

Performance Improvement through Non-systematic Training Premises

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Abstract

Effective managers resort to training as a means of performance improvement. He/she also adopts the systemic approach to training in order to train on a scientific basis. The interest in taking these actions is efficiency in performance and enhanced productivity. Five distinct approaches to training were identified by Boydell (1976), out of which the systemic approach was found as more scientific and appropriate for organisational development. In spite of the perceived benefits of adopting the 'systems approach', managers neglect them and adopt other methods which give only "accidental improvement". Some of these other methods could be perceived by managers as giving 'mere' accidental improvement, but the manager realizes that such other approaches would need to be adopted now and then, in order to have industrial peace. Also, the desire of the manager, which is organisational sustainability, is not often that of the group, which is "satisfaction of social relationships". The forward-looking manager may succeed in changing his/her organisational culture on training approach, by insisting on the right approach, but once in a while adopts any of the other non-performance enhancing methods, in order to motivate staff and have industrial harmony.

Key Words: Performance, Training, Training Approaches, Systematic Training.

Introduction

It is generally believed that 'training' is a panacea for most organisational performance problems. Hence, in situations of a performance gap and low productivity, managers resort to training in order to make good or achieve the required level of performance. At the beginning of each financial year, managers make budget or set aside some funds for training of employees during the period. In order to demonstrate their competence and effectiveness, some managers strive to utilize these training votes by all means in the training of workers, what and how of training notwithstanding. "Just let us train staff".

While some managers sent personnel on training because money voted for that activity must be used during the financial year, others do so as a way of satisfying the personal desires of employees. There is another group of managers who send employees on training because they want the trade unions to see that management is 'cooperating' with them, therefore, the latter should cooperate with management whenever there is any kind of industrial dispute. In such practices, personnel are sent on training or training vote is employed for the wrong reasons. In many cases, such practices bring about improved performance, even though the improvement may not really be the same level with training undertaken under the right processes. The Management may see itself as being 'training conscious' and as making improvements through training of workers, but managers in such organisations fail to realize that their seeming successes and improvements were only accidental and would have been higher or more beneficial to the organisation if the right processes were adopted. The effective manager does not look for improvement at any level without considering the efficiency with



which the improvement was achieved. He/she is also interested in sustainability of performance and long term achievement of organisational goals.

This study set out to examine the issue of 'accidental performance improvement' recorded by managers through training, with a view to determining processes for effective training exposure of personnel. Managers would also be encouraged, not to do training for the wrong reasons or on faulty premises, but on systematic' or rational basis.

Definitions of Training

Today's organisations regard attendance at any training event as a serious investment that must provide value for money and relate to the objectives of the business. So, what is meant by training? In the view of Kenny, Donnelly, and Reid (1977:2), training is helping an individual to learn how to carry out satisfactorily the work required of him in his present job. In line with Kenny et al's (1979) view that training is geared towards work performance, Marsick (1987:3) states that training usually refers to short-term activities that emphasize practical skills immediately applicable to the job. In other words, when an employee is involved in an activity involving the acquisition of skills to be applied on the job, we refer to it as training. This definition indicates that if learning is not directed towards practical application of same, then it could not be referred to as training. It also suggests that when organisational members are sent on training, then one expects or rather; they should apply knowledge and skills acquired from that training to the job, and otherwise they were not trained.

In defining training from another perspective, Laird (1978:9), states that it is the acquisition of the technology which permits employees to perform to standard. This reference to the standard aspect of organisational life is supported by Robinson (1988:12), who said that training means to improve a person's behaviour pattern, in the areas of knowledge, skills or attitude in order to achieve the desired standard or level of performance. By these definitions, one understands Laird (1978) and Robinson (1988) as saying that training is for the attainment of set standards. In other words, every organisation operates on a set or desired standard of operation. Therefore, where one is not measuring up to a set standard, he/she is sent on training, to develop and improve the workers' ability to the required standard. It is important to note that the expected result sets the standard of performance; compelling employees to work towards the achievement of desired results, based on defined performance standards. This also implies that anybody who is not performing according to set standards is not giving the desired result and needs to be put in line through a training programme.

