

Full Length Research Paper

Multi-skilling at a training institute (Western Cape Provincial Training Institute) of the Provincial Government of Western Cape, South Africa: Post training evaluation

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Accepted 30 January 2012

As global and national markets become more competitive, businesses are forced to become more adaptable and the public service is by no means exempt from this phenomenon. However, in most organisations, the impact of training and development programmes are undermined. The value placed on increasing knowledge and skills is limited to attending a training programme. Resultantly, the newly acquired information and competencies are very seldom transferred from the classroom to the workplace and without a definite increase in performance and in service delivery; the contribution of actual learning is questionable. This research study used the IHRAP multi-skilling programme (presented by the Western Cape Provincial Training Institute) to gauge the importance of post training evaluation and the benefits that can be derived from it, both for the department and the employee. In addition, the study evaluated whether the participants of the training programme are able to apply concepts and techniques learned in the classroom. A research survey was conducted and the results were analysed. This enabled the researcher to determine where there were gaps in the post training evaluation process. Several recommendations were made to bridge these gaps and in so doing, enabled the training programme to have a greater impact on the participants and in the workplace.

Key words: Public sector, post training, evaluation, training, development.

INTRODUCTION

Change is unavoidable. From small organisations to big, powerful conglomerates, change cannot be averted. Certain changes are, however, necessary to survive and succeed in a dynamic environment. Resultantly, organisations must be able to adapt to change if they want to continue to operate in a highly competitive business environment. Due to the subsequent effects of change within the workplace, a greater emphasis is being placed

on lifelong learning and professional development. Additionally, organisations are realising the importance of streamlining processes through regular training of employees.

Mullins (2002) postulates that although staff is an essential resource, they are also costly. However, in order to sustain excellent performance, it is crucial to maximize the contribution of staff to meet the goals of the organisation. Parr (1996) concurs that a vast number of South Africans need new skills to keep up to date with the demands placed upon them by new technology, different management styles and improved service delivery. The training and development of employees is

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therefore necessary to ensure a constant supply of staff who are knowledgeable and skilled and who are able to aspire to career development in general management positions or specialist areas.

Unfortunately, in their need to train employees, many organisations have failed to focus sufficiently on training evaluation procedures. Indeed, training is often seen as a tedious and dull exercise with little or no usefulness, whereas in reality post training evaluation is of the utmost significance.

CHALLENGES REGARDING TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

Training and development has, over the years, become more popular within most organisations. Yet, irrespective of the amount of money, time and resources spent on it, many organisations do not fully recognise the value it brings to an organisation. Even more worryingly, they do not know how to measure its worth to the organisation, or determine how the organisation can benefit from the training. Thus, organisations find it challenging to gauge the success or the relevance of training programmes.

Post training evaluation allows for the identification of skills gaps within the organisation and enables the organisation to find workable methods to close or at least narrow these gaps. An evaluation of the training programme will ensure that the course material can be amended to reflect any changes to the immediate environment of the employee. In addition, the work environment can be adapted so as to provide an opportunity for the employee to transfer the new skills from the classroom to the workplace. The absence of a full training evaluation process undermines the importance of continuous learning and impedes a culture of development and growth.

GLOBAL TRAINING AND EVALUATION

A common goal of business organisations is to grow from strength to strength, to achieve and to flourish in all their dealings. In such businesses there is an immense focus on training. It would be highly unlikely that a business would be able to attain its goals if it did not build in the capacity and ability to succeed. In other words, a business must put mechanisms and methods in place to ensure that it has the ability to be the best and to produce the best at all times.

As such, training ensures that each employee does their job as best they can, using the correct tools and techniques and in so doing helps the business to achieve its objectives. Hackett (2003) stipulates that doing a good job involves efficient processes, competent people and outstanding performance.

Contributors to a successful training intervention

Even though many organisations spend millions of rands on state-of-the-art training facilities, the best presenters and the most expensive training techniques, this is still not a guarantee that the training will assist in delivering competent employees or outstanding performance.

Carrell et al. (1999) agree with the above statement, indicating that there are a number of conditions that must be in place before the training can be gauged as successful. These authors point out that should these conditions exist; it would encourage employees to continuously motivate each other. The conditions referred to above include performance evaluations, training interventions for the present and the future, support for training programmes and environments that encourage change.

