

Training Needs Analysis Checklist 090



Introduction

Providing effective learning, development and training opportunities depends on knowing what is required - for the individual, the team and the organisation as a whole. A training needs analysis (TNA) to establish where training is needed is particularly vital in the context of today's fast changing environment: it will help to keep people's skills and abilities current and give organisations a competitive edge.

Analysing training needs is a vital first step for any effective training, enabling organisations to channel learning and development to where it is most needed to improve organisational performance. TNA is a natural function of appraisal systems and performance management, and is a key requirement for the 'Investors in People' award. It is also often needed for funding or to meet service-level agreements.

Managers today are often at least partially responsible for developing their team, and it will help if they understand the principals of TNA, which requires systematic planning, analysis and coordination to ensure that organisational priorities are taken into account, duplication of effort is avoided and economies of scale are achieved. All potential trainees should be included in the TNA process and, ideally, managers should receive training on the TNA process, and how they should approach and implement it.

This checklist outlines an approach for introducing training needs analysis into an organisation. Whilst most large organisations have already developed cultures of continuous improvement and self-managed continuing professional development (CPD) for their employees, organisation wide training needs analysis can still be helpful in some circumstances, for example, when new technology is being introduced on a wide scale.

Definition

A training need is an individual, team or organisational level requirement for skills or abilities which can be fulfilled through training, learning or development interventions.

A lack of adequate training can prevent employees from fulfilling their job responsibilities and hinder organisations in achieving their objectives. TNA should aim to detect where and how this may be happening, and establish the need for training and development in specific areas.

The aim of TNA is to ensure that training addresses existing problems, is tailored to organisational objectives, and is delivered in an effective and cost-efficient manner.

TNA involves:

- monitoring current performance using techniques such as observation, interviews, regular performance appraisals and questionnaires
- anticipating future shortfalls or problems
- identifying the type and level of development required and analysing how this can best be provided.

Training needs fall into three broad types:

- those which can be anticipated
- those that arise from monitoring and performance appraisals
- those that result from unexpected problems.

Action checklist

1. Ensure that the identification of training needs is integrated across the organisation

Development needs discovered in one department are likely to exist in others. It is pointless for individual managers to throw their own limited resources at each problem as it arises, duplicating efforts and dissipating energy. Most organisations have a human resource (HR) management function which organises overall training delivery. While managers may not be responsible for co-ordinating the system, they have an important role to play in collecting information on the training needs of their people, and passing it on to the HR or training department.

At the very least, managers can liaise with other colleagues to aggregate training needs information, so that a range of appropriate cross-departmental training and development activities can be planned.

2. Anticipate future needs

Development needs often emerge at organisational or activity level. For example, the introduction of a new software system may well have training implications for those who must work with it; or a strategic decision to enhance the level of customer service is likely to depend on a general programme of customer service-related training for its success.

Other areas to look out for are:

- over-dependence on one or two individuals who hold vital skills or knowledge
- changes in products or policies
- overall changes in internal work processes
- new legislative requirements.

3. Develop monitoring techniques

Some training needs can go unnoticed because they develop gradually within an organisation. Active monitoring systems are essential to spot these, and provide regular information on performance gaps and training needs.

Variance analysis is one approach to monitoring. This sounds technical but is a simple tool for monitoring budgets. When a budget is agreed, expected monthly expenditure is detailed: any major variance from the forecast - up or down - triggers an investigation into why it happened and what the implications will be. This translates neatly into the identification of training needs.

For TNA purposes, the budget numbers are replaced by performance standards and indicators that should be as specific as possible. For example, for a 'soft' issue like customer satisfaction, a standard could be set that says 90% of customers should feel they received excellent service. Carrying out customer satisfaction surveys will allow the measurement of any deviation.

Asking questions at appraisal interviews can act as a form of survey, as the same issues are being addressed throughout the organisation. Identifying development needs is one purpose of appraisal and performance reviews.

