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Training & Development towards an Integrated Approach

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ABSTRACT

During the last two decades, there has been greater awareness about soft skills training and development in all the sectors of the Indian economy. As a result of this awareness, there has been growing need to find ways and means to determine the efficiency & effectiveness of soft skills training and development from the point of view of organizational improvements. However, in spite of the increasing need for assessing the impact of soft skills training and development efforts, there has been little systematic emphasis on evaluating the impact of training not only in the context of training situation but also from the point of view of transfer of learning to the job. This is the question which has been vexing the minds of human resource developers.

The traditional approach to evaluation of soft skills training & development has been on collecting the immediate feedback of the trainees which hardly indicate learning in terms of knowledge, skills and attitude and its transfer to the job. Measures have to be developed for recording the widest possible spectrum of the effects of training and not just whether the training programme has been considered successful or enjoyable. During the course of such evaluation efforts being adopted at ASCI, it was felt that certain problems and some interesting facts were worth pursuing through research which may help the trainers as well as the organisations to improve the effectiveness of management development efforts in the country.

Keywords: Soft skills, Training, Management, Development. Organization, Trainees

INTRODUCTION

Soft Skills Training and Development: An Evaluation Approach

Soft skill training is specially designed to enhance the competence of managers in dealing with the variety of organizational functions. Soft skills training is a process, a means through which the goals of soft skills development can be achieved. Investment in soft skills training has come to be considered as an asset for organizational development. Therefore, the credibility of any training

programme for managers lies in its utility and relevance to the needs of the managers or their organization at large.

During the last two decades a number of post experience training institutions, have mushroomed in India and even certain concern has been voiced.

Soft skills development programmes offered by these institutions attempt to inculcate concept and techniques in the managers so as to upgrade their competence in dealing with the growing complexities of organizational management, prepare them to shoulder higher responsibilities and further improve their decision-making skills.

2. RESEARCH PROBLEM

Objectives of the Soft Skills Training Activity

The success of effectiveness of training programme can be best measured in terms of the fulfillment of the training objectives as perceived by the trainee. These objective scan be as follows:

1. Objectives of the organization at large
2. Objectives of the organization for enhancing personal output in terms of the job performance,
3. individual behaviour and attitude for future development purposes
4. Objectives of the personnel for self development.

When these objectives are borne in mind for formulating a training programme, it will imbibe a sense of involvement in the trainees and motivate them to accept and made use of the training more effectively. It is essential here, to ensure that the target groups are demarcated with respect to the specific areas of work and also not disturbed by the change of job/area of job immediately after training, so as to enable transfer of training to the job.

3. THE TRAINING PROGARMME

The actual training programme has to be based on the objectives to be achieved keeping in view, the individual training needs of the target. The programmes could include the area specified and aimed at achieving the specific behavioural changes. The programmes have to match the needs

and objectives of the sponsoring and the individuals (trainees). Coverage of the curriculum, the subjects and their relevance to the participants must be ensured throughout the training.

4. POST TRAINING FEEDBACK

It is always essential to assess and evaluate a training programme so as to improve upon further training programme apart from justifying the existence of trainers. The feedback would involve an assessment of training programme by the trainee, the trainee's peers and subordinates. This would throw light on the usefulness and relevance of the course and its applicability to the work situation. Based on the feedback, an action plan can be drawn for the implementation of the learning. The action plan is referred to as JIP (job improvement plan), as a part of measurement of learning as well as its transfer.

5. TRAINING NEED IDENTIFICATION BY THE BOSS & SUBORDINATE

The role played by the executive himself and his immediate boss in the training need identification has a tremendous impact on the transfer of learning. When the trainee is consulted about his training needs and the areas in which he would like to develop for his own career progress as well as for the organization's goals two very essential things take place. One, the trainee starts assessing himself in order to find his lacunae, his plus points which he wants to develop, and secondly the exact training needs of the individual are identified which will help diagnose the necessary training programme. When such training programme is devised based on his needs, the individual will be motivated to learn and transfer, since he feels not only involved but also feels that the organization cares for him, his progress, as well as his opinion, regarding the growth of the organization. The individual takes more initiative and plays an active role in transfer of learning.

When the boss is involved he is in position to identify the exact training needs of his personnel and knowing them subsequent to the training programme he tends to encourage the application of the inputs so designed and this increases the transfer of learning. Compiling the reports of these two sets of people gives not only clearer picture of the necessary congenial environment due to the new level of awareness among the personnel as well as management/boss.

