

Proposing a Training Evaluation Strategy to Ensure Training Transfer in Public Sector Organizations in Pakistan: An exploratory Account

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Accepted: December 2, 2011 Published: January 9, 2012

Doi:10.5296/ijhrs.v2i1.1195

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/ijhrs.v2i1.1195>

Abstract

Purpose

For human resources development training is a key scheme in attaining organization objectives. Evaluating training outcome is low in public organizations of Pakistan. This situation demands a viable training strategy based on systematic flow of processes and techniques to develop the workforce for practical application in job environment. This study

addresses a doable training assessment strategy to ensure training effectiveness in public organizations of Pakistan.

Design

The study approach is based on theoretical phenomenon. It is a review of old and current approaches of training evaluation. The strategy presented in this study is based on critical review of diverse approaches to training evaluation to inculcate quality and bring improvement in training programs conducted in developing country environment such as Pakistan.

Findings

In Pakistani public organizations, there is no trend by this time to formally evaluate training outcome. But this unstable state of affairs will not last long. In future they will need to know what cost they incurred on training and what benefits did they acquire. This is essential to get training quality. This study addresses the policy makers in both public and private sectors of Pakistan to respond to the proposed training strategy as an innovative move to instill training as a thought provoking and willingly participative activity.

Research Limitations

This study is limited to assess training and evaluation needs of public organizations and their employees in Pakistan.

Practical Implications

In the awake of financial crisis and long debts, Pakistan needs to save every penny and must not give away any investment. This study invites public organizations to consider the proposed training assessment strategy for practical implementation. This study offers assistance to evaluation activities and presents solutions to gaps in performance and skill.

Originality/value

This study will contribute to the debate on training evaluation methods and techniques and finds its originality from literature review to conceive a training evaluation strategy and to develop a practicable methodology to judge training effectiveness.

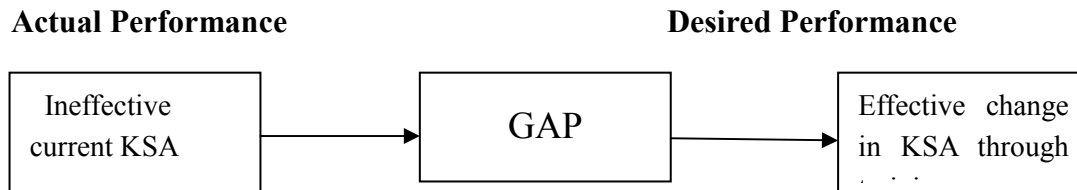
Keywords

Public organizations, training assessment, evaluation, effectiveness, strategy,

Paper Type: Research Paper

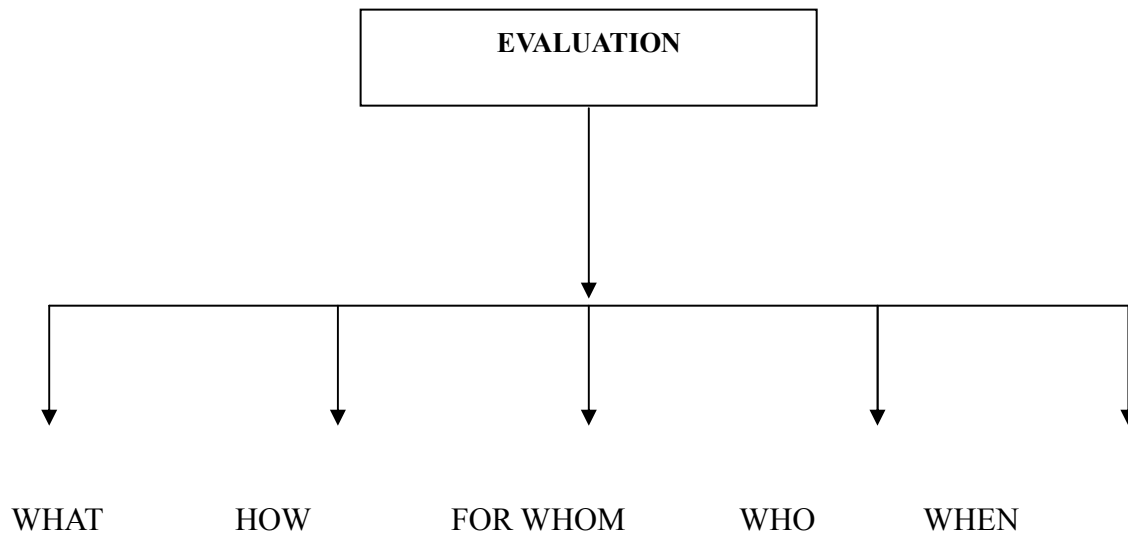
Introduction

Training is an integral part of HRD to achieve organization economic targets. Public departments allocate high budget for training but they are not able to evaluate this investment. This is due to scarcity of valid evaluation techniques and instruments. Training triggers learning which generates performance in the organization to attain goals (Harrison, 2000). Performance is always needed to fill up gap between desired and actual performance (Swart, et al, 2005). Phenomenon is depicted in the figure 1:



