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Relationship between Management Support and Training Needs Analysis: An Empirical Study of Administrative Employees in Healthcare

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of this study was to examine the effect of management support on Training Needs Analysis (TNA) amongst administrative employees in a healthcare setting. The context of this study is the Directorate of Health Services, Ministry of Health, Al Buraimi Governorate, in the Sultanate of Oman

Methodology: The survey method was used by means of a self-administered questionnaire. Quantitative data from 348 administrative employees from all levels were gathered and analyzed. Pearson's correlation, as well as simple regression analysis were used to analyze the survey data.

Findings: The findings revealed a significant strong positive correlation between of management support on Training Needs Analysis (TNA). It was also noted that 48.1% of the variance in Training Needs Analysis (TNA) was explained by management support

Implication: The study showed that top management support and involvement in TNA, in line with the mission and objectives of the organization will lead to training programs being more effective in design and implementation, and reduce wasted time, money, and resources in unnecessary or ineffective training programs.

Originality/value: This is the first study to be conducted regarding training needs analysis in Directorate of Health Services, Ministry of Health, Al Buraimi Governorate, in the Sultanate of Oman. It is expected that the findings from this study will help to close the performance gap among administrative employees in this setting.

Keywords: Management support, Training needs analysis, human resource development

Introduction

Employees are the most valuable assets in an organization, and it is often stated that an organisation is only as good as its people. Only through them can organisations achieve their objectives. As a result, it is therefore important that employees possess the necessary Knowledge, Skills and Abilities (KSA's) to ensure that organisations achieve their goals and remain competitive and successful. However, in today's fast-paced and changing world, many of the performance bottlenecks found within organisations are caused by deficiencies in employee knowledge and skills. Since organization's resources channeled to addressing employee training needs are limited, analyzing performance needs has become increasingly critical.

A formal approach for organizations to update employees' acquisition of job-related KSA's is by training. From a human capital theory perspective, training is investment rather than consumption. Research has claimed that training is an important factor that could facilitate a firm's expansion, develop its potential and enhance its profitability (Cosh, *et al.*, 1998). In addition, Tung-Chun (2001) asserted that educated and well-trained employees are a prerequisite for an organization's competitive advantage.

Thus, for organizations to enjoy the returns on training investment, the training itself must first be approached systematically. Systematic training means that there are certain steps that

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organizations need to take in training and developing their employees. These steps begin with an identification of training needs. Thereafter, designing, and developing an appropriate method to serve those needs, implementing the training per plan, and evaluating the training program to determine whether the original needs have been achieved. These steps are more popularly known as the “training cycle” and numerous training scholars agree that they are necessary to ensure training effectiveness.

However, in practice many organisations unfortunately fail to acknowledge the importance of the Training Needs Analysis (TNA). Some of the previous research show that approaches to training are often conducted informally, and unsystematically with most organisations relying heavily on top management judgments to make training decisions such as types of training to invest in and which employees to receive training (Moore and Dutton, 1978; Erffmeyer, *et al*, 1991; Amos-Wilson, 1996; Agnaia, 1996; and Elbadri, 2001). Evidence also showed that trainings conducted in organisations are often not strategic, as training needs are not properly assessed to determine how such needs contributed to the overall strategic objectives of the organisations (Amos-Wilson, 1996; and O’Driscoll and Taylor, 1992).

More importantly, human resource is the most important input to the health care system of a country. This is especially true for the Ministry of Health (MoH) in Oman. In this regards, the Ministry of Health (MoH) is one of the most challenged organisations among all public sector organisations in the Sultanate of Oman. In addition, the Ministry has some of the most diverse activities, hence the health care personnel engaged in health care delivery belong to a variety of professions. Therefore, there is a need to be very focused, active, and effective. In order to reach and sustain the highest level of health, MoH collaborates and cooperates with other economic and social sectors, for protecting and promoting the health of the people to achieve a better quality of life.

