

Designing, Delivering and Evaluating Learning and Development

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Introduction: Training, Learning and Development

Organizations are operating a rapidly changing environment necessitating for learning and development training among employees. According to McLean (2006), learning and development, training in an organizational setup is different from the traditional training. The traditional training was tailored to impart occupational related skills, knowledge and techniques, with no regard to learning and personal development. Therefore, training that facilitates learning and development extends beyond the traditional occupational related skills imparting to include motivational opportunities for employees and employers, more so in the challenging business environment. Organizations, therefore, have redefined learning; training is no longer a stand-alone organizational event but a strategic component of organizational growth. Consequently, new training approaches have emerged such as action learning, organizational learning, coaching, mentoring and just-in-time training.

Because improved learning and development in the organization contributes to improved organizational performance, learning and development managers should ensure that learning and training activities in an organization are of sound quality. According to Noe (2008), learning and training programs should be accurate, credible, clear and practical and, therefore, a learning and development manager should design, assess and review learning activities in an organization.

Therefore, as a learning and development manager, this report seeks to brief the senior management on ways in which the existing approach to needs analysis, design, delivery & evaluation might be enhanced

Designing, Delivering and Evaluating Learning and Development

Theoretical Framework

According to Lien, Hung and McLean (2007, p.215) learning in an organization can be viewed through theoretical approaches, namely the behaviorist approach and cognitive approach. Gond and Herrbach (2006) state that the behaviorist approach views learning in organizations as an adaptive response to changes in their environment, therefore, learning is a goal-driven adaptive process. Whereas the cognitive approach views learning in organizations as a cognitive shift driven by advancement of knowledge, therefore, learning in an organization is a cognitive alteration that aids in knowledge acquisition and sharing of knowledge and information. Slater and Narver (1995) assert that the two orientations, market and learning orientations, as proposed by behaviorist and cognitive theoretical approaches are inseparable. Slater and Narver (1995) continue and argue that the learning orientation facilitates market orientation approach and performance. Similarly, Hurley and Hult (1995) state that learning in organization facilitates innovation.

Salas and Cannon-Bowers (2001, p. 474) observe that since 1992, numerous new and holistic theoretical frameworks for learning, training and development have been developed to give a deeper and comprehensive thinking into training, learning and development in organizations. The new theoretical approaches to training and learning have influenced the design and delivery of training and learning activities. For example, Salas and Cannon-Bowers (2001, p. 474) outlines that an integrative learning and training framework advanced by Tannenbaum influenced how organizations designed and delivered training and learning programs. The integrative framework postulates and highlights conditions, both pre-training and in training that affects the learning process, together with factors that aid in transfer of acquired skills post

Designing, Delivering and Evaluating Learning and Development

training period. Kozlowski and Salas (1997) observe that characterization of factors and processes in training intervention influence transfer of skills and knowledge. Salas and Cannon-Bowers (2001, p. 474) report that in the year 2000, Kozlowski and other colleagues studied and advanced theories that consider organizational factors and training design that affect vertical transfer process, which according to Salas and Cannon-Bowers (2001, p. 474) is the “upward propagation of individual-level training outcomes that emerge as team and organizational level outcomes.” Following this study, other scholars have studied barriers that impede on implementation of learning in organizations. Salas and Cannon-Bowers (2001, p. 474) continues to observe that other research studies have postulated new theoretical frameworks of learning and evaluation concepts and theories through expanding evaluation typology and incorporating recent concepts in cognitive psychology.

Other theoretical frameworks that have been advanced in recent years have been more focused. For instance, Colquitt, LePine and Noe (2000) proposed a new integrative framework on training motivation through empirical studies conducted both quantitatively and qualitatively. Cannon-Bowser and Salas (1997) developed a model to be used in conceptualizing performance measurement in learning and training processes. Cannon-Bowers et al., (1998) carried out a study that singled out conditions, learning intervention and concepts that improve learning and training process in organizations. Salas and Cannon-Bowers (2001, p. 474) observe that numerous scholars have conducted studies and developed conceptualization on imperative variables that impact on the learning process, which include pre-training, conscientiousness and training outcomes, individual and situational factors that affect motivation during training and learning process. In summary, these conceptualizations and theoretical models offer a platform

Designing, Delivering and Evaluating Learning and Development

for need analysis, design, delivery and evaluation of learning and training activities in organizations.