Source: Swart, et al, 2005

Bramely individual model of training states that it is the responsibility of the organization to identify the deficient areas of its employees, as employees often feel shy to express their shortcoming. If organization does identify the need areas and plan a training program accordingly, employees will willingly take part in it. Swart et al, 2005 favors this approach and adds that quality of a training program motivates an individual and addresses its learning needs. Bramely model presupposes that change in KSA affects organization performance. Comprehensive model of training effectiveness lays the need of training motivation by focusing and radicalizing training method, content, principles, and trainer (Cannon-Bower et al. 1995). Training motivation can be acquired through volunteer participation (Tsai and Tai, 2003). An empirical study conducted by Tharenou (2001) found that willing participation in training is the stepping stone to raise trainees' motivation. Another model of "HRD evaluation research and measurement" researched that perceived training reputation has a competitive edge (Holton, 2005). Wright and Geroy (2001) argue that quality of training can not be achieved until training is made effective by addressing all important issues regarding individual and organization. Kirkpatrick stresses upon evaluation of a training program through his perceived four steps: Reaction, Learning, Behavior and Results (Kirkpatrick, 1959). Majority of training evaluations are reaction based but many believe that reactions may be temporary and not related with learning or performance (Bushnell, D.S. 1990). These can not provide substantial base for building a viable training policy (Swanson, 1996). While researching for the Results Assessment System, Swanson & Holton, 1999 rule out the adoption of KP model of evaluation as an integral part of HRD evaluation as participants' reactions are not able to offer tangible outcome. According to CIPP model of training evaluation (1987), context, input, process and product are more realistic and practical steps to evaluate training success. IPO model (1990) emphasized that input, process; output and outcome are key indicators of a successful training program. TVS model (1994) regarded situation, intervention, impact and monetary value gives clue to conduct training evaluation. The Holistic training evaluation model presented five factors to build a viable training evaluation strategy, What-How-For whom-Who-When (Pineda, 2007) as shown in figure 2.



Source: adapted from Pineda, 2007

What does Evaluation mean?

Business world is full of uncertainties. To get sustainable competitive advantage, measuring output, and remain proactive is the hallmark of a successful business against the complexity of business. Training is seen as one of the best HR practice to produce skills in manpower and enables them to improve their professional KSA and get better their inapt skills and behavior (Phillips, J., 1994). As greater efficacy is attributed to training, organizations allocate high sums for training. On average, percentage of investment in training was cited as 2.99% of payroll in developed countries. In Spain, this percentage was observed as less than 2% of payroll (ESADE, 2005). If training is considered investment, profit earned from these decisions should be brought to audit (Holton, 1996). Training outcome is therefore, imperative to know for the organizations. Evaluation serves this purpose. Evaluation is not conducted in isolation. It is carried out using archives of organizations to spot weaknesses for rectification (Kirkpatrick, 1998). By evaluation means investigating program, strategies, stakeholders, staff, and product mix of an organization to understand outcome (Pilar Pineda, 2009). In Europe many companies restricted training evaluation to some aspect i.e. reaction or learning of trainees. The area like transfer of training to the workplace is less evaluated by businesses (Eurostat, 2009). Training proves fruitful if evaluation becomes part and parcel of planning activity (Brinkerhoff, R.O., 2006).

How-Experts propose five in-depth stages to carry out evaluation:

1. Initial stage evaluation-to conduct a training need analysis to assess trainees and their organizational requirements. This is before entry into training stage
2. Primary stage evaluation -Plan a training session based on TNA-
3. Secondary stage evaluation- during training
4. Tertiary stage evaluation-at the end of training -
5. Later stage evaluation- at formal prescribed time after the previous training and before the

advent of new training program. This schedule is variable with organizational training policy (Nicholas, 1992)

Experts have researched that questionnaire; interviews (personal and collective), Tests, observation, past information, research indicators and income group factor have proved as valid instruments of training evaluation (Pineda, P, 2007). Besides the above, the learning activities assessed during a training session provide a valid tool to judge capacity building of trainees. Training management must monitor and develop a comprehensive report for analysis and decision making.