The MoH in Oman has focused on training the medical staff, paramedical staff, and nursing staff through ongoing on the job trainings, workshops, and training sessions. The trainings involve the provision of theoretical lectures. This is evidenced by the fifteen training institutes that are owned by the MoH throughout Oman. Of these 15 institutes, 3 focus on offering paramedical training and 12 focus on offering training in nursing. However, the Ministry has not been concerned with identifying the training needs to improve the performance and efficiency of administrative employees by developing their KSA’s in their tasks and duties. A thorough search of the existing databases and literature, as well as the articles published addressing Human Resource Development (HRD) issues within the MoH in Oman, reveal no studies have been done addressing Training Needs Analysis (TNA) in any aspect, neither are there any studies specifically addressing the HRD needs of administrative employees in the MoH in Oman. Nonetheless, it is noted that a TNA manual for trainers in brochure form, exists for staff within the MoH. However, in the section of identifying training needs, trainers are referred to search for information from health workers, health system managers, documents, epidemiological data, or management information systems and the public (Pampanga, 2008). Administrative employees are not mentioned, neither is the strategic input

from the top management stated

Failure to identify the training needs is a serious problem for the organisation. This study uses a questionnaire based survey method to examine the effect of Top management support on training needs analysis amongst MoH administrative employees of Al Buraimi governorate in Oman.

Literature

Within the healthcare industry generally, it can be difficult to consistently conduct thorough Training Needs Analysis (TNA). For example, there are often issues such as nurse shortages directing the organization’s focus. Equally, the need for, and importance of TNA in healthcare sector seems to be below average when it comes to developing and implementing TNA strategies. Gould *et al.* (2004) reinforces this in a review of literature focused on empirical research concerned with the need to conduct TNA within the healthcare profession. This review found that, of 266 articles identified, only 23 (8.6%) contained empirical findings, and most of the studies were undertaken in the UK. This strongly highlights the need for further empirical research to be undertaken in this area, to provide a greater understanding of the TNA, and the benefits that can potentially result for a firm in understanding and appropriately implementing TNA in the training and development cycle.

Dolliver (1993) concludes that though an essential first step, TNA is often overlooked because some managers consider it difficult and others think of it as wasting valuable time that would be better spent on problem solving without training or by means of management tactics. The literature highlights that management’s mandate is found as a primary response to the investigation into why companies assess employees’ training needs (Elbadri, 2001).

Leka *et al.* (2004) found that there is a relationship between management support and developing training needs. Also, an empirical study by Ramus (2001) has shown that supervisory behaviours that encourage daily praise and environmental awards are ranked as being among the most important factors for innovativeness and problem solving by employees. Therefore, it has been suggested that Human Resource Development (HRD) efforts to improve social support should be concentrated on supervisors as they have a degree of control over their resources at work.

A study conducted in Ireland by Murphy *et al.* (2006) found the main cause of nurses not wanting to participate in continuing professional education was lack of top management support, although respondents understand and accept the positive outcomes, they believe that continuing professional education is essentially a job-related activity, reliant on their employing organisation.

In addition, Bowers *et al.* (1998) are of the view that training interventions are usually designed based on common sense instead of TNA. This reveals that senior, and/or line management at many organisations either avoid TNA, they practice it half-heartedly, or even show resistance to training (Cheng and Dawson, 1998). Nonetheless, scholars have opined that it is necessary for organisations to focus their attention on analyzing the possible motives of senior management for understanding the TNA. Also, there is a need to gain involvement and support from management in training processes in order to

achieve the best results (Elbadri, 2001; Brown, 2002; Clarke, 2003). Without management support, there would not be designated funds for training programs, and employees would not feel comfortable using new knowledge and skills.

Abdalla and Al-Homoud (1995) reported that all government and 96% of private and joint venture organizations had no specific practices or procedures for determining training needs of their administrative personnel. These results reveal that the perception of senior, and/or line management plays an important role in practicing true TNA.

