AN EXAMINATION OF STAFF TRAINING AT VALLEY VIEW UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

In this paper, the primary objectives were to review the literature on staff training and development, and to analyse staff training issues at Valley View University. This study was exploratory in design and relied on secondary data. The study concludes that Valley View University will need to provide its employees with training throughout their career in order to equip employees with the requisite skills to compete effectively in the tertiary educational sector.

Key Words: Staff training and development, Valley View University

INTRODUCTION

An institution is only as effective as the people working in it. It is a fact that the provision of efficient services by any institution depends on the quality of its workforce. This can be achieved through a continuous evaluation upon the performance of the workforce. Training and development of personnel according to Bratton and Gold (2003) comprises the procedure and processes that purposely seek to provide learning activities to enhance skills, knowledge and capabilities of people, teams, and organizations so that there is no change in action to achieve the desired outcomes. It is literally impossible today for any individual to take on a job or enter a profession and remain in it for years with his skills basically unchanged. Staff training and development is not only desirable but it is an activity which management must commit human and fiscal resources if it is to maintain a skilled and knowledgeable personnel. This is particularly, the case in institutions like universities, whose primary and most important resource is people. The administrator of an institution gets most of his results through people. It is therefore beneficial for the administrator to ensure that people in his institution have the skills and attitudes needed to do their work. Although the actual analysis of jobs and skills is usually a task for specialist training personnel, administrators cannot escape responsibility for the inadequate performance of their departments and sections and should therefore keep training needs under constant review as one of the means of achieving their objectives. Personnel training and development is a process of altering employee’s behaviour to further organizational goals.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cole (1993) defines training as any learning activity which is directed towards the acquisition of specific knowledge and skills for the purposes of an occupation or task. The focus of training is the job or task. Development on the other hand he said is any learning activity which is directed towards future needs rather than present needs and which is concerned more with career growth and immediate performance. The focus of development tends to be primarily on an organisation’s future manpower requirements, and secondly, on the growth needs of individuals in the workplace. Development is the acquisition of knowledge and skills that may be used in the present or future. This is more long term focused. It is a comprehensive term used to describe all the different ways in which people can be encouraged to increase, update and adopt their knowledge, skills, personal abilities and competencies. He said, development has a wider focus, long time frame and broader scope.

O’ Conner et al. (2006) stress that employee training and development in an organisation is a process and to ensure its effectiveness, it must pass through a cycle or
sequence. He said that for effective training and development in an organisation, it should be in a cycle starting from needs assessment, training design, implementing training and end with training evaluation. Cole (2010:331) also states: "A systematic approach to training and development will generally follow a logical sequence of activities commencing with the establishment of a policy and the resources to sustain it, followed by an assessment of training needs, for which appropriate training is provided, and ending with some form of evaluation and feedback."

The above definitions point out that for effective and efficient training and development in an organisation, there should be clear-cut policies and procedures on training and development. That is, the needs of the organisation in terms of training and development must be identified after which interventions that will help to reduce the problems so identified are designed and implemented. The next stage in the process is to evaluate the intervention to find out whether the purpose has been achieved, and if not, the process starts again.

According to Cole (2010), the training policy of an organisation may include a range of policies dealing with human resources. The policy statement sets out what the organisation is prepared to do in terms of developing its employees and it must support the organizational mission, goals and strategies. The policy statement must be defined in clear terms and must also be available to all for references. Some organisations have a tradition of growing their own managers and specialist by providing a substantial internal training to sustain all their needs (Noe, 2009). Other organisations contract their training to external providers such as colleges, universities, consultants and private training organisations. There are, however, other organisations that adopt a mid-way position, providing induction training and job training internally but contracting out management and supervisor training.

It can be said from the above that whatever option is chosen, it will require funding and this justifies the inevitable competition between managers for a share of the organisation's financial and material resources. In United Kingdom, a national quality standard was developed in 1990 to encourage effective investment in employee training and development. The standard provided a framework for improving business performance and competitiveness as well as providing a comprehensive benchmark of best practices against which an organisation can audit its policies and practices in development of people (Cole, 2010). The standard is based on four key principles as follows:

i. A commitment from the top to develop all employees.

ii. The regular review of training and development needs.

iii. The taking of relevant action to meet these needs throughout people’s employment.

iv. The evaluation of training and development outcomes for individuals and the organisation as the basis for continuous improvement.

The above standards conform to the systematic training approach discussed earlier on. The standards were set up to guide the training and development practices due to the important roles that they play in organisations.