For Whom- Organizational people including training management, trainer, and trainees are considered internal beneficiaries. External stakeholders are outside beneficiaries. Organization, its employees and their achievements are the core subjects of evaluation. Most desirable evaluation elements are knowledge, skills and learning acquired during training (Pineda, R. (2003).

Who are the Evaluation Stakeholders?

Troika of instructor, training management and trainees are the evaluative stakeholders.

When

Every organization has its distinct culture to evaluate proceedings within its organizational framework. If knowledge is outcome of training endeavor, pre, post tests can prove appropriate tool to check learning growth of participants at pre, during and post training stage (Kirkpatrick, D.L., 1994). On job performance tests can reveal the knowledge and skill learnt during training (Kontoghiorghes, C, 2004). In Pakistan, civil servants are required to attend mandatory management development programs at National Institute of Public Administration (NIPA) to attain promotion to next position. Training transfer is confirmed when participants behave as skilled after training (Russ-Eft.D and Preskill, H, 2008). Successive evaluation can enable management to construct a result oriented training plan. Holistic training evaluation model was successfully implemented in many organizations of Spain (Pineda, P. 2007). What-How-For whom-Who-When base factors pointed out by Holistic evaluation model are universal. This model was implemented in European environment. Logical application of Holistic model can yield much better results, if it is to modify in context of attitude, psyche and educational standards of locales. Using these experiences, a good training strategy can be devised to address performance gap in Government departments. Works of Gordon (1985), Burke and Day (1986), Bass (1990), Lewis (1995) and Collins and Holton (2004) reveal that there is a scarcity of meaningful and rigorous research about effectiveness of managerial training programs. There is no published evidence which could indicate high organizational performance as a result of successful managerial training. Even effectiveness of training through management development games or simulations was not proved successful (Gordon 1985). Thinkers have been constantly looking for techniques to evaluate training effectiveness. Burkey and Day (1986) traced out seven training methods, six content based training and four criteria based trainings in search of outcomes. Public institutions in Pakistan need criterion based training. Collins and Holton (2004) after researching 83 studies found marked improvement in knowledge and skill when right training was delivered to right people in the field of education, government, medical, military, business and industry. Literature review point out two flaws: much reliance on training not development and

complexity of training issues in training system of developing countries.

There is a stress on outcome in current business environment. Outcome portrays an array of core outputs of the system in vogue, its sub-system; process involved and individual's effectiveness and efficiency (Holton, 1996). Looking for a systematic strategy to training evaluation, many studies focused on organizational performance as outcome, many regarded job satisfaction level of employees as outcome, many regarded training transfer an indicator of successful training. Training results will remain mixed until training is planned with a pre-defined criterion to disseminate among all stakeholders.

Training Design

Training design denotes significant features of the learning environment (Noe, 2009). These features include reward system within organization and its importance in training (Whitehill and McDonald, 1993), distributive justice (Bell and Ford, 2007), and several training methods such as trainees' centered learning (Nikandrou et al., 2009), open-learning (Baldwin et al., 1991), and blended learning (Klein et al., 2006). Literature revealed that training evaluation has not been able to gain the status of management tool. Utility analysis technique was put forth to determine utility of evaluation (Cascio and Boudreau, 2008). Metrics offers a straightforward and easy to use macro level approach to conduct a program evaluation and set benchmark standards (Swanson, 1996). Literature review helped to identify key indicators contribute to transform blur picture of training evaluation into a lucid training assessment framework: Total pay roll expenses and Training expenses, their percentage, Setting Parsimonious criteria, Easiest to use by all, Streamlining the existing and future data, Highlighting past lag indicators to predict future leading indicators (Ulrich, Zenger and Smallwood, 1999), Value based training ("Human Capital Theory", Cascio and Boudreau, 2008), Employee satisfaction, Skill leverage & Promotable workforce (Kaplan and Norton, 1996). Constrained resources bring trivial improvements in quality and efficiency. Strong institutional management, instructor standard, improved incentive packages for instructors and managers; superior supervision, compatible instructional material and agile monitoring helps to build professional development of public/private training system (Dennis R. Herschbach, 1997).