The training cycle

The training cycle is a constant flow of preparation, application and evaluation. Irrespective of the nature of the training being conducted, it involves many processes. These processes are integrated, and therefore, sometimes overlap. Carrell et al. (1999) agrees that the actual training is merely one part of a bigger picture. There are several other components, which must work together in order for training to actually materialize.

According to Furjanic and Trotman (2000) the training process consists of four stages, namely: Assessing, designing, delivery and evaluation. In order to focus more extensively on the last stage (evaluation), it is essential that the preceding stages be carefully examined.

Stages of evaluation

Evaluation can be conducted at various stages of the training intervention. The data gathered during each part of the intervention is relevant to the whole process of evaluation and should not be seen as an isolated facet. Each stage of evaluation measures different aspects of the training intervention, depending on what it hopes to accomplish. Agochiya (2002) gives a clearer explanation of the different stages of evaluation:

Pre-training evaluation

Pre-training evaluation is an opportunity to understand the knowledge and skills level of the participants before the programme begins. Pre-training evaluation will assist in identifying special areas that the trainer should concentrate on and it may also identify participants who need more attention than others during the programme.

Evaluation throughout the programme

As part of the evaluation process trainers require continuous feedback in order to ensure that the standard of the training given is of a high quality. Monitoring data that has been gathered throughout the training programme helps the trainer to remain in control of the intervention.

End-training evaluation

This method of evaluation simply demonstrates how much learning has taken place during the training programme. End-training evaluation also provides an indication to the trainer of what the participant thinks of the training programme. Furthermore, it establishes what areas of the programme can be removed from future programmes that are the same or similar in nature.

Post training evaluation

Post training evaluation takes place once the participants have completed the training programme and have returned to their workplace. Agochiya (2002), however, stipulates that there are several factors that contribute to the supposed effectiveness of information transfer to the workplace, such as the conduciveness of the work environment, barriers that prevent the transfer of information or the number of opportunities that arise for participants to actively implement what they have learned in the training classroom.

Training evaluation models

The concept of evaluation, implemented during any stage of the training programme, would be useless if there was no way to measure it.

Kirkpatrick's levels of evaluation

The model comprises of four levels, as explained by Truelove (2006). Each level has an influence on the next level, and as the levels progress it becomes more time-consuming and challenging to implement. However, as the levels evolve, it does provide critical information.

Jack Phillips's evaluation model

Based largely on the Kirkpatrick model, Jack Phillips has

amended his model to include an additional level, called return on investment. It is outlined by Phillips et al. (2004) that workplace-learning performance can be separated into a 5-Level framework, which represents various categories of data, and which will aid the process of evaluating a training programme.

Context, input, reaction and outcome (CIRO) evaluation model

Somewhat different to the Kirkpatrick approach is the development of the CIRO Model. Warr et al. (????) developed this model (Truelove, 2006). The acronym CIRO denotes the four levels of evaluation contained in this approach: Context, input, reaction and outcome.

Brinkenhoff's evaluation model

This is another model that can be adapted to suit non-training performance interventions. This model consists of six phases (ASTD, 2001): Goal setting, programme design, programme implementation, immediate outcomes, immediate/usage outcomes, impacts and worth.

Training and development in South Africa

In order for organisations and employees to maintain a competitive edge in South Africa, it is important that the spotlight remains on the improvement of skills and knowledge. Organisations who do not encourage the use of ongoing training and development interventions and initiatives will find it difficult to keep up with changes in the market and in technology. There are, however, many other variables that play a role in the execution of training programmes.

Macro factors that affect training and development in South Africa

The methods and techniques used to conduct business have changed dramatically over the decades. These changes have mainly been driven by the advancement of information technology and the development of innovative thinking and ideas. Notwithstanding these changes, education and training remain vital components of a growing economy. This sentiment is shared by Haasbroek (2003) who draws attention to the relationship between a country's growth and that of training and development initiatives.