Training Need Analysis

Since organizations are organically different, therefore organizations have different training needs, necessitating learning and development manager to conduct a training needs analysis of an organization. According to Salas and Cannon-Bowers (2001, p. 475) the most critical step in learning, training and development process is carrying out a needs analysis procedure. Goldstein (1993) further states that the needs analysis is conducted to establish areas in an organization that require training, what need to be learned and personnel that need to be taken through the learning and development process. During this process, therefore, the learning and development manager need to specify the learning goals and objectives. The needs analysis stage shape the subsequent steps, design, delivery and evaluation. Therefore, needs analysis stage is critical in facilitating an effective learning, training and development approach in an organization. Arthur, Bennet, Edens and Bell (2003, p.235) state that by carrying out a needs assessment or the need analysis procedure, an organization seeks to evaluate whether the organization's objectives, needs and problems can be solved through learning and training. Arthur et al., (2003, p.235) continue to assert that the need analysis is a three-step procedure that includes organizational analysis, task analysis and person analysis.

Organizational analysis seeks to evaluate the organizational goals that can be achieved through learning and training and the functional areas within the organization that need to be taken through the learning and training process. Learning and development managers conduct task analysis in order to establish what the employee or personnel who is going through the learning

Designing, Delivering and Evaluating Learning and Development

process need to learn in order to develop holistically and areas that the training need to cover. Lastly, person analysis is conducted by the learning and development manager to identify individuals that need to be taken through the learning process and for what reason they are suited for the process. Goldstein and Ford (2002) opine that a systematic needs analysis is important because it is the initial step to design and development of a learning guide. It also guides the design, development and evaluation of the learning and training process. Arthur et al., (2003, p.235) continue to observe that the needs assessment provides two key features in the learning process that include implementation and evaluation of the learning process. The implementation feature acts as the input, the concepts, processes and systems that employees and other personnel learn during the learning and training process, while evaluation is the outcomes measured after the learning and training process is over. As a result, the comprehensiveness of the needs analysis determines effectiveness of the learning and training process because it offers solutions to the central questions to successful learning and training process.

Ways of Enhancing Needs Analysis Procedure in the Organization

Effective needs analysis requires that the learning and development manager conduct robust organizational analysis, task analysis and person analysis of the organizational components. The role of a learning and development manager is to identify learning needs, planning, learning activities and evaluating learning activities in order to facilitate individual and organizational development. In order to successfully design and develop learning activities, the learning and development manager requires to outline factors that may impede effective delivery of the training and learning in the organization. The manager identifies and matches learning objectives and goals to organizational goals, resources available, both financial non-financial and constraints and conflicts facing the organization. According to Salas and Cannon-Bowers (2011,

Designing, Delivering and Evaluating Learning and Development

p. 475) organizational constraints and conflicts are the major impediments that hinder effective learning in an organization. Therefore, prior identification help to ameliorate these major impediments to effective learning and training process before the learning process is implemented. Organizational analysis helps in identifying organizational conflicts and constraints that may manifest during the learning and training phase. Salas and Cannon-Bowers (2001, p.475) observes that in an empirical study conducted in fast food restaurants, organizational climate determined whether employees who were taken through the learning process transferred the learned skills,. Therefore, organizational factors influenced post-training and learning behaviours among trained employees. Since organizational climate determines post-training attitude and behavior, therefore, it determines whether the trained employee will put into practice acquired knowledge or skills on the job. Job analysis is pre-requisite because it helps the learning and development manager identify the information required to develop learning goals. Salas and Cannon-Bower (2001, p.475) state that a learning and development manager after conducting task analysis should come up with a description detailing job functions, conditions necessary for the task and the knowledge skills and attitude needed to perform the described job. Person analysis helps learning and development manager assess strength and weaknesses of individuals. Salas and Cannon-Bower (2001, p. 475) agrees that there is a paucity of research in this domain, but it is crucial because provides suggestion on training, learning and development activities.

