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A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF TRAINING EFFECTIVENESS

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Organizations invest a lot of money and time on training towards employee development and learning transfer. Training is defined as a systematic process designed to provide trainees with knowledge, skills and develop positive behavioural attitudes. A well defined learning objective and corresponding evaluation of change in knowledge, skill and behaviour can be the measure of success of training programme. In recent years we have observed the outsourcing of the programmes to the training houses and educational institutions. However, limited research has examined the effectiveness of the same. This study tried to analyse the experience and feedback of 51 participants from two training programmes by using grounded theory approach. The sample consists of 24 participants from government sector and 27 participants from a private firm who attended the training programme organised in an outsourced environment. This paper tried to explore the measures of effectiveness of training. It was also tried to investigate the difference between the measures (if any) between the sectors. This study will have implications not only for the researchers, but also for the trainers and the corporate human resource professionals who are involved in defining, designing, and delivering numerous training programmes.

Key words: Training effectiveness, trainer, sector, and phenomenology.

1 . INTRODUCTION

Training is a process which is planned to facilitate learning so that people can become more effective in carrying out aspects of their work. According to CIPD “Training is an instructor-led and content-based intervention leading to desired changes in behavior and which, unless it is on-the job training, involves time away from the workplace in a classroom or equivalent”[1]. Managerial training is an essential ingredient of organizational performance. Where as training programmes try to enhance the knowledge, skill or change in behaviour of the individual employee, majority of the training programme try to address the causes of performance deficiency. While studying the effectiveness of training among sales people Attia & Honeycutt Jr [2] found that there is a uniform improvement in trainee behavior than that of non-trainees. In recent years great strides have been made to improve rigour in training design, delivery and evaluation. This is particularly important given the large budgets dedicated to organizational and, in particular, managerial training. Given the reports of a ‘leadership skills gap’, coupled with the recent economic downturn, we anticipate increased pressure on the HRD community to show a return on training investment [3].

2. MEASURING TRAINING EFFECTIVENESS

The pioneer work of Kirkpatrick [4] was in finding an answer ‘what to measure’, which can be the determinant of effectiveness of a training programme. Kirkpatrick’s measurement categories for evaluating the effectiveness of training programs included: reactions; learning; behavior; and results [5]. The first category or level in Kirkpatrick’s model is the “reaction” or feelings that participants in a training program have toward the actual program. However, the first two training levels – reaction and learning – have both been criticized [6]. That is, reaction ratings that assess trainee satisfaction or perceptions about training programs can be influenced by instructor personality or skewed by learning environments that are beyond the instructor’s control. Reaction or “happiness sheets” have been described as being worse than useless [7]. Similarly, reactions to training can be unduly influenced through extraneous factors such as training venue (e.g. the beach), the trainer’s personality, etc [8]. Research reflects that 78 percent of companies assess training at the reaction level followed by 32 percent at learning level, nine percent at behavioral level, and seven percent only at results level (ROI or financial value)[2]. This reflects the acceptance of Kirkpatrick’s model as well as the use of reaction level evaluation. Past management research has also found that reactions do lead to learning or knowledge acquisition [8]. There are several other models proposed for evaluation of training effectiveness such as performance, learning and satisfaction (PLS) evaluation Model by Swanson - 1996, Pineda’s holistic model of evaluation [9], Baldwin and Ford’s 1988 Transfer of Training model, Holton’s 1996 model and Learning Transfer System Inventory (LTSI) [3]. However, Kirkpatrick’s model continues to be the most popular method of representing training evaluation criteria because of its simple and practical approach [8]. Long et al.’s [10] finding states that trainee reaction has a positive correlation with the further levels of evaluation as well as future learning and attending future programmes. This paper tries to evaluate the effectiveness of the training programme at a reaction level only by employing qualitative research method.

3. FACTORS EFFECTING TRAINING

While studying work related continuing education and training, Thomas and Qiu [11] examined factors like participation, pedagogy, effectiveness and association of several individual and organizational characteristics with effectiveness. Sanjeevekumar and Yanan [12] found that trainee personal characteristics such as age gender and marital status influence the training effectiveness. The same study also reflects that training environment have an effect on training effectiveness. The environment includes training facilities, site layout, sound lighting, hardware environment,