Reilly (1979:22) defines training as the development of a person's knowledge, skills and attitudes for a vocational purpose. In the same vein, Maduabum (1996:4) sees it as the behaviour in order to accomplish the stated objective; while Oatey (1970:4) defined it as any activity which deliberately attempts to improve a person's skill at a task. Considering both Hasseling (1971) and Oatey (1970) definitions, we can regard them as being wide because, they appear to give room for the inclusion of education and development from what we can actually call training. For our purpose, we can define training as any action which deliberately attempts to improve a person's skill in a job (as against education which deals with personal development as against direct job-relevance). It is not our intention to join the controversy on the difference between education and training in this study, but suffice it to say that Marsick (1987:3) explains that education usually refers to longer-term courses that develop generic knowledge, skills and attitudes rather than specific job-related competencies.

Approaches to Training

So many methods are adopted by different organisations for sending or exposing employees to training programmes. While some organisations do so in a carefully thought-out way, others train by the rule of thumb. Whichever way they adopt, one finds that some results are obtained. Such results would have been higher or better if they are well thought-out before embarking on the training programmes; while other methods would have been avoided, knowing that they would not give appreciable effect. Most of these results obtained are term ‘accidental’ and managers would agree that planned results are better than accidental result. Boydell (1976:33), provided five approaches to training by organisations, and they are organisation development approach; welfare approach; administrative approach; political approach, and systems approach. These approaches are analysed as follows:

Organisation Development (OD) Approach

Here, the focus is on ensuring that every group in the organisation is trained. Hence, groups are sent on training in order to either obtain their support or favour. The training division does not want to be seen as neglecting any group; so, either a member of the group needs training or not, the group (occupational) must be represented.

Welfare Approach

This relates to the personal growth of the person; often, for economic goals of the individual. In many organisations in Nigeria, for example, employees are recommended or sent to training as a way of ‘rehabilitating’ them when under financial stress. Sometimes, it is done in order to enable the individual attain a ‘lucrative’ position that is, or likely to be vacant in the near future.

Administrative Approach

This approach sees training in terms of number of persons that have been trained rather than on the Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes to be gained. It could also be on the number of staff who attended various courses. Hence, a manager may observe that they have few numbers of staff in a particular occupation who have attended any course in the last two years, and decided to make it higher, for no practical reasons.

Political Approach

This approach means “where there is an opportunity to gain further influence, power and fame for myself”? Here, the manager in charge of training uses this approach to acquire fame or political power in the organisation. For example, in organisations where training takes place abroad, one finds that the training manager wields a lot of influence because, both superior and subordinate officers lobby for selection, either for themselves or their cronies.

Systems Approach

In systems approach to training is different segments, and the movement from one segment to another is in a step-by-step fashion which is referred to as systematic or methodical. The different segments include:

- (i) Identification of Training Needs or Training Needs Analysis;
- (ii) Designing of training programmes;



- (iii) Implementation of training programmes; and
- (iv) Evaluation of training.

Identification of training needs is always the first step in the training system. In fact, it is the pivot of training since every other activity or segment in the training system depends on how successfully this first step is carried out. Because of the use of Training Needs Analysis (TNA) under the systems approach, it is widely agreed by managers that this approach is the most recommended. In fact, any of the other four methods could be found as satisfactory if they engage in the use of Training Needs Analysis before selecting staff for training. There are many advantages derivable from the application of Training Needs Analysis, which makes this step recommended by managers. So, what do we mean by Training Needs Analysis (TNA) or Identification of Training Needs?

Training Needs

One of the most important steps in the training process is the establishment of the training needs. In using this term, we are implying that there are weaknesses somewhere in the system which demands strengthening by means of training in some form or other (http://collections.infocollections.org/ukedu/en/d/Jh0239e/5.html_br). Even when there are no weaknesses observed. Training can be embarked upon to introduce a new product line, new technology or a new process that will lead to enhanced performance. The sum total is that it will keep the organisation ahead of competitors,. Osborne (1996:43) is of the view that a training need exists when the gap between the 'actual' and the 'required' performance (i.e. training gap) can be most economically matched by a training intervention. This view is supported by Robinson (1988:37), who defined training needs as the gap which exists between the true requirements of a given job and the present capabilities of the incumbent.

Both Osborne (1996) and Robinson (1988) could be regarded as using performance gap as an indication of training need, and Maduabum (1992:184) joins both of them by saying that a training need is a gap between the kind of performance improvement that can best be met by training of some kind. This definition is very easy to be applied to so many situations because, for example, it did not specify the area of human performance, whether a work relationship or participant position. In other words, one many need training in order to be a good wife or husband; a good member of society or community or a good worker. All that Peterson (1992) advocated was that if a human situation requires performance improvement, then training need has been established. The danger in using this definition is that it could also encroach on the area of 'education' which we have been trying to avoid. For example, a student who has been passing at lower grade consistently, and who wants to start passing at distinction level, is in the quest for performance improvement. What shall we call this scenario, training or education?

