

Training Needs Assessment (TNA); a Solution for Effective Hotel Employee Training Outcomes in Kenya

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Abstract

Employee training needs assessment has increasingly become a vital component that defines effectiveness of training outcomes. Despite comprehension of the importance of training needs analysis, hotel managers incessantly rely on action oriented training plans. Such are ad hoc plans which are neither systematic nor grounded on holistic incorporation of suitable training needs indicators, training plans and robust evaluation processes. Furthermore, managers are distracted by busy schedules biased to planning and realizing sales targets, which hardly give precedence to training needs assessment for quality service delivery. As a result, training needs assessment is often founded on varied reactions to internal and external environment forces which often are not best practices for achieving effective training outcomes in hotel management, production and operation. Using semi-structured questionnaires, survey data was collected from 161 respondents in selected rated hotels within Nairobi Central Business District. The objective of the study was to identify the training needs assessment gap affecting achievement of effective training outcomes. Descriptive and factor analyses were performed on the data collected. The results revealed that hotel management training teams are typically action oriented and highly influenced by the nature of service of the hotel industry. Despite manager's supportive culture to training needs assessment processes, their industrious schedule undermines the critical process, since previous reports are rarely considered to inform future trends or training needs. Organizational goals and not employees perceptions are used thus employees are demotivated to commit to the process. Lastly, post evaluation is not keenly monitored to ensure transfer of skills gained in the work place. The study concludes that the assessment process should be holistic, flexible and systematic and fit within feasible and budgeted limits. Training needs assessment would be a solution for the future of the industry's growth, consistent efficiency and productiveness especially in the long-term.

Key words: Employees, Hotels, Training Needs Assessment, Training outcomes

Introduction

Training can be defined as a process of aiding new or present employees to acquire basic skills, competencies and attitudes required to execute their jobs or improve their ability to perform on their jobs (Armstrong, 2001; Decenzo and Robins, 2007; Dessler, 2008). According to Noe *et al.*, (2000) some of the essential training outcomes or competencies particularly for hospitality employees include: knowledge acquisition which could be, conceptual, cognitive and affective; skills acquirement for example social, technical and operational skills; in addition to good character and attitudes which encourage self-motivated creativity.

Despite the importance of training in ensuring excellence, most hotel management teams are action oriented. The reactive element is caused by the nature of hospitality services where managers are often compelled to excel in operational activities through maximizing revenue rather than improving the training process. Conversely, some organisations consider training an answer to all work place safety related problems, thus implementing training at every occurrence (Cekada, 2011). These features often leave many problems unsettled due to under training or overtraining, which not only frustrates employees but management's credibility and training programs used is also questioned (Blair and Soe, 2007). The problem of achieving effective training outcomes is further compounded by the majority of managers believing that accomplishing organizational regulatory mandated requirements on training and its documentation is more effective (Cekada, 2011).

In the hospitality sector, the training process is more than simply facilitating employees to acquire basic skills required to excel. However, since the majority of establishments are small micro enterprises (Akama, 2002), theorists and researchers claim that such small firms do not regard performing Training Needs Analysis (TNA) a priority (Bhatta, 2002; Budhwar *et al.*, 2002; Gordon, 1994). Furthermore, TNA is considered a difficult process, time consuming and lack of resources in the establishments inhibits undertaking of involved processes (Anderson and Elgamal, 1994; Budhwar *et al.*, 2002). However, if training would be the right solution to the workplace problems, employees require to be suitably trained based on needs assessment. Indeed, TNA reveals the need for well-steered training (McArdle, 1998); the choice of appropriate methods; and need for managerial support which enhances appropriate feedbacks and recommendations for improvement (Caudron, 2001). Thus, if TNA is effectively carried out, it is a wise investment for the organisations since it saves time, money and effort by working on the right problems (McArdle, 1998).

Subject to the importance of TNA in hotels in Kenya, this study sought to find out how it affects effective achievement of foreseeable training outcomes. Wayne and Noe (2005) note that all factors hindering administration and management of training especially by the right people, in the right form, time and budgeted costs must be eliminated. Therefore, the employee needs, TNA process, scope of needs survey and the evaluation process were analysed to identify its effects on training outcomes. The assumption behind the TNA process is that many trainers in the hotel industry lack the ability to effectively determine the training needs gap that ensures achievement of excellent training outcomes. On the other hand, the majority of employees are not involved in the TNA process which is vital in enhancing their motivation and commitment to the training and more so play a complementary role in accelerating learning (Reynolds, 2004). As a result the TNA process was expected to provide benchmarks against which the effectiveness of a training program can be evaluated as part of the training outcomes (Armstrong, 2001).