Globalisation

According to Meyer et al. (2004), globalisation involves

the amalgamation of national and international economies and markets, resulting in universal systems, uniformed methods of communication, infrastructure and trade. Essentially this means that business partnerships and environments are no longer limited to the country in which a business operates. Business transactions have no boundaries and the global manner in which things are done, have become standard.

Productivity and adaptability

Productivity and adaptability are important in any workplace because they ensure that business operates efficiently. Productivity helps the business to increase its performance and, in so doing, increase its profit. Along with the challenge to remain competitive and relevant is the need to increase productivity levels. An increase in productivity levels has several positive effects on employees.

Improvements in technology

Erasmus and Van Dyk (2003) explain that constant training and development initiatives are critical in ensuring that ideas and the “know-how” of technological processes can be transferred between employees. This therefore, suggests that as technology continues to advance, training should continue to take priority for new and existing employees.

Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)

Work environments across the globe are daily being affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. This has led to the over utilisation of sick leave and rising numbers of deaths. Addressing this challenge is essential because as performance decreases due to ill-health, productivity levels and profits may also drop. Organisations must put appropriate workplace policies and programmes in place to ensure that the effect of HIV/AIDS is limited.

Labour market activities and educational levels in South Africa

Pre-1994 a lack of sufficient human resource development programmes ensured that certain citizens struggled to develop any significant skills that could be utilised in the workplace. The aftermath of this era, however, still has an effect on the economy and the skills level of individuals today.

Training legislation in South Africa

In the same way in which macro factors have an effect on

training and development, so does training legislation. This includes the promulgation of various training policies and legislation that further encourage South African citizens to overcome the historic challenges of unequal educational opportunities.

In order to provide training that is relevant and updated, the South African government had to change its views on current training legislation. This meant that different legislation had to be introduced - legislation that assisted in correcting the imbalances of the past, thereby ensuring that all South African citizens have access to the same training opportunities.

Additionally, it became a priority to encourage labour flexibility and increase manufacturing, so that South African businesses can continue to compete internationally (Van Dyk et al., 2001).

Research setting

Within the confines of the Provincial Government of the Western Cape, the Provincial Training Institute is responsible for the fostering of skills through the development of functional training programmes as well as leadership and management programmes. The Integrated Human Resource Administration and Persal (IHRAP) programme is one of the learning interventions facilitated by the Provincial Training Institution.

The IHRAP programme has been jointly developed by the Departments of the Premier and Provincial Treasury. The main purpose of this programme is to advance the skills and competencies of all human resource employees on salary levels 3 - 10. This practice would subsequently lead to an increase in standardised procedures within the Western Cape.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Once permission to conduct the study had been approved by senior management at the Provincial Training Institute, the researcher was able to obtain the names and email addresses of those who completed modules of the IHRAP programme.

Fortunately this research study made use of a survey method, which proved to be inexpensive and could be conducted in a relatively short period of time. This research study is unique; Adler and Clark (2008) do specify that there are some general categories of expense involved in the research design and methodology of any research study. These include research costs (planning the study, costs of data collection, payment to staff for their time, facilities and equipment used to send emails or make telephone calls).

The reason for using this specific design and methodology is so that the researcher is able to identify challenges currently facing the IHRAP programme and to find ways in which to use the data to solve the challenges.

Research population

In this research study the population refers to all the course

participants of the IHRAP programme (N = 106).

All the programme's participants are employees of the Provincial Government Western Cape. Within the public service (national and provincial departments) all jobs are categorised according to a salary level between 1 and 16. Participants of this particular programme must be between salary level 3 and 10. These salary levels cover the occupational categories of semi-skilled (level 3 to 5), skilled technical (level 6 to 8) and professionally qualified (level 9 to 12). This population group represents both permanent and contract employees across twelve different provincial government departments (including regional offices and institutions such as hospitals).

Research sample

According to Sekaran (2000) a sample is derived from a population, and is classified as a sub-category. As such, the sample used for this study is a selection of participants from the greater population. From the 106 participants, only 95 participants were given the research tool to complete. The outstanding participants could not be located, and it is therefore assumed that they have already exited the public service.

Sampling technique

This research project makes use of a non-probability technique. The reason for this is that the total population size is manageable and the researcher will therefore use all the participants available.

The convenience sampling method was considered and adopted as the sample design. This type of sampling was used because it was easier and more cost-effective than other types of sampling.