For our purpose, we do not want to treat training needs wider than is applicable to the work situation; in order to prevent us from following an endless track of an argument. Therefore, applied to the work situation, training need stems from an equation which shows that a factor is missing, and the training event is what supplies those missing factors. We shall take it that the existence of a training need states or implies that a change is necessary: a change from a situation or performance which is below that level required to attain at least the

minimum performance level. And that the change agent is the training event. Craig (1976:9) stated that:

A training need may be described as existing any time an actual condition differs from a desired condition in the human, or “people” aspect of organisation performance, or more specifically, when a change in present human knowledge, skills or attitudes can bring about the desired performance.

Turell (1980:14) concluded that a training need had been revealed if the results we get from the present organisation structure or present procedures are below an acceptable standard. This we can interpret to mean that when an organisation or a procedure within it is operating below an acceptable level of effectiveness, it may be because the people who work and operate procedures have not been sufficiently well developed and trained. In other words, they have training needs. Rae (1986:12) has the same view of training needs with Turell (1980) by defining training need as meaning that performance is not up to the level required, and this in turn means that both the existing level of achievement and that required have been measured and assessed. This indicates that in order to confirm that there is training needs; both the existing level of achievement and that required must have been measured and assessed. Having known what training needs is, how and why do we carry out training needs analysis? This would be treated in the next section.

Training Needs Analysis

It is true that performance has to be enhanced in order to enable the individual job holder perform at optimum level. We also know that where such a need is not rectified, there would be ineffectiveness and inefficiency on the part of the job incumbent and ultimately the work group/organisation. It is widely acknowledged that there has to be an assessment of “what is” and “what ought to be” before training needs could be established. This assessment is done through what is termed as Training Needs Analysis (TNA). The exercise is described as an examination of the organisation’s present operation, expected operations, present and manpower requirements in order to identify the number of staff and manpower categories needing to be trained and retrained, individual training needs which enable a person to reach the required standard of performance in the current job or the future job (Osborn, 1996:138):

The complete process of training needs analysis according to Peterson (1992:14) means specifying those gaps or discrepancies in performance that actually exist between what people are capable of doing now, and what you want them to do in the future. Managers who adopt the systems procedure in determining training recipients in their organisation could be seen as very rational-looking at the requirements of training needs analysis. It is doubtful if any other training approach could match or even surpass the benefits of systems approach to training. Some managers are not careful about engaging in training needs analysis and use “accidental results” as their encouragement for training. Such managers may need to reconsider the necessity of adopting performance improvement through training based on needs analysis, than that obtained through accidental approach.

Why We Need to Assess Training Needs

In the view of Reilly (1990:17), the short answer is that:

A tremendous amount of training resources are wasted when training needs are not properly assessed. First, training may not be the appropriate response to a particular



organisational problem. Second, when training is the correct response, it is important to identify what kind of training. Thus, managers and trainers should try to find out where training might improve the performance of an organisation before they commit resources to training.

Goldstein (1989:29) stated that training needs assessment provides information on where training is needed, what the content of the training should be and who within the organisation needs training in certain kinds of skills and knowledge. He further explained that once an organisational analysis has been concluded to identify where training is needed, (for example, in a department or a workgroup); a task analysis determines the activities performed on the job and the conditions under which the jobs are done.

Perceived Attractions of ‘Training for other Reasons’ by Managers

Considering all other training approaches so far highlighted, one would recommend or support ‘systems approach’ to training. But is there no merit in the use of other approaches? Under what conditions would it be advantageous to overlook the use of systems approach? The systems approach to training supports the rational nature of man, but sometimes, the manager finds it useful to train for some other reasons. Such reasons may not be widely acclaimed, but reasonable to the manager who engages in them. What are the issues that attract the manager to the use of other approaches as against the systems approach to training, and is he/she justified to adopt such approaches? We shall tackle these questions by reviewing the other approaches to training not recommended so far and whose result on performance may be is accidental.