Literature Review

The concept of Training Needs Assessment (TNA)

The concept of TNA has been described as an on-going process of collecting data to determine: what training needs exist; whether the 'needs' are important; how the needs become apparent; how they are defined; and how they can be addressed with the aim of developing training based on priorities (Erasmus *et al.*, 2000). TNA helps organizations accomplish their objectives (Brown, 2002) or implied organisational needs that could be met through training (Barbazette, 2006). Essentially, it leads to the development of a training plan which determines: the need for training; identifies training needs; and examines the type and scope of resources needed to support training (Sorenson, 2002). As a result, T.N.A provides answers to specific questions that both hotel managers and training professionals need to know. For example; which employees need to learn what? Why they need to learn it? and at what depth and the priority it has to learners, topics and time? (O'Connor *et al.*, 2009).

TNA and Training outcomes

The purpose of TNA is to identify performance requirements so as to direct resources to the greatest areas of training need, whose outcomes fulfil: the organizations goals and objectives; improves productivity; and provides quality products and services (Sunita & Ajeya, 2010). The 'need' can be identified in several ways but is generally defined as a gap between what is taking place and what is needed now and in the future (Molenda *et al.*, 2002). As a result, employee training needs arise when there is a gap between events taking place on training and expected outcomes. The questions highlighted earlier assist in seeking information on: optimal performance or knowledge needed; actual or current performance or knowledge; feelings of trainees and other stakeholders; causes of identified problems; and solutions (Rossett, 1987). Contrary to the TNA which prioritizes organizational needs, training needs analysis breaks-down the identified need into component parts to determine the solutions required (Kaufman *et al.*, 1993).

The training gap in this context is defined as the difference between the required standard of the job and the trainee's performance (Sunita and Ajeya, 2010). If the two sides perfectly match, there will be no training requirement, but a mismatch indicates the need for training. Rummler and Brache (1990) contend that if training needs are not well identified, then both the training course and outcome is in jeopardy, since TNA is the first step in any training and development activity (Sunita and Ajeya, 2010). The source of training needs is often pegged on: the demand of the job and changes in technology; organizational forms and globalization, which have contributed re-definition of knowledge; employee's experience; in addition to association workers recommendations, which are valued by today's market and organizations (Reich, 1991). Therefore, all trainers whether in the senior, middle or line levels of management should keenly assess the current performance status of individual employees and their ability to excel whilst undertaking set tasks. According to McConnell (2003) employee training needs would in the long run increase or reduce subject to: employers re-engineering their work process; transfer of employees; and variances in identification of needs that would meet performance goals alongside available resources. However, Al-Khayyat & Elgamal (1997) argue that the need identification process is not a routine process and managers have to cautiously conduct TNA and in a diagnostic manner. TNA process can be a challenging task, but organizations should make it an on-going process (Tessmer and Wedman, 1995) by constantly providing the need assessment data throughout the organization to decision makers (Sunita and Ajeya, 2010). Consequently managers will maintain focus on developing effective standards to realise effective training outcomes.

Importance of TNA in the Hotels

In today's highly competitive macro and micro business environment, the hotel industry requires employees with the right skills, knowledge and attitudes which are not only crucial for growth and success of the business but also seek to ensure that employees learn by increasing their concentration and receptivity to new ideas (Mathieu, 1992). Additionally, employee motivation and commitment would enhance participation and development on training.

According to Wayne and Noe (2005) it is a prerequisite for managers to undertake a systematic approach in assessing and achieving the training needs. A well planned out TNA would deliver many positive outcomes which should yield to pay-off. The key people planning the training process should agree on the criteria for success which should be measurable to enable monitoring during the various phases involved in the training process (Molenda *et al.*, 1996). In addition, this process would require some exchange of inducements favourable to maintain performance and contribution to an organization (Scholl, 1981). This would certainly be a professional process and not simply compelling employees and management to adapt to a new work situation (Koontz and Weihrich, 1990). Indeed, the need for effective needs assessment cannot be overemphasized. Therefore, training needs assessments should focus on the organization holistically, especially focussing on the employee training need desired and utilisation within the organization. Remarkably, there are established methods of identifying training needs. However due to the unique procedures as well as systems specific to individuals, the models must be selected to fit the situation, be valid, reliable and implemented by trained persons to ensure its effectiveness.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design which entirely employed quantitative methods to examine the effect of training needs assessment on the achievement of training outcomes in selected rated hotels in Kenya. The target population consisted of 280 employees from selected hotels in Nairobi Central Business District. A total of 160 permanent employees were selected from the human resource records and studied. The sample frame of the study consisted of permanent employees who had worked in the establishment for at least a period of six months and had undergone a training process. The sample was made up of 27 section managers, 43 supervisors/ trainers and 87 operation employees. The semi-structured questionnaires, which adopted a 5-point Likert scale, were self-administered to collect data within three months from the selected respondents who provided information on how training needs assessment affects training outcomes in the hotels. Semi-structured questionnaire was adopted as data collection tool with descriptive precision sought to minimize errors of occurrence (Zikmund *et al.*, 2010; Cooper & Schindler, 2008). The tool was researcher-administered and provided for direct interaction between the researcher and the respondent. The respondents were guided through the core objective and concepts to be inquired with a formal structured instrument. The questions focussed on how training needs assessment affected training outcomes, specifically, effects caused by determination of employee training needs, TNA process and scope of training needs. All data was combined and only group summaries were included and factorised. Principal component analysis was used to transform all highly correlated or significant components into a set of composite variables and themes derived from the converged components.

