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Training needs analysis practices: a survey on large scale companies in manufacturing industry in Saudi Arabia

Abstract

The current research aims to provide an adequate analysis of the training needs of companies belonging to the manufacturing sector of Saudi Arabia. In providing sound methodology and best practices in undertaking this analysis, the research may serve as a benchmark for similar companies who intend to develop their work force systematically. For a country like Saudi Arabia, this research shall contribute to the dearth of literature which focuses on people workforce development. In being able to contribute to the development of manpower in the manufacturing sector, there will eventually be contribution to the economic sector of Saudi Arabia overall. Moreover, it may also provide a template for systematically assessing the training needs within this Industry.
1. Introduction

Training needs analysis (TNA) is defined by Mabey and Salman (1995:158) as a “process of collecting data which allows an organisation to identify and compare its actual level with its desired level of performance”. The authors also indicate that this performance could be interpreted as meaning the competencies and attitude necessary for the staff to do the job effectively. Moreover, Armstrong (1996:536) states that “training needs assessment is partly concerned with finding the gap between what is happening and what should happen. This is what has to be filled by training “. Figure (1.1) depicts this gap.

Figure 1.1

The training Gap

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT IS</th>
<th>TRAINING GAP</th>
<th>WHAT SHOULD BE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CORPORATE FOR FUNCTIONAL RESULTS</td>
<td>CORPORATE OR FUNCTIONAL STANDARDS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL POSSESSED</td>
<td>KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL REQUIRED</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACTUAL PERFORMANCE OF INDIVIDUALS</td>
<td>TARGETS OR STANDARDS OF PERFORMANCE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Armstrong (1996)

The current study intends to carry out a training needs analysis in selected manufacturing organisations in Saudi Arabia.
Training needs analysis is a crucial facet of the training cycle because it is upon which the effectiveness of all the other phases rest. These phases include training design, deployment, and evaluation. Moreover, it is also difficult to carry out because the parties from whom data are gathered may have varying perspectives on the exercise. There are other circumstances that aggravate the conduct of training needs analysis, such as the situation in which an external consultant merely receives input on the training needs analysis and has not been involved in the process. Moreover, there is some sensitivity involved in training needs analysis. Reid and Barrington (1999) point out that there may be some sensitivity involved in gathering, gauging, and analyzing the training needs of an organisation. This is especially true if the process involves determining weak areas that need to be improved. These are but some of the issues that need to be watched out for in the conduct of the training needs analysis in the selected companies.

The conventional models of training needs analysis takes into consideration only the requirements of the job and the extent to which the incumbent meets these requisites. However, it is clear from the view of many HR authors and practitioners that this view is wanting. To be able to make the human resources function truly strategic, there is a need to scan the environment and integrate the strategies of the enterprise into HR strategy. Only in doing so can the HR function truly have value.

The methodology which the current research adopts is based on the theoretical framework of Sleezer (1993), which upholds a holistic approach to training needs analysis. The framework requires analyses at the organisational, task, and person levels.
2. Synthesis of the Review of Related Literature

The review of related literature begins with giving out the various definitions of human resource management or HRM. Briefly, it is defined as a strategic and coherent approach to the management of an organisation’s employees who individually and collectively contribute to the achievement of its objectives. Moreover, the hard and soft models of HRM were presented. The hard model emphasizes the quantitative, calculative and strategic facets of managing the workforce in as rational a way as any other economic resource. In addition, this model adopts the idea that the workforce is another expense that needs to be lessened and managed. On the contrary, the soft model is anchored on the human relations school of thought that gives emphasis to communication, motivation and leadership.

Strategic human resource management or SHRM has also been tackled. Its distinguishing characteristics include the following: consolidation of internal workforce strategy with the general business strategy, use of line management style in HR execution and policy creation, relationship with the workforce is individualize instead of a traditional communal one, and putting focus on dedication to the organisation and encouraging manager ingenuity. The three main perspectives of SHRM, namely, the universalistic, contingency and configurational methods were discussed as well. The universalistic view presumes that there exists HRM practices that are cut above the rest and can be considered as best practices. On the other hand, proponents of the contingency approach recommend instead a best fit approach. Finally, in the configuration approach, the
success of an organisation’s business strategy relies on the degree to which it matches the vertical or external fit and the horizontal or internal fit.