As opposed to this is the nomination by persons not directly in contact with the executive concerned. In, most cases, the specific training inputs needed by the individual are not identified and the subsequent training programme for which the executive is sponsored, may at the most be

totally irrelevant or have a limited number of relevant inputs. In any case, the motivation level of the trainee to learn is low and so is the transfer of learning which is further diminished. And when the relevance of the inputs is limited or very low, the transfer of learning can be hardly expected. But the situation can be salvaged to a certain extent through a discussion between the boss and the participant prior to the training programme.

6. SELECTION OF THE TRAINING PROGRAMME

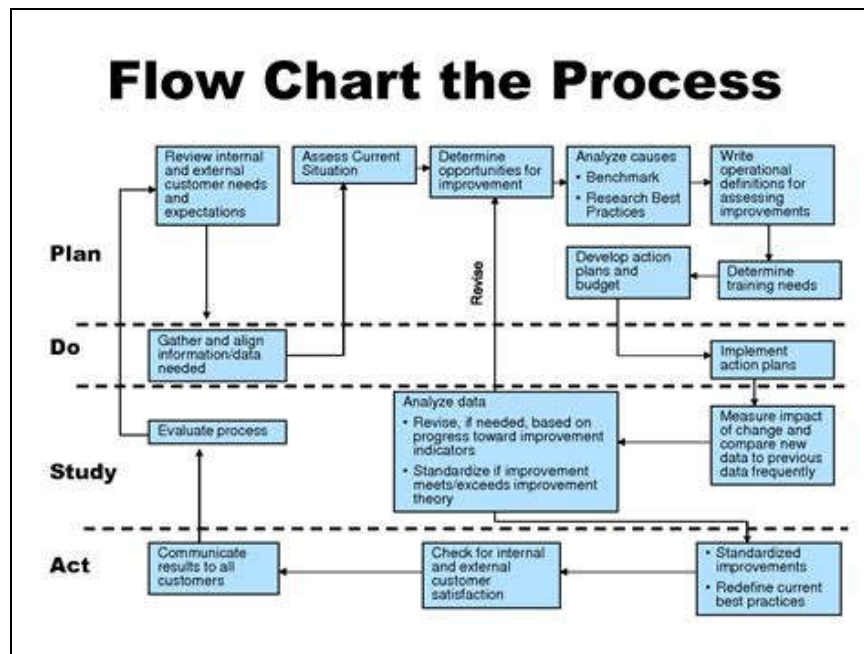
Like in the selection of the trainees, the training programme should be in tune with the training needs, which would ensure learning and subsequent transfer of learning. Otherwise it becomes a hindering factor as it gives no relevant inputs for the individual to utilise. Consequent to this is the method in which the training programme is conducted, including the interest maintained and encouragement provided to participant. This factor can either aid to transfer or create a mind block, leading to low level of learning and as a result no transfer takes place.

If the individual is highly motivated prior to attending the actual course, his learning will be high, provided other conditions are also suitable. If the initial motivation to learn is lacking during the programme, the learning will be low and so will be the transfer. Post course discussion between the participant and his management, with his peers, subordinates plays a major role in the transfer of learning to the job situation. It more or less provides an opening for the application of learning brings an awareness regarding the learning and in what way it can be put to use. This presents a common ground where the pros and cons can be thrashed out as to avoid confrontation late on. This also leads to the preparation of an action plan giving the proposed changes and the manner in which they are to be brought about. It leads to the involvement of not only participant but all concerned in the endeavour thus enlisting their cooperation which is absolutely essential for any effective transfer of learning.

Besides these factors at each stages of the operation there are other factors which have an equally significant effect on the transfer of learning. These involve the personality aspects of the individual, organisational environment and company policies/rules/regulations etc. The other aspects include the attitude of the individual, his decision making ability, his relations with others, his convincing ability etc. Attempts could be made in almost all training programmes to enhance positive effect of these factors. The other factors which affect transfer of learning and changes are the organisational climate including the boss' attitude towards change, the peer group relation, the

attitude of the subordinates, the trade union approaches, freedom to take decision about changes, top management attitude, rules and regulations and availability of resources.