classroom climate, and student involvement. In another study on evaluation of training effectiveness of on-the-job training, the trainees did not regard training as important for the learning in the training session has limited opportunities of application in their everyday work [13]. While measuring the training effectiveness of an online training programme Long et al. [10] found that training reaction was measured by using factors such as technology satisfaction, enjoyment and relevance of course content. The study also reveals that training designers may be able to increase pre-training motivation and decrease negative trainee reactions during and after the course. While developing the case on training need analysis Bashir et al. [14] identified three major categories which impact the effectiveness of training (1) objective, content & activities, (2) facilitators effectiveness (3) application of learning. Koblike et al.'s [15] qualitative study of computer education describes that a content design based on personalized learning style has added to the effectiveness of the training. Similarly, Cocchiara et al. [16] stated that individual and situational factors tend to influence trainees' transfer of learning. The content design starting from elementary concepts and gradually progressing to increasing more difficult materials add to the effectiveness of the training programme. Rehman et al. [17] has highlighted several indicators of training ineffectiveness which include 1) top management support for the training and development system; 2) clarity of link between training and organizational goals or plans; 3) adequate, correct accounting of the costs of training; 4) Training Need Analysis; 5) support for applying skills and knowledge learned in training on the job; and 6) assessment of impact of training on project performance. More ever, Chiaburu & Tekleab [18] found that culture and contextual factors have the most positive relationships with training motivation and outcomes. A number of contextual/work environment factors have been identified as important elements in training effectiveness such as continuous-learning culture which is defined as an organization wide concern, value, belief, and expectations that general knowledge acquisition and application is important. It can also be inferred from Bedinham's [19] study that the trainer plays a pivotal role in determining the effectiveness of the training. Some specific measure used by Pineda-Herrero et al. [9] for evaluating the training are satisfaction, learning, pedagogical adequacy, transfer, and impact.

4. THE STUDY

A common method of trying to evaluate training has been through simple questionnaires completed by participants at the end of a training session. This basic approach relies on subjective judgments. It can be the source of misleading conclusions. As per Bedinham [19] the questionnaires rarely take account of the complexity of the topics covered in the training session or the difficulties which different classes might have with unfamiliar subjects. The apparently "best" courses could simply be

those where the trainer has the knack of developing a good rapport with the students, and whose subject-matter is easy to assimilate. Questionnaire method might exclude several factors which the participants value the most during the training session versus an open ended question where the participant is free to express the strength and weakness of the programme without being confined to the specific item in a questionnaire. However, the author did not come across any such study to find the application of qualitative research method in order to study the training effectiveness at reaction level. This uniqueness of this study is to employ the qualitative research method in order to evaluate the training effectiveness, explore the difference among the factors (if any) which contribute to the training effectiveness through a comparable sample from government and private sector firm and examine the effectiveness of the training in an outsourced environment.

5. METHOD

A number of empirical researches on sales training [8], [20], [21] record the managers' belief on the superiority of qualitative measures towards gathering of insights into training effectiveness at level three and four. Similarly Brown et al. [3] have used reflective learning journals (RLJs) and grounded theory method to evaluate training transfer in a leadership development programme. The data was collected from the participants of two separate training programmes on 'General Management' for duration of ten days conducted in a common venue away from their workplace. The first group consisted of 24 participants from one of the department functioning under government of India where as the second group consisted of 27 participants of a large scale private manufacturing unit. Participants were requested to give their feedback in writing at the end of the programme by answering two descriptive questions in details.

- What are the major strengths of this programme?
- What are the major weaknesses of this programme?

The author along with another researcher¹ used the open coding method to identify the concepts. Both the researchers coded the response of 24 participants from the first group together and the response of the second group (27 participants) independently using the derived theme. Both the researchers discussed, deliberated and through consensus included the concepts for further examination.

The author adopted grounded theory approach which is in consistent with Strauss and Corbin's approach, which permits the emergence of important themes and patterns in the data while assuming some prior knowledge [22]. As recommended in this approach the open coding method was followed which expressed the phenomena in the form of concepts. These concepts were considered

as the factors after generating an acceptable definition from the terms and their properties which was agreed upon by both the researcher engaged in coding.

This paper tried to find an answer to the following exploratory questions

- Research question 1: What are the factors which determine the effectiveness of a training programme?
- Research question 2: Are those factors different for participants from government and private sector organization?

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The content analysis tool employed for the data analysis resulted in several concepts after coding which can be considered as the factors of training effectiveness. The frequencies of appearance of such concepts were also recorded by using a tally bar. The objective of this analysis was to find an answer to the first research question as stated below

6.1 Research question 1: What are the factors which determine the effectiveness of a training programme?

The coding was done separated for the two groups of participants and a consolidated list was generated for both the programmes. Table 1 presents a summary of those concepts which are identified after coding. The data analysis saw the emergence of nine factors which can be considered as the factors which influence the effectiveness of the training programme.