Trainees Fitness for Training

Trainees' fitness for training is prerequisite which is terribly ignored in developing country's environment. It has been found that trainees lack the desired spirit to learn and develop themselves. Employees' internal motivation and ability to learn and transfer to the job (Self efficacy) are two mainly required traits of trainees (Gist et al, 1991). These two characteristics need to be tested before training in public sector organizations of Pakistan. Internal motivation affects behavior of trainees (Mathieu et al, 1992). Effectiveness of training can therefore be judged through the degree of motivation and self efficacy of employees. Management in public organizations of Pakistan must develop a work environment conducive to nurture trainees' confident and motivation before training. Employees with elevated spirit of self efficacy, try to learn more and excel from the others (Chiaburu & Marinova, 2005), such employees are likely to apply skills on the job more

proficiently (Saleas and Cannon-Bowers, 2001). By this way, good learners can be developed to lay foundation of a good training design. Determining employees' performance and inherent skills before, during and after training leaves healthy impact on his(r) motivation and confidence building (Salas et al. 1999). Galagan, P. (1983) regards Trainees' learning capacity at training entry stage, a prerequisite to achieve other three levels identified by the researcher i.e. target performance, carrying out job performance and organizational performance. To him, HRD can be evaluated on the basis of these levels.

Job environment

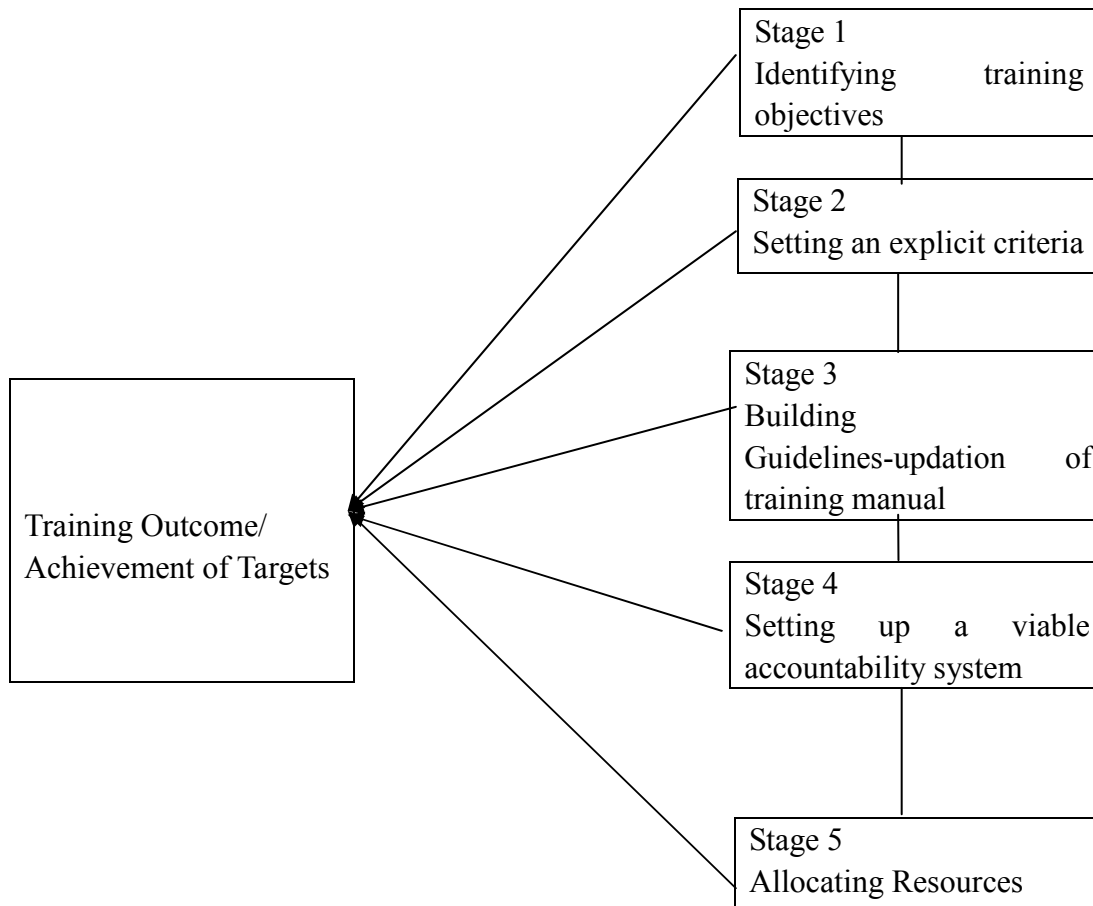
Finding support in job environment is an influential phase of training in which trainees manage to transfer their learning during training on job. Job environment finds development from Management Support, Technical Support, colleagues' professional support; resources support and follow up support. These kinds of support enable learner to apply his skills (Kontoghiorghes, C., 2004; Burke and Hutchins, 2003). If entire the support factors are available but follow up support is not there, training endeavors will lose their efficacy (Rossett, 1997). Mind set of management support is a stepping stone for encouraging and supporting employees to get training and develop its inherent skills (Birdi et al, 1997). If management does not give training its due value, training will not make its mark. Similarly colleague support provides the employee feedback about his current level of KSA (Gilpin-Jackson and Bushe, 2007).