Fig1: Flow Chart Based upon Planning, Doing, Studying and Taking Action during training



Source: www.hormelfoods.com

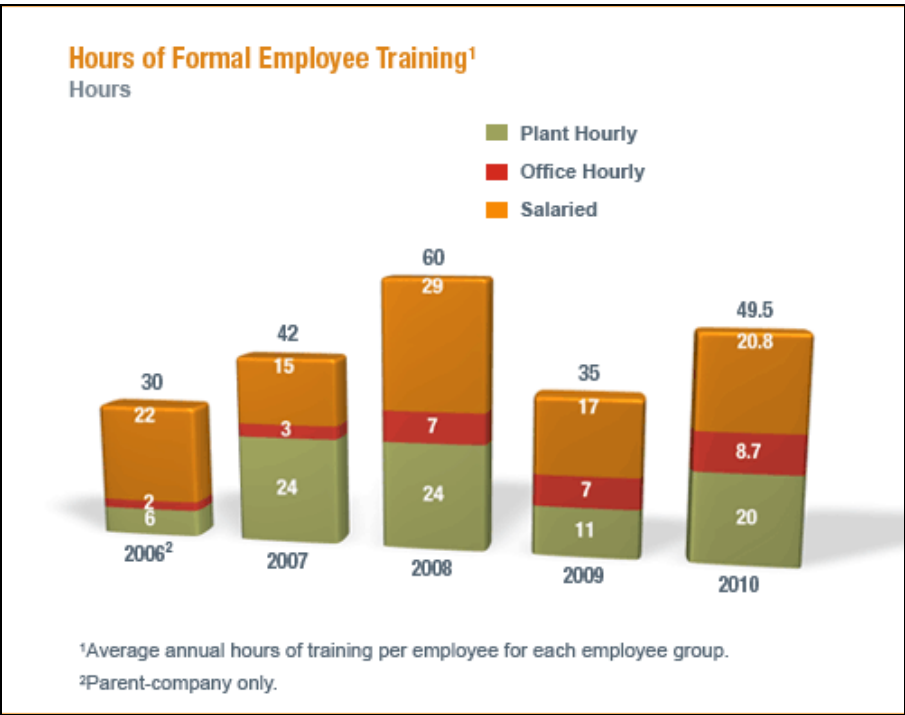
7. METHODOLOGY

To assess the training effectiveness and its transfer to the job, a combination of various methodologies were adopted. The initial data was collected through questionnaires. Separate questionnaires were prepared for the trainee and his boss asking questions on various dimensions of learning and its transfer to the job. The questionnaires were followed by in depth interviews. During the interviews, it was found that there were differences in responses based on the mailed questionnaire and the questionnaire filled in during interview by the researchers. Therefore, after analyzing a few initial mailed questionnaire responses, the major emphasis was shifted to interviews and filling up of the questionnaire by the researchers themselves.

Earlier experience revealed that any single research tool of measuring training effectiveness may not reveal the realistic picture. Therefore, a multi pronged data collection methodologies were used which included apart from the questionnaire and interviews, observations, in depth case

studies of the selected organizations, in depth case studies of individual trainees, group discussions among the trainees, follow up of the job improvement plans prepared by the trainees etc. In view of the various approaches used for studying the different stages of training and its transfer, the method of analysis differed depending on the suitability and type of data sought. The transfer of various aspects of training by each trainee with special reference to individual job improvement plans was studied with the help of questionnaire responses as perceived by the trainee and his boss as we; as though indepth interviews. The questionnaire included aspects like organisation climate, practices which helped or hindered the process of transfer of learning to the job. All tools used to measure transfer of learning were administered at least one year after training.

Figure 2: Comparative Formal Employee Training Hours Based on Plant, Office & Salaried, Hours, from the year 2006-2010



Source: www.readytomanage.com

8. EVALUATION

Evaluation of training must be consistent with the purposes, objectives and goals of the training activity on the following guidelines. For evaluation to be successful, efforts must be cooperative, with the essential involvement of the training staff, the trainee and the sponsoring organisation.

Evaluation must be specific. Those affected by or involved in training and development activities and operations need to know what is being done well, what might be done better, and how improvements can be made. General comments about a training system may not provide the direction and guidance so essential to improvement.

Evaluation must be based on objective methods and standards preliminary evaluation and appraisal in the establishment of standards and criteria, which are readily acceptable and observable in product or in process of the training programme. Without agreed upon standards, everyone involved in the evaluation will come up with different findings and arrive at different conclusions with respect to any element of the training programme. Such a situation will make it possible to plan and implement a workable improvement programme.

Effective communication and coordination are essential. Every effort must be made to let people involved with training know what is planned. A good practice would be to schedule a series of group meetings among the training staff to discuss the evaluation procedures that are to be used. They would be encouraged to meet face to face, share ideas and discuss different aspects of training and its subsequent evaluation. Having accepted evaluation as a part of the training programme, the question remains as to how systematically and comprehensively evaluate a training programme, based on these principals. A systematic evaluation programme is best with certain problems like lack of goal, variability of management tasks, lacunae in the quantitative approach to evaluation, etc. that need a closer analysis.

