors or managers. HRM policies also play an important role in staff training and retention. The HRM may adopt 'soft' or 'hard' policies, John Storey (1992) views are suggest that the hard one emphasizes the quantitative, calculative and business strategic aspects of managing the headcounts resource in a 'rational' way as for any other economic factor. By contrast, the 'soft' version traces its routes to the human relations school; it emphasizes communication, motivation and leadership.

4. Conclusion

Training needs should be determined through proper training needs analysis methods to produce the best results and to achieve the learning outcomes of the training program. The next step should be the formulation of training strategies in order to achieve the desired outcome and to study the return of investment by recording and measuring the pre training and post training outcomes or results of the employees.

Training strategies depend on the training philosophy of the organization and the management style. Organizations cannot be described as adopting specifically 'soft' or 'hard' approaches to Human resources management. It can sometimes be a blend of both. Once the training needs have been analyzed a number of strategies that can be used to support staff learning and self-improvement as well as organizational change. It is important to determine what specific performance change is to be achieved through training in order to be able to measure if the learning outcomes have been achieved.

Training needs analysis and training employees in the right direction could play an important role in the success of companies in future.

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