Notwithstanding some of the negative connotations of convenience sampling, this sampling technique was not merely selected because it was an easier option, but mainly for specific reasons linked to the research participants and the requirements of the subject matter.

Data collecting method

For the purpose of this research study, a quantitative approach was used for gathering data. A questionnaire was therefore developed by the researcher and distributed to participants for completion.

Questionnaires are able to reach many participants in a short period of time, with minimal costs. This factor was particularly important as some participants of the IHRAP programme are located outside of Cape Town, in George and the surrounding areas. As opposed to utilising interviews or focus groups, the bias associated with interviewers is eliminated as participants were able to complete the questionnaires on their own (Bless and Higson-Smith, 1995).

Measuring instrument

A Likert scale was used in the questionnaires. Participants were able to select from the five options their level of agreement or disagreement with each question. This five-point rating scale gave participants the opportunity to select a positive, negative or an unsure answer. The scale was set-out as follows:

- Strongly disagree = 1
- Disagree = 2

- Unsure = 3
- Agree = 4
- Strongly agree = 5

Data collection process

Once approval to conduct this research study had been granted, the researcher obtained a list of names regarding all the participants of the IHRAP programme. The names of participants were recorded on an Excel spreadsheet and each allocated a questionnaire number.

The questionnaire, together with a covering letter, was emailed to each participant. The covering letter elaborated on the purpose and objectives of the research study and also highlighted the importance of the research topic. Participants were given seven days to complete the questionnaire.

Two days before the deadline for the submission of the questionnaires, the researcher distributed a reminder to the participants requesting them to participate in the study. It was, however, emphasised that participation in this research study was voluntary.

In an effort to minimise the possibility of a low response rate from participants, the researcher provided various options for the return of the questionnaires. The participants could either email the complete questionnaire back to the researcher; alternatively the researcher arranged an individual collection of the questionnaire.

Statistical procedures

The responses on each questionnaire were allocated a code value. This assisted the researcher in establishing the level of agreement. The excel spreadsheet containing all the scores and codes was then submitted to CPUT's statistician, who utilised a statistical computer program to interpret the data.

According to Kumar (2005) this assists in indicating the validity of the process. Once the data has been received it is analysed by the researcher, and the importance of post-training evaluation within the organisation is determined.

Data analysis

As the study mainly utilises a quantitative methodological approach, a description relating to the value of the training, the opportunities available to implement the training, an increase in job performance, the effective transfer of learning and the overall impression of the programme are identified. There are, however, no representations in terms of demographics, as these are not relevant to the purpose of this study.

Research participants

In total 105 participants attended the IHRAP multi-skilling training programme. However, the questionnaire was only distributed to the 95 employees who had access to email facilities at their place of work.

The table below provides an indication of the departments where the employees work. The higher attendance rates from the Departments of Health and Transport and Public Works is purely based on the need for this training programme within the departments. In addition, operational requirements dictate when it is suitable for candidates to attend training programmes, and may thus be responsible for the fewer number of participants in the

smaller departments (Table 1).

From the total questionnaires distributed (N = 95), 53 participants responded to the researcher. This equates to a total of almost 56(55.78%).

RESULTS

This research study aimed to establish how participants can gain further support in the workplace from managers and peers, how managers can act as mentors and coaches and how interpersonal skills can be improved upon. In addition, it sought to deduce the effect of the multi-skilling training programme on the participant's ability to integrate information learned into their work environment.

Recognising the value of the training programme

The value that a training programme brings to an organisation is essential if it concentrates on the long-term goals of the department. This could include developing employees who possess core competencies relevant to the work they perform. In today's tough economic times, skilled, knowledgeable and capable employees can be a strategic advantage. It is for this reason that the impact of this training programme be acknowledged.

The survey indicated that a cumulative percentage of 18.87% (13.21% strongly disagree plus 5.66% disagree) of respondents did not share their knowledge and skills with colleagues and peers. However, as part of recognising the value of this training programme, participants should be encouraged to discuss and confer information with their teams and work groups. Knowledge sharing would not only increase the value derived from the programme, but also the prestige associated with the training programme.