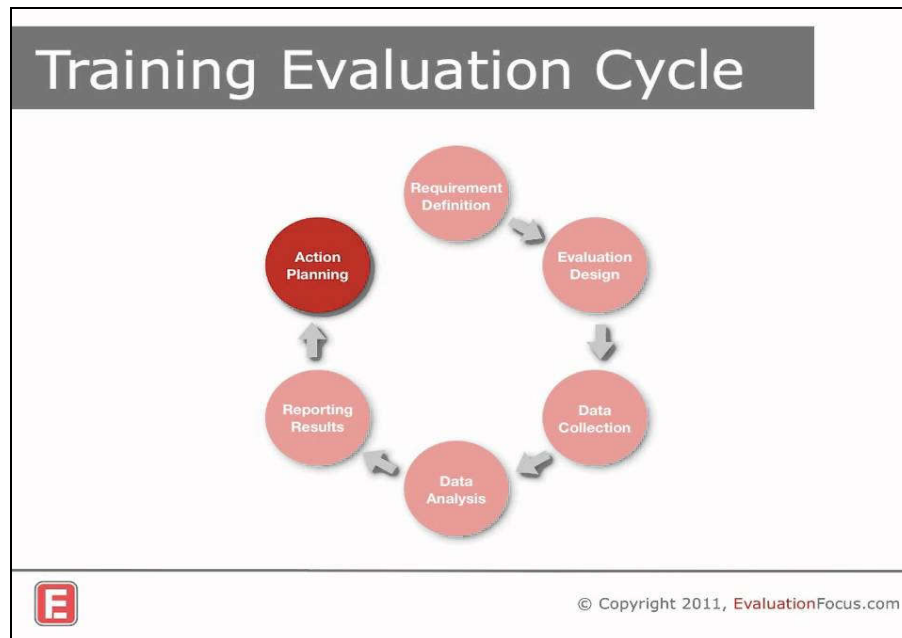
Figure 3: Top 10 Topics in Training & Development of trainees



Source: www.kabbomlatam.com

9. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The role played by the executive himself and his immediate boss in the training need identification has a tremendous impact on the transfer of learning. When the trainee is consulted about his training needs and the areas in which he would like to develop for his own career progress as well as organizations goal two very essential things take place. One, the trainee starts assessing himself in order to find his lacunae, his plus points which he wants to develop, and secondly the exact training needs of the individual are identified which will help diagnose the necessary training programme.

Figure 4: Training Evaluation Cycle of New Hire Trainees

Source: www.evaluationfocus.com

When such a training programme is devised based on his needs, the individual will be motivated to learn and transfer, since he feels not only involved but also feels that the organization cares for him, his progress as well as his opinion, regarding the growth of the organization. The individual takes more initiative and plays an active role in transfer of learning. When the boss is involved he is in a position to identify the exact training needs of his personnel and knowing them subsequent to the training programme he tends to encourage the application of the inputs so designed and this increases the transfer of learning.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSION

Recently, there has been greater awareness regarding training in the development of managerial resources in all the sectors of the economy. There have been sudden increases in training budgets; however a systematic approach to training has been lacking.

The Training Function

In most organization of late, there has been a greater awareness to have full-fledged, separate, training set-up, called either training or human resource development department though the functions of all these are similar. The major function of the training department is either to

organize in-company training programmes or sponsor executives for external training programmes.

In a majority of the organizations, there was a feeling that the persons manning the training departments have been transferred from various other line functions and in a few from the staff functions, because they were not considered very competent in their own areas. However, of late this trend is gradually changing in some organizations. It was also found that the trainers were not happy in training department and barring a few exceptions, a majority of them were looking forward to being posted to their original or line functions with the result that very little effort was made to develop the skill of the trainers in the training functions. The trainers perceived their role more in terms of administrative aspects of training rather than developing themselves as trainers. For example, in in-company management development programme, they perceive their role as limited to arranging the faculty (external or internal) outside their departments, preparing the timetable and making administrative arrangements. In the case of external training programmes, they play a very little role to getting needs identification; instead, they confirmed their role to getting nominations from various departments as sponsoring executives for various external programmes, corresponding with the training institutes etc. Most of the executives interviewed also don not have much regard for the training department and perceive the role more in terms of administrative aspects of the training.

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