Methods of training

Generally, several writers on literature on human resource development have identified several methods of training. Moreover, the particular method selected is determined by considering factors such as cost, time available, number of persons to be trained, background of personnel and whether the training is of relative importance to institutional development (Desimone et al., 1998). However, trainers have identified the following training methods: on-the-job training method and off-the-job training method.

On-the-job training involves conducting training at a trainee’s regular work station (desk, machine, and so on). This is the most common form of training; most employees receive at least some training and coaching on the job. Virtually any type of one-on-one instruction between coworkers or between the employee and supervisor can be classified as on-the-job training. However, much of this training is conducted informally, without structure or planning or careful thought (Desimone et al, 1998).

Off-the-job training method occurs outside the work premises. This method can be effective because they give the individual an opportunity to get away from the job and concentrate solely on what is to be learned.
Examples of some off-the-job training methods are: workshops, seminars, and formal education.

A workshop is a specially assembled group of people who with a help of a facilitator, examine organizational issues and or review their effectiveness as a team in order to develop and agree on courses of actions to which they will be fully committed (Gilley et al., 2003).

A seminar is a meeting where a group of people discuss a problem or topic. It can be said from the definition of workshop and seminar that the two are designed to engage employees to take responsibilities for their careers. Gilley et al (2003) state that workshop and seminars are excellent vehicles for orientating employees to career or life planning, and major component of staff training and development.

Another method used in staff training and development is formal education. Formal education involves activities designed to help employees gain a broad range of conceptual knowledge and skills in formal classrooms situations, typically in accredited institutions like universities and polytechnics (DeSimone et al, 1998). The formal education can take the form of full time course, sandwich course and distance learning.

A full time course is where the employee or trainee is fully engaged for a period of time for the acquisition of skills, knowledge and competencies (Gilley et al, 2003). Under this system, the worker leaves his/her work for a long period in order to gain training. The problem with this system is that the worker goes on study leave with or without pay and the employer has to replace the worker who is on training in order to keep the organization running. This problem was pointed out by Baah-Wiredu (2006) when he said that staff in the Ministry of Education Youth and Sports needs to be trained and developed in order to face the current technological changes. However, the major problem facing Ghana's educatinal sector is the number of teachers who leave the classroom and go on study leave annually, leaving most schools without teachers.

A sandwich course on the other hand is an educational course in which the employee or the trainee has a period of study in between periods of work in industry. The rationale for the introduction of sandwich programmes is derived from the current educational and job market situation where two or more years grant of continuous study leave for employees is not favourable to most employers and capacity utilization of study facilities in the Universities are stretched to their limits (Baah-Wiredu, 2006).

The third form of formal education is distance learning. This is where the trainer and the trainee are at different geographical locations and learning experiences are transmitted through various media from the trainer to the trainee. According to O’Conner et al (2006), distance learning is a form of instruction in which learners are dispersed and few extremely well-qualified institutions are available to reach a large number of students and teleconferencing systems are available to support communications between trainees and an instructor who are in different locations.

Significance of training

The significance and value of training has long been recognized. Consider the popular and often repeated quotation, "Give a person a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a person to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." This simple but profound saying is attributed to the wisdom of Confucius who lived in the 5th century BC. Given today’s business climate and the exponential growth in technology with its effect on the economy and society at large, the need for training is more pronounced than ever.

Training, in the most simplistic definition, is an activity that changes people’s behavior. Increased productivity is often said to be the most important reason for training. But it is only one of the benefits. Training is essential not only to increase productivity but also to motivate and inspire workers by letting them know how important their jobs are and giving them all the information they need to perform those jobs (Baah-Wiredu, 2006). He lists the following as general benefits from employee training:

i. increased job satisfaction and morale.
ii. increased motivation.
iii. increased efficiencies in processes resulting in financial gain.
iv. increased capacity to adopt new technologies and methods.
v. increased innovation in strategies and products.
vi. reduced employee turnover.

This is only a partial listing of the many benefits that result from training. Training that is appropriate to the needs of an organization can
add great value. So, why would an organization not welcome and seek out the value-added benefits resulting from training? Training is not always the answer to performance problems. Brandt Sakakeeny, Training Industry Analyst for Solomon Smith Barney believes that training can be a great investment and training can be a waste of money (Rosner, 1999). Training is indeed a waste of money when the desired behaviour does not occur. Gupta (1999) acknowledges that not all performance problems can be addressed by training. In many cases, non-training interventions are necessary. The key is to identify what problems can be attributed to training deficiencies and, once that is accomplished, to ensure that the right training is implemented. Without the right training, employees can be your biggest liability. Trained effectively, however, they can become your biggest asset (Bartram & Gibson, 2000).