Content validity was maintained through critical review of literature and build-up of the conceptual framework which incorporated appropriate phenomenon that were measured on suitable scales. Additionally, construct validity was essential, to measure the presence of abstract characteristics for which no empirical validation seemed possible and much more difficult, like in

the attitude scales. Further assurance was required to measure the acceptable degree of validity. The consistency was examined through the inter-item consistency reliability test -Cronbach alpha reliability test which tested the consistency of the respondent's answers to all the items measured and how independent measures of the same concept correlated with one another. The higher the coefficients, the better the measuring instrument. On the other hand, triangulation involving multiple sources such as involving employees from different levels of management; managers, supervisors and operational staff was equally used to establish validity (Creswell, 1998). The objective of this study was to find out whether training needs assessment affects employee training outcomes in Kenya's hotel industry. Twenty four (24) items were used to measure the effects of training needs assessment on training outcomes. After running the correlation, only significantly correlated components were further subjected to factor analysis from which three specific principal components were generated. The findings of the study are as discussed in the succeeding section.

Discussion of Findings

The first objective was to find out if the employee training needs were appropriately incorporated which would have been based either on organizational or employees perspective. The respondents were asked to indicate training needs indicators used and the effectiveness of each and the level of their incorporation in the assessment process. The second objective was to examine if the training needs assessment action plan adopted was suitable and how it affected training outcomes. In addition, respondents were asked to explain the process of training needs assessment, the members involved, the importance of each step and its effects on training outcomes sought. Lastly the third objective was to find out whether the data collection, interpretation and evaluation methods affected training outcomes. Rotations converged in seven iterations and three components with Eigen values accounting for 57.047% of the variance were extracted. This is above the threshold of 50% and indicated that the three-component factor model derived fits the data appropriately. Cronbach alpha analysis for reliability on the twenty four items showed internal consistency of the items which had loadings greater than 0.4.

From the results of data analysis (see table 1) the first component factor labelled 'the cause of training' need was found to be vital in ensuring achievement of training outcomes. This factor was found to be a reliable component, as indicated by the Cronbach alpha value of 0.719.

Table 1: Component Factors for Effective Employee Training Needs Assessment

Employee Training Needs Indicators	Component Factors 1, 2, 3		
	1. Cause of Training Need	2. TNA Action Plan	3. Level of Preparation
Inefficiency in Production Processes	.744		
Increased Employee Turnover	.742		
Employee Job Descriptions	.486		
Effect of the TNA Action plan			
Feasibility of set targets		.792	
Correct and Adequate Timescale		.690	
Holistic Evaluation of Past Trends		.655	
Constant Review During Training Process		.789	
Effects of the Evaluation Process			
Use of Training Reports			.446
Organization is the Core Determine Body			.735
Cronbach α Values =	.719	.558	.324

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

Three factors; production processes, trends of employee turnover and employee job descriptions were used by many hotels to determine the need to train. Employee inefficiency at 74.4% was used extensively to justify identified training needs so as to increase productivity and achievement of maximum profits. Employees were often rated on targets set, without due consideration of challenges faced. For example, some set targets were not achieved due to technical problems in forecasting of sales or other supporting processes, inadequate teamwork or coordination between employees.