In addition to including questions about development needs at appraisal interviews, a worthwhile approach to investigating one-off problems is to interview staff and customers. Regularly ask a random sample of people for their views on the same set of questions relating to general performance - for instance customer satisfaction levels.

4. Investigate unexpected problems with care

Monitoring will indicate where gaps and problems exist. However, it is possible to make the wrong assumption when faced with a particular set of circumstances. For instance, unusually rapid staff turnover in a small section may lead to an assumption that unsocial hours worked there are the issue. Staff exit interviews, however, may indicate that the turnover is a result of cramped working conditions and poor ventilation – issues that training cannot resolve, even though the monitoring process has helped identify the problem.

On the other hand, it could be that:

- the behaviour of the section head is the root cause
- errors at the recruitment stage have led to the employment of unsuitable people.

In both cases there is a development need - in the first case for the section head and in the second for those doing the recruiting.

5. Identify the level of need

It could be that a development need is limited to a single individual or activity but it is more likely to be relevant for a number of people, a whole department or across the organisation. For example, if employees are found to be habitually treating customers as a nuisance, their attitude needs to change. In this case, giving one or two people customer services training would address the training need at the wrong level, because organisation development is needed rather than individual training sessions.

6. Consider what type of training will be most appropriate

Consider whether training needs can be met by using internal expertise or whether external help will be necessary. Remember that formal internal or external training courses are not the only option – approaches such as coaching, mentoring or informal peer-to-peer training should be considered. Technological developments have also opened up a wide range of e-learning and blended learning options, including self-managed online learning programmes. Take into account the number of people to be trained and the resources available.

7. Take appropriate action

If the training needs are within your own span of control, at individual or maybe at activity level, you can take action to meet the needs you have identified. If the needs are broader, you will need to make recommendations and proposals to those responsible for planning and implementing learning and development interventions in your organisation. This may involve drawing up a report specifying the needs you have identified, your recommendations for meeting them and the expected benefits of the interventions.

Whilst this may conclude the training needs analysis, this is not the end of the training and development process. You will need to ensure that the development undertaken has been effective and worthwhile for the individual and your organisation. For more details on this, please refer to the checklist on evaluating training and learning (See related Checklist below).

National Occupational Standards for Management and Leadership

This checklist has relevance to the following standards:

D: Working with people, unit 7

Managers should avoid:

- making snap assumptions about performance problems
- organising training without first establishing a need
- taking a one size fits all approach
- focusing on obvious training needs, when systematic monitoring may reveal more urgent needs.

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Additional resources

Books

Training in organisations: a cost-benefit analysis, John Talbot

Farnham: Gower, 2011

This title is also available as an e-book at www.managers.org.uk/ebooks

The theory and practice of training, 6th ed., Roger Buckley and Jim Caple

London: Kogan Page, 2009

This title is available as an e-book: www.managers.org.uk/ebooks

Training needs assessment: methods, tools and techniques, Jean Barbazette

San Francisco, Calif: Pfeiffer, 2005

This title is available as an e-book: www.managers.org.uk/ebooks

Training needs analysis in a week, Tom Holden

London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2002

This is a selection of books available for loan to members from CMI's library. More information at:

www.managers.org.uk/library

Related checklist

Evaluating training and learning (113)

Internet resources

Business Link: www.businesslink.gov.uk

For guidance on identifying training needs go to Employing People, Improving staff performance, Skills and training, and Fit the training to your need.

Business Balls: www.businessballs.com

Scroll down the left-hand menu and click on 'training needs assessment' for tools, guidance and templates.

Skills – Third Sector: www.skills-thirdsector.org.uk

Click on "training needs analysis" on the top menu for advice and resources on training needs – at individual, team and organisational level. Designed for the third sector but generally applicable to most organisations.

The Learning Needs Analysis Toolkit www.conted.ox.ac.uk/courses/professional/lnat

A toolkit and questionnaire developed by the University of Oxford.

This is one of many checklists available to all CMI members. For more information please contact

t: 01536 204222

e: enquiries@managers.org.uk

w: www.managers.org.uk

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