6.1.1 Programme design

The programme design can be defined as the topics included in the programme which covers the tools and techniques which are useful for the function of the participants. The covered topics must have practical application which has relevance in the current or future role of the participants. It should focus on the new research and development in the areas of training and provide exposure to the modern management techniques.

Table 1: A summary of concepts identified

Factors Identified	Frequency	Percentage
Programme Design	31	61%
Faculty	18	35%
Pedagogy	16	31%
Course content Design	13	25%
Scheduling	10	20%
Non-academic Infrastructural support	7	14%
Learning outcome	2	4%
Classroom environment	1	2%
Programme Objective	1	2%

6.1.2 Faculty/trainer

The expertise of the faculty member with in-depth knowledge and the ability to interact with the participants is considered to be a parameter of training effectiveness. This finding contradicts the earlier research proposition that training effectiveness is influenced by trainer's personality [8], [6]. It's not the personality rather the subject matter expertise and proficiency of the trainer is considered to be the factor of effectiveness.

6.1.3 Pedagogy

The participants appreciated the use of different pedagogy used by the trainers which had facilitated their learning. Some of the tools liked by the participants are group activity, role play, simulation, survey/questionnaire, experiment, exercise, video, and case study. The reading material also played a vital role in the learning. Tools that generate new perspective, discussion and participative way of teaching, feedback on individual participant, examples of which are practical in nature are few other techniques which contributed to the effectiveness of the training programme.

6.1.4 Course content design

The relevance of the course content was highlighted by the participants. The curriculum should be conducive to future work roles and should have immediate application back in their job. There should also be a judicious allocation of time to the different topics covered under the training programme.

6.1.5 Scheduling

If the scheduling of the session and the day is not proper that can add to the ineffectiveness of the programme. Some of the concerns raised were the too short or lengthy classes. Sometimes adequate break was not provided, neither a rest day during the weekend as the programme duration was ten days each. As mentioned earlier, for the sessions where case study is used as pedagogy it requires a preparation time which should also have been taken care by the programme facilitator while doing the scheduling.

6.1.6 Non-academic infrastructural support

This factor reflects on the non-academic aspects, yet affects the reaction of the participants. It includes the hotel, accommodation, travel, and food.

6.1.7 Learning outcome

The participants are keen on the knowledge and definite take away from the training and the emphasis was given to the learning that can be implemented back in their job. The participants have come with a defined learning objective and focussed on the take away which can fulfil their need.

6.1.8 Classroom environment

The class room environment which has developed trust in sharing information and peer learning through frank opinion sharing is considered as conducive for learning.

6.1.9 Programme Objective

Ideally, any training has a programme objective which is defined while doing the need analysis and the same must be given importance while designing the programme. The participants should be conversant with the training objective which can facilitate the learning. However, the participants expressed that lack of clarity and communication on the programme objective has hindered their learning.

Programme design and course content design were found as two different factors compared to earlier literature which focus on content design [3], [1], [10]. While programme design is in the hand of the programme coordinator who usually coordinate between the client origination and the individual instructor of the programme there were multiple trainers involved in the delivery of the programme

who design the content of their assigned topic in consultation with the coordinator. While the focus of the programme coordinator is to take into account the training need of the organization, the focus of the trainers is to design and deliver the content assigned to them. Both the programme under study was of 10 days duration involving multiple trainers and them all vary in the use of different pedagogy. While 61 % of the participants emphasized on the programme design, 25% of the participants identified course content as a factor of training effectiveness. Hence establishing the coherence of the topics to be covered and giving the wholesome experience of the wholesome is given more importance than the content of a particular session. As the programme was on 'general management' participants expressed their satisfaction of receiving the 'broad overview of a Masters Degree Programme in Business Administration' which has helped them to look beyond profession. The finding of this paper is consistent with the research finding that appropriate consideration of training design factors improves transfer, hence needs analysis as well as training content and design plays a pivotal role in determining the training effectiveness [3]. The emergence of course design as an important factor of training effectiveness contradicts the findings by Powell and Yalcin [5] which says that learning as an outcome consistently resulted in stronger and significant effect sizes, regardless of the chosen design of the study.

In contradiction to the research finding by Leach & Liu [8] and Summy [6] which says that trainer's personality may skew the reaction level evaluation, this research find that it's the subject matter expertise of the trainer which is can be a determinate of training effectiveness. Thirty five percent of the participants considered the faculty who is 'well read' and have 'in depth expertise' can impact the effectiveness of the training.