The organization can enhance its needs analysis approach by performing the following procedure, which include performing a gap analysis, identifying priorities and importance, identify causes of performance deterioration as well as opportunities and identifying possible

Designing, Delivering and Evaluating Learning and Development

solutions and growth opportunities. The organization needs to shift from reliance of a single technique to investigate organizational needs instead should adopt a multidimensional approach. The basic need analysis tools and technique include direct observation, questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, tests, record and report studies and work samples. From a perspective of a learning and development manager, the organization should use the primary need analysis technique, which includes direct observation, questionnaires, interviews and focus groups. Though expensive and time consuming they are accurate and unbiased. Gap analysis helps compare actual performance against benchmarks, and will form the first procedure in the needs analysis. The first step of the procedure will involve determining the contemporary state of skills, abilities and knowledge of the employees vis-a-viz the organizational goals, objectives and constraints. The second step will be to identify requisite conditions to spur both organizational and personal success. This will be accomplished through evaluating levels of skills, knowledge and abilities together with the critical tasks needed to achieve the success. The difference between the contemporary and the necessary situations will help the learning and development manager identify problems, needs and purposes of the organization. Evaluation of problems, needs and purposes will help the manager isolate those that can be improved through training. The second procedure of need analysis involves identifying priorities and importance. After developing the list of needs for learning, training and development, the learning and development manager needs to evaluate the needs against organizational objectives, goals and constraints. The identified needs are then evaluated on their practicability, urgency and importance to the organizational performance. The third procedure of need analysis is identifying causes of performance and opportunities. After narrowing down on both personal and organizational needs, the learning and development manager then identifies specific problem

Designing, Delivering and Evaluating Learning and Development

areas and opportunities in the organization. This involves task and person analysis to ascertain whether individual are skilled to do the jobs they are doing. The fourth procedure of needs analysis is the identification of possible solution and growth opportunities in the organization. The learning and development manager identifies a problem and assess to ascertain whether the intervention of learning and training can solve the problem.

Designing and Delivery of Learning

After the completion of the needs analysis, the learning and development manager is required to design and deliver learning activities. According to Noe (2008), learning, training and development describes an organization's attempt to impart employees with skills, knowledge and behaviours that will aid employees successful in their day-to-day task performance. Noe (2008) continues to opine that an organization can use learning, training and development to achieve competitive advantage if learning and training encompasses basic and advanced skills to develop intellectual capital. Therefore, learning, training and development is connected to strategic drivers of the business. Philips (2005) term this form of training as high-leverage training, it emphasizes on creating conditions that facilitate continuous learning, enhancing employees understanding of organizational systems, relation among different functional systems and structures. To achieve desired learning and training goals, learning and training should be conducted using appropriate learning and training methods. Reisner and Gagne (1983, p.5) observe that instructors have a broad spectrum of instructional methods that supports learning and instruction. They include printed text, sound and interactive video communication. Reisner and Gagne (1983, p.5) continue to assert that learning and training are "built on a model for instructional methods that is itself predicated on the instructional design process." Learning capabilities should correlate to instructional methods. Mitchell (1983) states that there are five

Designing, Delivering and Evaluating Learning and Development

categories of learning capabilities, verbal information, cognitive strategies, attitudinal change, intellectual skills and motor skills, and each category gives a specific learning outcome that should dictate instructional methods. Therefore, selection of an instructional method should take cognizance of learning capability and desired learning and training outcome. Similarly, Carter and Parker (1993) assert that training method influence specific learning and training outcomes. Carter and Parker (1993) continue to observe that lecture method is an ineffective training method while methods using newer technology register high levels of efficacy.