Opportunities to implement learning in the workplace

Although a cumulative percentage of 83.02% (5.66% strongly agrees plus 77.36% agree) agree that their behaviour in the workplace has changed due to the knowledge and skills acquired in the training programme, these changes in behaviour are not being adequately monitored. This is evident as the research shows that almost 72% of respondents are unsure if their manager notices a difference in the standard and application of their work. If sufficient opportunities are created for these participants to practice what they have learned, managers would be more aware of the difference the training programme has made. It would be viable for departments to create more opportunities for the participants to actually put into practice what they have learned at the training. In this way the learning is reinforced and when the task can be completed correctly

it increases the confidence levels of the participant.

Increase in job performance

In this section of the questionnaire, approximately 60% of the respondents agree that since attending this training programme their job performance has increased. Completing the training enables employees to increase the quality of their work and also shorten the time it takes to complete a job. The survey shows that participants use their skills more frequently and make fewer errors in their work. This could also be attributed to the fact that the training programme combines both theory and practical demonstrations as part of its learning.

Despite the fact that almost 23% (15.09% strongly agree plus 7.55% agree) of respondents are unaware of the costs involved for them to attend this training programme, 85% (62.26% strongly agree plus 22.64% agree) of the respondents stated that this training is an investment in their career. If departments are aware of the costs for training, they may be more interested in fully utilising the participant when they return to work. This would be part of the department's return on investment. The vast majority of respondents did feel they had an obligation to plough back into their workplace what they had learned in their training.

Transfer of learning to the workplace

Part of transferring learning to the workplace is the ability to monitor and track performance after the training has been completed. An area of concern, however, is that a cumulative percentage of 68% (3.77% strongly disagree plus 64.15% agree) agree that their managers have not discussed with them how the knowledge and skills can be integrated into their daily work. As a result, 96% (83.08% strongly disagree plus 13.21% disagree) of the respondents claimed that they do not have action plans in place to monitor their progress. Consequently, only 3.77% of respondents agree that they are being mentored or coached in the workplace. This is indicative that the skills transfer process is not being optimally managed by the departments.

However, owing to the amount of knowledge and skills accumulated during the training programme, almost 89% (3.77% strongly agree plus 84.91% agree) of respondents agree that they are willing to work on job rotation programme. This would assist the department in terms of service delivery, efficiency and quicker turnaround times.

Overall impression of the training programme

Generally, the overall impression of this training

Table 1. IHRAP participants per department.

Department	Number of participants	% participants
Health	31	33
Transport and public works	22	23
Premier	17	18
Social development	9	9
Cultural affairs and sport	6	6
Economic development and tourism	5	5
Environmental affairs and development planning	2	2
Human settlements	2	2
Education	1	1

programme was extremely positive. Most respondents would recommend it to someone else. It is clear that the participants must have experienced professional growth and development after attending this programme. This in itself could be utilised by the departments as a way of retaining existing employees and further developing the talent found within the department.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This research study also focused on the importance of being able to transfer behaviour, skills, knowledge and competencies from the classroom to the workplace.

Execution of post training evaluation

Although summative and formative evaluation is conducted during and at the end of each module, it is imperative that post-training evaluation is also implemented.

Post-training evaluation ensures that there are opportunities for the participants to implement their new knowledge and skills in the workplace. Furthermore, it ensures that the training offered to the participants is relevant to the work that they do. Participants would be reluctant to attend training that will not benefit them in the workplace.

Post training evaluation should be implemented by the Western Cape Provincial Institute and/or by the department where the participant works. Post training evaluation will assist in establishing the degree to which the newly acquired skills and knowledge are being utilised in the job done by the participants. Consequently, this information can be filtered back into the training programme so as to improve future programmes.

Overall, post training evaluation can be used as a technique to align strategic training initiatives to the business objectives of the department.

Effective mentoring programmes

Indicative in the survey conducted amongst participants, was that mentoring programmes are not being employed in the workplace. Mentoring, however, has several benefits for both the mentor and the mentee. According to Klasen and Clutterbuck (2002), "mentoring is one of the best methods to enhance individuals' learning and development in all walks of life".