Organisation Development Approach (OD)

The background in the use of Organisation Development Approach (OD) is one of social psychology, with special emphasis on the dynamics of working groups. In consequence, much of what is referred to as OD is concerned with the application of behavioural science techniques – especially social and group psychology to the solving of organisational problems. Consideration of group perception is adopted in deciding whether a member of the group needs training or not. In the view of Boydell (1976:34), groups in organisations concern themselves with typical issues in identifying training needs as shown below:

Organisation Development Approach

Level (of Group)	Typical issues involved in Identifying needs
Organisation Wide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the norms, expectations, of employees’ behaviour? - How do people feel about the organisation, about top management, about the products, processes and policies of the organisation? - How is power distributed and used? - Is the climate democratic or autocratic, co-operative or competitive?
Inter-group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is there evidence of inter-group conflict, ‘us-and-them’ syndrome, for example between management and unions, specialists and line, administrators and professionals? - How do various groups see each other? - Do they help or hinder each other’s effort?
Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How well does the group function as a team? - What is the leadership style in the group? - Does it make effective use of its resources? - What is the quality of the relationship between the group members?

Source: Boydell, T.H. (1975). A Guide to the Identification of Training Needs

Looking at the needs perceived as relevant by groups in organisation and comparing same with that perceived as important to 'Management' in organisations; one finds that while that of groups focus on social relationships, that of 'Management' concentrates on productivity and survival of the enterprise. The question to be answered is whether a dissatisfied group can be productive. Not likely, but the issues that cause dissatisfaction and disaffection to group are not performance related. Hence, in order to reduce the negative effects of group dissatisfaction, Managers send personnel on training on the basis of Organisation Development Approach, if only to have organisational or industrial peace. With the group thus satisfied, some measure of performance improvement is achieved although not as would have been obtained using the systems approach. The top manager should be able to read the pulse of the organisational politics in order to defuse tension in a diplomatic way. Hence, Managers sometimes train on the basis of Organisational Development Approach, not because they do not know the most appropriate method, but because there has to be industrial peace before one can talk of productivity. The results of the Hawthorne studies by Roethlisberger and Dickson (1967) are a good example of how productivity could be influenced by group behaviour, indicating that matters affecting a group could give unexpected results if not properly handled. Hence, one may not totally discourage Managers from using the Organisation Development (OD) approach to training. At that point, Managers are thinking about maintaining a cohesive and motivated workforce before any other considerations.

The other question that arises is – to what extent could Managers adopt OD approach to training? Definitely, any organisation that neglects performance and productivity is heading towards its doom. Hence, Managers cannot train by OD approach all the time. In what proportion then should the apply OD approach be used? This is where the Manger has to use discretion and good judgement, which allows for the satisfaction of work groups without relegating productivity and competence.

Welfare Approach

The background in the use of the Welfare Approach is to enable the individual make some economic gains. Either as a compensation for good performance or assistance in time of economic hardship. Using this approach, it will be difficult for the manager to know all that the personnel is going through, unless they all confide in him/her, which is very remote. And in terms of reward for good performance, organisations already have provisions and salary increases. Hence, the Manager may not have greater reasons for adopting welfare approach.

The experience is that welfare approach is adopted mainly in developing countries by Managers in government establishments. In such government establishments, a large number of employees may be nominated to attend a training programme that falls on the week before a religious festival. The reason being to enable the participants derives some financial benefits that would 'cushion' the financial effect of the festival. The Manager could afford to send those officers on Welfare basis because, in the developing nations, government business is not strictly profit oriented, and budget must be implemented whether revenue is earned or not. The Mangers in a commercial enterprise cannot afford to do that mass training on Welfare Approach; else, the organisation would fold up.

The reality is that beneficiaries of welfare approach get motivated to the extent that the output of the 'sensible' or 'appreciative' ones amongst beneficiaries double, leading to higher



productivity. However, such improved productivity may not be based on efficiency which is as a result of competence. Hence, when employees increase or improve their performance/productivity, the discerning Manager asks questions concerning the efficiency of the increase.

Administrative Approach

The background to this approach is that Managers using this approach want to be seen as being pro-organisation by implementing every proposal 'to the letter' without questions. That the performance or effectiveness of the Manager is measured in terms of his/her work output, and in this case, the number of persons sent annually on training. Such Managers forget that some of the staff sent on training may not be exposed to the right kind of training without systematic training needs analysis. Hence, the individual may come back from training without effecting positive learning transfer. Given the number of personnel sent on training in a given period, to what extent did they make any meaningful impact in the performance of the organisation? Are all the problems of the organisation training based? The Manager who adopts Administrative Approach could get some positive results but are these results worth the effort? These accidental results may encourage the Manager, who has little knowledge about the benefits of systematic training approach.