Ways of Designing and Delivery of Learning in an Organization

According to Arthur et al., (2003, p. 236), needs analysis helps the learning and development manager establish learning and training objectives, which in turn dictate the knowledge, skills and tasks to be learned. The skills and tasks to be learned fall under three sub-domains cognitive, interpersonal and psychomotor. Learning and development managers cannot influence the skills and tasks to be learned because they are dictated by the task assignment, need analysis and learning objective, but can influence in the design of learning delivery method. To enhance the design and delivery of learning, there is a need for the organization to make sure that task training aligns to the most effective training method. This will be conducted in five procedures, namely: identifying requirements and factors that affect design, converting requirements into learning outcomes, determining the sequence of learning content, selecting methods to meet the learning outcomes and needs and selecting an assessment activity. In this organization, there is a need to reorient how the design and delivery of learning takes place by introducing a five-step procedure in the design and delivery of the learning process. The first step is identification of learning and training objectives, which encapsulates learner outcome as a result of the intervention. Learning objectives should have the following characteristics: it should be clear on

Designing, Delivering and Evaluating Learning and Development

learner outcome and performance at the end of the learning process, it should set the standards of performance expected at the end of the learning process and spell out the conditions under which learning shall take place. The second step is the selection of training or learning strategy, which is detailing the approach to the delivery of the human resource development intervention.

Familiar learning strategy includes e-learning, off-the-job learning, off-the job planned development, on the job and self-development. The third step involves the selection of the assessment method of learners during the HRD intervention to measure understanding and ability during the delivery period. The fourth step is selection of content, methods and media. The fifth step is selection of training methods, which is different ways in which concepts and elements will be delivered to learners. Typical examples include case, study, role-play, discussion, coaching among others.

Ways of Enhancing Evaluation of Learning

According to Arthur et al., (2003, p. 235) evaluation criteria are used to measure the effectiveness of the learning process. There are many evaluation models that learning and development managers use in learning and training evaluations. However Van Buren and Erskine (2002) state that the most commonly used evaluation criteria is the four-level model of learning and training evaluation. The model measures effectiveness in terms of reactions, learning, behavior and results. These evaluation criteria of measuring effectiveness of training are done in order to improve the design of training, validate training as a business tool, justify training costs or help in selection of training methods. Arthur et al., (2003, p. 235) assert that reaction criteria measure trainees attitude and affection level towards the training program. Learning criteria measures learning outcomes of the HRD intervention but not the job performance. Behavioural criteria measure the effects of training on job performance. Results

Designing, Delivering and Evaluating Learning and Development

criteria measure learning activities at a macro level and the utility of the personnel intervention by measuring the dollar value gained from the learning activities, mostly through return on investment metric. Therefore, it is prudent that evaluation of learning activities be assessed at different levels, hence, a mix of criteria should be used.

Conclusion and Recommendation

For an organization to achieve competitive advantage, it must develop superior learning and development approaches in order to achieve organizational transformation. Effective learning and development in an organization facilitates improved alignment of external and internal environment of an organization through aligning organization's culture, business strategies and the competitive business environment resulting in organizational transformation. Learning and development practitioners agree that workplace learning and training is an effective method of enhancing employee productivity and communicating organizational goals to employees, hence facilitates organizations to gain a competitive advantage in the marketplace. Consequently, organizations through the help of learning and development personnel and consultants spend huge sums of money to deliver effective learning and development approaches in an organization. Industry statistics report improvement in learning in organizations come at a hefty cost, as organizations are spending a sum of \$55.3 billion to \$200 billion every year on learning activities. The hefty expenditure on training and development is a testament to the potential impact of learning and training on organizational performance. Effective learning in the workplace is achievable through improved needs analysis, design, delivery & evaluation of learning intervention.

Designing, Delivering and Evaluating Learning and Development

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Designing, Delivering and Evaluating Learning and Development

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Designing, Delivering and Evaluating Learning and Development

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