Currently, departments are struggling to retain employees who are suitably qualified to assist their clients. However, employees who are mentored may feel more valuable to the department and therefore less likely to move elsewhere. This in turn would decrease turnover rates and increase productivity and job satisfaction. In addition, a mentor may assist the participant to practice the multi-skilling they have learned on the training programme. This would be an ideal opportunity for the mentor to assist the participant with practicing skills they have not yet fully mastered. In this way the participant is also able to gain more exposure and experience in other areas of human resources, not just the specific discipline they are used to. In this way mentoring encourages the participants to take responsibility for their own careers. A mentoring programme will build a team's skills and competencies, enabling them to perform more functions than before.

An increase in management commitment

It is the opinion of the researcher that the training programme would be more effective if it had the full commitment of management. The training programme should be seen as a partnership between the department and the WCPTI. It is suggested that the managers of all participants are gathered together at the WCPTI for a briefing session before the training programme commences. This briefing session could include information relating to the course content, its purpose, the roles and

responsibilities of the managers and examples of the work to be covered.

Implementation of action plans

Merely attending the training programme does not signify the end of the training cycle. In fact, it is now vital to establish ways in which the transfer of information can take place from the classroom to the workplace. One such way is through the development of action plans.

Once the participant has completed the training programme, the immediate supervisor and participant should review what was learned in the classroom and decide on ways in which this new information can be implemented in the workplace. It would also be an opportunity for the participant and the manager to identify their goals and expectations after the training and the resources needed to ensure that these goals are met.

Action plans would be an ideal way of placing an emphasis on the knowledge and skills the participant has learned. Additionally, this would reinforce any positive behaviour and actions learned while attending the training programme.

The WCPTI trainers would be able to assist managers and participants in developing action plans and reviewing progress made by the participants.

Creation of job rotation and job enlargement practices

As stated by Dessler (1983) routine, monotonous work creates boredom, resulting in frustrated employees with low work attendance and productivity levels. This is the case with many of the participants - they specialise in one specific field of human resources only.

Job enlargement and job rotation would, however, offer these participants and opportunity to diversify their skills and further develop their area of expertise. Job enlargement would enable the participants to increase the number of similar tasks they perform, whilst job rotation would enable them to move from one job to another. The WCPTI would be able to provide assistance to the departments in this regard.

Development of a culture that supports training and development

In order to improve the performance culture of all departments, it is imperative that management and peer support for training and development is fostered. This includes the creation of a work environment which places an emphasis on keeping abreast with the latest technologies and techniques to complete jobs.

Employees must be encouraged to find more efficient ways of doing their job.

Part of building a culture that supports training and development is making training programmes and other resources available for employees to attend. Managers should be less reluctant to send employees on training just because it means they will be away from the workplace for an extended period of time. The long-term benefits of training programmes must be thoroughly understood by all employees and the training or development programme offered to the employee must be closely linked to the work they do. Training should not be viewed as a way to escape the office.

In adopting a healthy approach to training and development the departments will be successfully contributing to bridging the wide skills gap we are currently faced with in South Africa.

Providing a context for training needs

Several of the participants indicated that they were not sure why they were attending this training programme - it was simply just delegated to them. It is recommended that the participant be made aware of skills enhancement initiatives and how they can benefit the employer and the employee alike. It is further suggested that the employee is able to see the link between the training being offered and the work they are responsible for. This would decrease the level of anxiety an employee may face when experiencing something new, thus enabling the employee to focus on learning new information that can later be transferred to the workplace.

Conclusions

The WCPTI aims to deliver needs-based training programmes that will enhance the efficiency of public service employees. Their approach to training is positive and professional, thereby assisting to develop and advance technical skills and core competencies of all participants. The IHRAP programme is a multi-skilling programme offered by the WCPTI and created specifically for human resource personnel. This programme formed the basis of this empirical study.

Although this study focussed on an in-house situation, and therefore, cannot be generalised, there are some worthwhile lessons that can be learned from the trainers. The trainers of this programme assisted each group to meet the goals of the course by taking into account the individual's background and level of competency. The expectations of the groups were met through the initiation of practical exercises, collaborative discussions and lots of participation. The success of the programme can also be attributed to the way in which the curriculum was

developed in that it links with the participants' experience.

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