Political Approach

The background to this approach is that the Manager uses it to acquire some political power in the organisation. It is obvious that training which takes place abroad attracts some benefits and allowances, making the decision-maker in such cases much 'sought after'. Such positions put the Manager in an influential status as only the favoured get involved in such training programmes. When people learn on international programmes, they tend to acquire enhanced knowledge, but sending staff on overseas training indiscriminately often leads to sending the wrong persons on training. The training recipients come back well equipped, but many are unable to transfer learning because, such training is received outside their area of performance. No doubt, there may be some accidental improvements, but it would have been higher if the training was focused on the individual's area of performance. The reality is that, in practice, many beneficiaries of overseas training were nominated to enable them 'travel out', whether the sponsoring organisation would benefit from such training or not.

Organisational Culture Contributory to Accidental Performance Improvement

The culture of an organisation determines the kinds of decisions emanating from its Managers and its management style. The culture of any organisation builds up mostly from the reactions of its founding fathers or pioneer managers, and hardens into a way of life or norm of the organisation. In situations where the pioneer management staff imbibes systematic approach to training, subsequent managers and organisational members look forward to or practice it without problems. But, where other approaches were introduced *ab initio*, it becomes odd for one to change or rather correct the initial error. Hence, one discovers that the culture which current Managers met on assumption of office tends to determine their approach.

Every business, in fact, every organisation has a culture. It is not easy or even possible to know an organisation's culture from outside, nor can anybody say for certain what an organisation's culture is unless one has close contact with the organisation. An organisation

may have an imposing or beautiful structure which could easily entice passers-by, but a close relationship with that organisation may reveal a different perspective. What gives the organisation any kind of identity is the behaviour of the people that constitute its personnel and which sum total gives the organisation its culture.

Whether weak or strong, culture has a powerful influence throughout the organisation. It affects particularly everything: from who gets promoted and what decisions are made, to how employees are trained, how they dress and what properties they own. Because of this impact, it is considered that culture has a major effect on the choice of training approach adopted by the organisation. Handy (1976:177) stated that, in organisations, there are deep-set beliefs about the way work should be organised, the way authority should be exercised; people rewarded, and people controlled. These are all parts of the culture of an organisation.

In the view of Taylor (1977:1) culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society. Taylor's definition covers the critical areas of social life which he rightly described as 'complex'. One can hardly talk about the culture of the people without referring to their belief, law, morals and custom. These become habits to the society concerned and these habits are acquired as one lives in that community for a long time. In reality, 'culture' is mere 'habit' on any aspect of human life. So, once a group of individuals acquires a habit, it is adhered to as precedence in doing something. Even the Public Service and Legal System operated by 'precedence' which is a habit that has been practiced over the years or in certain situations. Therefore, if members of an organisation form the habit of doing one thing on each of such instances, it can be rightly regarded as their 'culture'. The definition of Taylor (1977) represents that of Unoh (1986:3), having defined culture in the exact words of Taylor (1977). This means that a culture encompasses conventional understandings and practices which give a people its uniqueness. And thus render such a people distinct from all others. The people may be a community or social setting of any magnitude; it may also be an organisation made up of individuals from diverse backgrounds, but the culture becomes a unifying factor; a habit which all members of that group exhibit unconsciously. Deal and Kennedy (1982:4) and Burrell and Morgan (1985) all gave definitional insights that are useful to this study.

Conclusion

It is generally agreed that training is a pre-requisite for organisational performance, but different Managers adopt different approaches, all aimed at organisational improvement and sustenance. Modern day managers regard attendance at any training events as a serious investment that must provide value for money and relate to the objectives of the business. Of the five approaches to training identified by Boydell (1976) the 'systemic approach' was considered as most scientific and systematic, capable of delivering the required results.

In spite of the benefits of a systemic approach to training, some managers adopt some other approaches which give an accidental improvement. Such approaches are adopted because the Manager wants industrial peace between Management and occupational groups. All the benefits of the systemic approach may not be realizable if groups are dissatisfied. Again, the organisational training culture established by the organisation's founding fathers may be such that considers social relationships as paramount. However, the Manager should, once in a while use the other approaches that would motivate and satisfy individuals and groups. While



government establishments could afford to adopt other methods that are not systematic, commercial enterprises have to abide strictly with the approach that would keep them afloat.

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