Follow Up Strategy

Stephen R. Covey expresses his thought in his book, "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People" that without identifying training objectives, defining a definite criteria, a set of guidelines, allocating resources, setting up a viable accountability system, positive results/accomplishments cannot be aspired.

Many organizations understand the importance of follow up campaign after training but they are unaware how to accomplish the activity (Hutchins, 2009). Many works and studies researched in this area and found methods like action plans, performance assessment, colleague meetings, continuous supervision and technical support needed from the organizations time to time (Saks and Belcourt, 2006). If the areas referred to above are given attention in developing countries and made a part of training strategy, public and private organizations can evaluate their trainings more effectively than ever. Action plans refer to trainees' ability to develop their action plans to implement knowledge on job (Broad and Newstrom, 1992). Performance assessment gauges the behavior of trainees at job environment after training (Tyson and Ward, 2004). Colleague scheduled or unscheduled meetings after training prove helpful in analyzing post training scenario and watch transfer of training. Activity is supervised by mentor from inside or out of the organization (Baldwin and Ford, 1988). Supervisory involvement refers to the direct involvement of supervisor and encourages the trainee to apply what he has learned during training (Cromwell, S.E. and Kolb, J.A., 2004). Technical support denotes the ways in which organization provides necessary and problem solving information to its employees as he resumes his job after training (Baldwin and Ford, 1988). Previous research indicates that training

transfer depends on different post training activities. Literature is evident that thinkers have given their best time and thought to explore the training evaluation phenomenon. Evaluation is still a theoretical idea awaiting constant research and development in Pakistan. Literature review confirms Brinkerhoff, (2006) thought that training evaluation and HR operational management are closely inter-linked. An epitome of these views and findings leads to draw a viable conclusion.



Commentary

The flow of proposed strategy advances in five interlinked stages. At stage 1 training objectives are identified. At stage 2, an explicit and self explanatory criteria is set and on this basis, guidelines are built at stage 3 and a training manual is documented with regular updating. Following this a viable and effective accountability system may be enforced. Resources are optimized and allocated keeping in view of the stated objectives at stage 5 to optimize desired outcomes and targets.

Conclusion

Human resources are viewed as plausible and incredible entity. That is why organizations like to raise huge investment on developing HR through training. Organizations are in constant chase to deliver better and effective training to their employees and make this investment borne fruit for the organization. Literature review helps to conclude that when trainees join training willingly and trainees' selection is made on merit, these two factors contribute as a great indicator of training effectiveness. Moreover an effective training design aiming at blended learning outcome can motivate many to attend training programs. The experiential words expressed by Stephen R. Covey provide strategy and road map to extract sound training results. This pragmatic and visionary approach seems best to developing countries environment such as Pakistan where huge investment is made in training but desired performance outcome seem nowhere. Diagrammatical flow of processes is depicted below in order to develop a practical training evaluation strategy to ensure training transfer in public organizations of Pakistan:

Training evaluation proves as a viable tool for optimizing training quality for employees and organization. ¹As rightly said, evaluation leads employees towards self learning, and enable trainees to improve mutual relationship with training management and trainers (Eurostat, 2009). Besides the above, three other ways were identified in the literature to make training evaluation more objective through interviewing trainees, trainer and training management at feasible stage of training either pre-post or mid training. This scenario manifestly demands a clear cut training evaluation strategy configured with organizational environment to change mind set of training stakeholders and instill quest for real knowledge, skill and aptitude among them to apply on workplace. Other important factors like Training context, needs, plans, and pre and post training effects and quality supervision cannot be ignored and must be attended systematically. To execute all this, there requires an intellect possessing the ability to look into the future._

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