Thus, we propose the following hypothesis;

H₁: Management support has a significant effect on Training Needs Analysis amongst administrative employees of Ministry of Health Al Buraimi governorate, Oman

Methodology

The unit of analysis for this study is the individual. A cross sectional research design was employed, because there is no time dimension, and there is a reliance on existing differences rather than change following intervention. Thus, the survey technique was utilized to gather quantitative data. A census was carried out via a structured type of questionnaire which was self-administered to the survey population which comprised a total of 392 employees in the administrative departments of two large hospitals, a poly clinic, and six primary healthcare centres in Al-Buraimi governorate, in the Sultanate of Oman.

Completed questionnaires were received from 351 respondents making up 88.8% of the total number of respondents surveyed. Of this, 348 questionnaires were useable, after excluding incomplete questionnaires

Sample

The distribution of the survey sample population per their socio-demographic characteristics of age, gender, educational status, and length of years in service respectively, revealed the following: The majority of the respondents (26.7%) were between 30 to 34 years old, followed by 24.4% being aged 35 to 39 years old. 24.1% were aged between 25 and 29 years old, and 20.4 % were aged 40 years and above, while 4.3% were aged between 20 and 24 years. According to their gender profile, the majority of the respondents were male at 85%, compared to 15% females. As regards the educational status of the survey respondents, the majority (37.4%) were bachelor degree holders, 35.3% have diplomas, 25.6% have PhD or Master Degree as their highest level of qualification, while 1.7% possess a secondary school level of education

Survey Instrument

The instrument used for this study was a structured type closed ended questionnaire. It was divided into three sections; Section A was used to obtain the demographic information of the survey respondents. Section B and C which were anchored on a 5-point Likert scale (1- strongly disagree, 2- disagree, 3- neither agree nor disagree, 4- agree, 5- strongly agree), were used to obtain information pertaining the level of agreement of the respondents to the questionnaire items relating to management support, and training needs analysis respectively

The questionnaire was originally developed in English. As

the primary language in Oman is Arabic, the questions were translated into Arabic. The verbal equivalence between the Arabic and English versions was checked through back-translation to ensure the compatibility of the meaning of the questions in the two versions. To ensure the greatest clarity possible, slight adjustments were made in the light of this comparison.

The developed instrument underwent careful pre-testing to ensure usability, reliability and validity (Cavana *et al.*, 2001). In line with Leedy & Ormrod (2005), the survey instrument was subjected to face validity, content validity and a pilot study before administering in the main field survey.

Face validity testing was engaged to determine if the wordings of the questionnaire items were clear and unambiguous (Cavana *et al.*, 2001). Consequently, a sample of 21 randomly selected respondents were offered the survey and then interviewed afterwards to ascertain if any items caused confusion. Each respondent was interviewed separately and the same set of discussion points were used for all. These included the time taken to complete the survey, their understanding of the survey, the presentation of the survey and any major issues with the survey. Collation of the 27 sets of results enabled improvements to the survey instrument.

Content validity testing was engaged to determine the representativeness of the survey regarding the constructs being measured (Cavana *et al.*, 2001). Evidence of content validity in the items of the survey was provided where the variables, item development and measures were clearly related to their origins in the factors determining training needs analysis. Further to this, the questionnaire was sent to two academic experts in the subject matter, as well as three experts in the field for their comments and feedback. The feedback provided was carefully considered and changes made accordingly to improve the content validity.