Rosner (1999) adds another ingredient for success – support after training. He states, “The most effective programs train workers in new behaviours and then train managers to support employees as they apply learning daily” (Rosner, 1999:43). Support and endorsement from management can greatly enhance training results. One can conclude that training is not always the answer, and when it is the answer, it has to be the right training.

Training needs analysis

Desimone et al (1998) define training needs analysis as “a discrepancy between what an organization expects to happen and what has actually happened.” If for instance component parts of a vehicle are to take one man an hour to produce and the employee used three hours to produce it, there is a discrepancy in his or her performance.

Some organizational and individual training needs are not as clearly defined as others. Even when training needs appear to be obvious, it is still necessary to choose appropriate methods that will meet them. Many training needs are not so obvious. A training needs assessment is one of the most basic and common forms of assessment used by human resource development professionals in the workplace (Gupta, 1999). Needs assessments help to determine when training is the answer and when it is not. Assessment ensures that training programs have relevance to the people being trained. Gupta (1999) gives the following overview of the training needs assessment: A needs assessment provides the information that is usually necessary for designing training programs. The basic purpose of a training needs assessment is twofold: The first is to identify the knowledge and skills that people must possess in order to perform effectively on the job. Second, to prescribe appropriate interventions that can close these gaps.

Some performance problems can be addressed by training. Some problems training can not fix. Training isn't the answer to a problem when it's used to cover up the symptoms (Rosner, 1999). A needs assessment avoids misdiagnosing a non-training problem as a training problem.

Staff orientation

Williamson, et al. (2009) define orientation "as the process of welcoming new employees, bringing them into the organization and familiarizing them with its operations and culture." They identified two dimensions of orientation, thus: formal orientation and informal orientation.

A formal orientation program is sponsored and developed by the organization. Its primary purpose is to welcome new employees and acquaint them with the rules, policies, and procedures of the organization. It should be held as soon as possible after a new employee begins the job, usually the first day of work, so that the new employee does not have time to pick up any “bad habits.”

Informal orientation occurs when new employees receive information about the organization and how to perform their jobs from current employees. Organizations hope that the information passed to new employees from current employees matches the information given during the formal orientation program. The stronger the belief of the employees in the organization’s culture, the closer the two types of information will be.

ISSUES OF TRAINING AT VALLEY VIEW UNIVERSITY

At Valley View University, training of employees is the responsibility of the Office of Human Resources (VVU, 2009). In determining training programmes for staff, systematic assessments of training needs are carried out.
Usually, employees and their immediate supervisors are consulted about any training identified as relevant to their situation.

The primary objective of training and development activities is to support the pursuit of the University’s goals. Training and development activities are also regarded as a key element in an individual’s mastery of, and satisfaction in, his/her principal duties. The University as and when it deems it appropriate, provides opportunities for selected employees to participate in development activities to prepare them for new roles in the University. To this end, the University use both internal and external methods of training. In using external out-of-job training method, the University identifies critical areas and advertises them before universities and other tertiary institutions advertise their admissions. The University’s Scholarship Committee at this stage will select applicants based on their qualification, annual assessment results and availability of funds. The list of staff selected for study leave is then published for the attention of staff concerned (VVU, 2009).

Duties of the Human Resources Office in relation to employee training and development:

i. Initiating and advising on employee training and development policies.

ii. Assessing staff development needs of the University.

iii. Designing, implementing and evaluating staff development programmes.

iv. Developing and carrying out induction, orientation and re-orientation programmes for all categories of staff.

v. Liaising with the Scholarships Committee and other agencies on training and study awards to staff.

vi. Liaising with other training institutions and organizations.

vii. Employee counseling services and career development (VVU, 2013).

The training policy of the University states that it is the collective responsibility of the individual members of staff, heads of department/section/unit and staff training and development specialists to ensure effective staff training and development. All individual members of staff have responsibility to attend to their training and development needs and to respond to the learning opportunities provided. Heads of department/section/unit also have the responsibility of identifying with staff, the learning development needs of staff and to develop and implement strategies for addressing them.

CONCLUSION

Training employees is an essential activity for all organisations. Training provides employees with the key knowledge and skills that they need to perform their job. Regular training and learning opportunities are an investment that helps employees to prosper and develop their careers while giving the organisation a highly skilled workforce. As the business world is continuously changing, organisations will need to provide their employees with training throughout their career in order to stay ahead of the competition.

As the tertiary educational world is continuously changing to meet the demand of various stakeholders, Valley View University will need to provide its employees with training throughout their career in order to stay ahead of the competition.

REFERENCES


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