The high-performance working model was also presented, sharing that it deals with the creation of interconnected methods that can affect the performance of the organisation by means of production, quality, degree of customer service, progress, revenue and lastly improving shareholder value. Moreover, the high-commitment management model focuses on improving the mutual commitment of the employee and management.

The importance and process of training needs analysis, the various training methods, and culture as factor affecting training and development were also tackled briefly, to conclude the review of related literature.

2. Aims and Objectives

The current research aims to determine the training needs of companies in the private manufacturing sector of Saudi Arabia for core and technical competencies, focusing on key managerial positions.

In particular, the researcher aims to address the following objectives:

1) To discuss the strategic thrusts of selected manufacturing organisation through:

   a) Economic analysis

   b) Resource analysis
c) A review of HR's running records (e.g. climate and attitude surveys)

2) To determine the task requirements of these critical managerial positions through:
   a) Task inventories
   b) Interviews
   c) Review of HR's running records (e.g. job descriptions and performance appraisals)

3) To carry out person analysis through:
   a) Survey information; and
   b) Running records (e.g. performance appraisals, test results, and documentation of critical incidents).

3. Research Question

The following are the research questions which the researcher intends to answer in the current research:

1. What are the strategic thrusts of the organisations?
2. What are the specific task requirements of key managerial positions in each Company?
3. Is there a match between the job and the incumbent in these key managerial positions?
4. Training and Development in Arab Countries

The need for human resources in the Arab countries is tremendous if nationals are to be available to support business and industry in both the private and public sectors. The need lies, among others, at the managerial level of all sectors such as hospitals, banks, marketing, exporting, factory and production management. Because of the shortage, most Arab countries have had to recruit foreign managers temporarily for posts usually set apart for nationals, until sufficient numbers are qualified to assume those responsibilities adequately (Atiyya, 1993).

One of the current problems for managers in Arab countries is the management development programmes offered by local institutes are translated from foreign sources and not written with Arab managers in mind. Trainers are often heard complaining about text books, exercises, and cases having little relevance to their situation. Most films used in training are imported. Only one agency, the Saudi Arabian Institute of Public Administration, has staff actively involved in the adaptation of programmes and equipment to the local needs. Many Arab managers who learned their skills from experience on the job believe that the best way to prepare future Arab managers is on the job, rather than investing large sums of money in training programmes that do not meet their needs (Atiyyah: 1993).
5. Methodology

The methodology which the current research adopts is based on the theoretical framework of Sleezer (1993), which upholds a holistic approach to training needs analysis. The framework requires analyses at the organisational, task, and person levels.

Source: Sleezer (1993)

The method selected for this research is the field study, using primary and secondary research data. The method for obtaining primary data has been selected for the purpose of achieving in-depth investigation of the problem. The secondary by reviewing the available literature in training and development both in Saudi Arabia, Middle East, other Arab countries and in the Western world. The aim is to discover the conditions under which training and development is most effective, both in theories and practice. To this end, a questionnaire will be administrated to the persons who are responsible for training and development programmes of a selected sample of private sector organizations in
Saudi Arabia. In conjunction with the survey questionnaire, a Simi-structured interview will also be used to gauge the view and attitudes of top managers in the Saudi private sectors on key issues related to training and development. This research will rely on the descriptive technique for gathering data, using both quantitative and qualitative methods. For the quantitative aspects of data, a questionnaire will be used. For the qualitative aspects, the interview will be the most appropriate instrument to use. Both methods were viewed as complementary rather than in competition with each others (Sayer, 1992).

**Conclusion**

To country such as Saudi Arabia, the need for better trained human resources is even more acute at a time when the government is attempting to exercise some control over the inflow of the foreign skilled workers into the kingdom. The demands of a developing economy, coupled with the increasing globalization of the world market growing domestics competition, and other challenge ought to make the training and development function a priority of the utmost importance for all business organization.
References