The pilot study was very useful to detect potential problems with the survey instrument. The survey questionnaire was piloted to 47 respondents, making up 12% of the study population. The respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire twice, within an interval of two weeks. Response patterns were compared between the two applications to gain some measure of information on the reliability of the instrument. Also, in line with the responses from the pilot study, modifications were made, with some irrelevant items deleted before administering the questionnaire in the main field survey. Hence the scale for management support contained 11 items, while that for training needs analysis contained 10 items

Data Analysis

The analyses of the responses from the questionnaire field survey was facilitated using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21.0. The internal consistency of the measures was determined by computing the average inter item correlations by means of Cronbach's alpha (Table 1). Pearson's correlation analysis was used to determine the strength, direction, and significance of the relationship between management support and training needs analysis (Table 1). Simple regression analysis was utilized as an inferential statistical technique to test the research hypothesis by analyzing the predictive relationship between management support and training needs analysis (Table 2).

Results and Findings

The relationship between the predictor (Management support), and the outcome (Training Needs Analysis) was

determined by using Pearson's correlation analysis. The Table 1, is result of the correlation analysis, the mean scores, as well as their respective standard deviation

Table 1: Mean, standard deviation, Cronbach alpha and Pearson's correlation

	Mean	SD	Cronbach alpha	Management support	Training Needs Analysis
Management support	4.14	0.71	0.747	1	0.601**
Training Needs Analysis	3.82	0.70	0.862	0.601**	1

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 levels (2-tailed)

From the results (Table 1), it is observed that a strong positive relationship which is significant exists between Management support and Training Needs Analysis ($p < .001$; $r = 0.601$). This assertion is in line with Nunnally (1978). Also, the mean scores of Management support (4.14), and Training Needs Analysis (3.82), shows a high level of agreement of the respondents with the items relating to the variables.

Furthermore, the predictive relationship between management support and training needs analysis was determined by means of a simple multiple regression analysis (Table 2). This was used to test the research hypothesis

Table 2: Simple multiple regression analysis

Variable	R ²	F	Beta(β)	p
Management support	0.481	98.60	0.362	0.000

Predictor: (constant), Management support

Dependent variable: Training Needs Analysis

From the results (Table 2), Management support is a significant predictor of Training Needs Analysis, $F = 98.60$, $p = 0.000$, $R^2 = 0.481$. Hence, Management support explains 48.1% of the variance in Training Needs Analysis, thus supporting the hypothesis (H_1) *Management support has a significant effect on Training Needs Analysis amongst administrative employees of Ministry of Health Al Buraimi governorate, Oman*. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Conclusion

Overall, results of the study indicated that the management support factor significantly determines Training Needs Analysis (TNA) from the perception of administrative employees in the Directorate of Health Services (DHS) of the Ministry of Health (MoH) at Al Buraimi Governorate in Oman. This is in agreement with previous studies that showed the trainees or employees should feel that they will receive the support and feedback necessary regarding their performance from the management or supervisor in order to effectively develop the training needs. One way this can be accomplished is by the management focusing their attention on analyzing the possible motives of senior management for understanding the TNA. As suggested by Elbadri (2001), Brown (2002) and Clarke (2003), there is a need to gain involvement and support from top management and supervisors in training processes in order to achieve the best results. Without management support, there would not be designated funds for training programs, also, employees would not feel comfortable using new knowledge and skills. Thus, this study concludes from the results that managerial support is an essential factor in Training Needs Analysis

In line with this finding, it should be noted that the

perception of managers at the Directorate of Health Services (DHS) at Al Buraimi Governorate in the Sultanate of Oman, plays an important role in practicing effective TNA. The DHS should focus their attention on analysing the possible motives of senior management for understanding the TNA. There is a need to gain involvement and support from top management in the training processes in order to achieve the best results. Consequently, it is recommended that training needs should be considered on the basis of overall Ministry' objectives. The goals of the Ministry should determine what training programs are to be organized for its employees.

The findings of the study are limited to MoH, DHS, Al Buraimi Governorate. Although similarities may exist among other Governorates, caution should be taken in making generalizations about the findings of this study to other Governorates. Also, the present study was dependent largely on quantitative data and is therefore restrictive. Therefore, qualitative data can be considered alongside in future studies in order to provide wider perspectives to the present study

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