At the end of the time scheduled, employees were evaluated and gaps identified that needed training especially if set targets were not achieved. Despite the fact that setting of targets was significant in determining the training needs, there were other significant sources of training needs such as materials wastage in production processes at 74.4%, high employee turnover at 74.2% and training without key consideration of job descriptions at 48.6%. All employees were encouraged to use procedures that would cut costs such as recycling of materials and personal work was not permitted during business hours. Notwithstanding the fact that other factors such as increased

machine breakdowns, reduced productivity and increased accidents were not used as indicative features for training gaps, employees were often given warnings and in case of careless use of machines they were liable for punishment or dismissal despite manager's infrequent concern to seek possible training gaps in such eventualities.

Secondly, the feasibility of the majority of training needs assessment action plans was significantly questioned. These plans are often expected to involve systematic processes specifically developed to oversee effective determination of training needs. However, the many hotel plans deviated negatively from the crucial objective to enhance achieving effective employee training outcomes. The TNA action plans were not fully feasible at 79.2% since they were not adequately prepared, trainers could not track if training needs were met and more so communication with the trainers was not consistent, since they were mainly concerned with achievement of training outcomes before a scheduled training session. The study time scale was also very essential in determining if training outcomes would be achieved. The timescale helps facilitate an effective action plan, employees who had worked within a short duration of at least one year and below, found it relevant to train, whilst long serving employees required some justification of the need to train, especially if they were being trained for refresher purposes or as a norm. Nonetheless, trainers did not regard timescale as a significant strategy to identify the employee training needs. In comparison, the majority of off-the-job training sessions met the timescale set, while those on-the-job training were difficult to meet deadlines. But due to ad hoc planning and need to cut training costs, correct and adequate timescales were not considered hence rated 69%. Evaluation during the training process to identify any other training needs was the third factor in ensuring a holistic achievement of effective training outcomes which was rated at 78.9%. More evaluation procedures were required despite the bi-annual appraisals that were carried out. Moreover, reports generated during and after training should be used as future reference points for training needs and not just paper work evidence.

The third component factor significant in ensuring training needs led to achievement of training outcomes was the 'level of preparation for training'. Preparations done prior to training are central to the achievement of training outcomes. The process was not only expected to be systematic, but its intentions and the means and level by which they were to be achieved were expected to be measurable. The scope of survey of training needs was dependent on the organizational change and needs rather than the single function of the hotel departments. The objectives and timescale of the training needs had to be agreed upon with sufficient and relevant information collected from training reports which was significant at 44.6%. But most importantly a link between the organizational goals and the employee motivators at 73.5% was vital to ensure the level of preparation was not compromised. The assumption was that incorporation of management support at high level facilitated the hotels to target the right groups, numbers of trainees in comparison to the trainers, have the relevant training content and evaluation measures put in place to meet the desired training needs.

Particularly, management was required to put in place, administrative and costing strategies to achieve these set targets though they were not more keenly involved to ensure TNA was effectively done to meet desired training outcomes. In summary, TNA has not only been sufficiently identified as one of the ways of ensuring that learning takes place effectively and efficiently. However, with the rigour to correctly implement TNA; employees acquire the right skills, knowledge and attitudes specifically designed for their jobs and a crucial tool for enhancing growth and success of the business since it ensures employees are sufficiently prepared, motivated, committed and receptive to new ideas.

Conclusion

The results of this study affirm that many hotel management teams are typically action oriented because of the service nature of the industry. Managers are thus often too busy for training and development which compels them to often overlook the critical process of critically examining employees training needs thus productivity and quality of work is compromised. Therefore, there is need for managers to intensely analyze work environments and use appropriate tools for TNA to be effective. According to the study, managers should keenly identify training gaps as reflected in inefficiencies in the production processes like changes in employee turnover rates and or employee job description which significantly affect the achievement of training outcomes. Secondly, for the training needs assessment process to fit in the action plan, managers are required to ensure that the TNA action plans are feasible in comparison to the training needs and outcome desired of employees. Practicability of timescale must be ensured, past trends must be analyzed too to ensure errors or inconsistencies are not repeated and most importantly, the objective must not be rigid, since a constant review during the training process could inform other training gaps. New ideas during the training process are especially vital if they are identified and incorporated to enhance achievement of the training outcomes. However, there must be assurance of adequate resources to maintain any new processes. On the other hand, hotel managers may consider offering employees incentives to increase their participation and psychological satisfaction like promising promotions which heighten their prestige at their place of work, paid off-duties during training sessions or provision of certificates on completion of attaining effective and implementable outcomes showcased through evident changes on transfer of acquired training skills, knowledge and attitudes in the work place.

Recommendation

For further studies, a more qualitative approach would be adopted with similar objectives to provide for an in depth enquiry of the perceptions of employees on how strategies for ensuring effective training outcomes could be achieved through TNA.

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