Pedagogy as a factor of training effectiveness is highlighted by 31% of the participants. While describing the delivery for application Wick et al. [23] emphasize the importance of pedagogy particularly in an adult learning environment. Adult learning is effective if the training narrows the learning-doing gap motivates the learners, make relevance clear, improve perceived utility, provide know-how, and make learning memorable. The researchers focused on the pedagogy which can fulfill such requirement by the use of skill practice, simulations, role play, case studies and games.

Scheduling and non-academic infrastructural support are the hygiene factors which may turn out to be the demotivator for the participants leading to ineffectiveness of the training programme. Some of the problems brought into notice by the participants are the travel involved as the venue of training and accommodation was at a far distance. This programme under study which ran for ten days should have a break particularly in weekend. While 20% of the participants emphasized on the

importance of scheduling 14% of the participants mentioned about the infrastructural support aspects which should be taken into account while designing the programme.

While programme objective helps the participants in appreciating the objective of their participation which can act as a motivator to join the programme, the learning outcomes helps them in defining the definite take away from the training. While emphasizing the adult learning, Knowles [24] states that adults have a need to know why they should learn something. The other insight about andragogy is adult have a deep need to be self directing and adults become ready to learn when they experience in their life situation. Though only four percentage participants mentioned about the learning outcome and two percentage of the participant about the programme objectives, the objective of this qualitative research is to bring forward all the factors emerged out of the coding which usually gets marginalized in a quantitative analysis.

Though only two percentage participants mentioned about the 'class-room environment', the importance of creating a conducive environment which can generate frank discussion without any judgment can add to the effective learning process.

6.2 Research question 2: Are these factors of training effectiveness different for participants from government and private sector organization?

In order to find answer to this research question the factors identified by the participants from the two different programmes were looked into separately. While the concepts and the corresponding frequency (by use of tally bar) against the theme helped in identifying the emergence of different factors that influence the effectiveness of the training programme it was difficult make a comparison of the same across sector as the number of participant in both the programme was different (government – 24, private – 27). Thus, the factors were ranked with respect to the frequency in their respective sector while rank one being considered as the highest. This analysis created a basis of comparison on two grounds – presence or absence of a factor in a sector, and rank comparison of the common factors. A summary of the findings is presented in Table 2.

6.2.1 Common factors

Some of the common factors which were identified by the participants of both the organization are programme design, faculty/trainer, pedagogy and course content design. However, the ranking of these factors were found to be different in different sector. While pedagogy was ranked as highest by the private sector participants (rank 4 in government), programme design is ranked highest by the

participants from government (rank 2 in private). Similarly, trainer/faculty is ranked as the second most influential factor, whereas the same is ranked as the lowest (rank 4) by the private sector participants. The course design is ranked fifth in government, and the same is ranked fourth by the private sector participants. Surprisingly the third ranked factor in private sector is ‘learning outcome’ where as the corresponding rank by the government participant goes to scheduling which is absent in each other’s sector. Taking the above facts into account it may be inferred that participants from the government were more driven by faculty centered learning were as the private sector participants had a defined learning outcome which was the driver of their learning.

Table 2: Summary of comparison of the factors influencing training effectiveness across sectors.

Factors Identified	Ranking in Government Sector	Ranking in Private Sector	Sectoral Presence
Programme Design	1	2	Both
Faculty	2	4	Both
Pedagogy	4	1	Both
Course content Design	5	4	Both
Scheduling	3	NP*	Only government
Non-academic Infrastructural support	7	NP	Only government
Learning outcome	NP	3	Only private
Classroom environment	6	NP	Only government
Programme Objective	7	NP	Only government

* NP: Not present

6.2.2 Sector specific factors

While the data from private sector could yield up five factors only, the number of factors identified from the government sector data generated eight factors. Learning outcome is the only factor identified by the private sector participants was not reflected among the government participants. This reflects a lack of defined learning outcome which can be linked into the lack of proper training need assessment in the government sector. This argument is supported by a factor namely ‘lack of programme objective’ identified by government participants only. The programme objective was not communicated to the participants of government sector prior or during the training programme. This inference is supported by the fact that the HR manager from the private sector has several rounds of meeting with the programme coordinator of the training prior to the programme in order to

communicate the specific training need and make sure the programme design take care of the same which was absent in case of the government participants.

The other three factors which exclusively present in the government sector was the scheduling, non-academic infrastructure and class-room environment. This reflects the fact that in the absence of an outcome/result oriented training programme the hygiene factors may crop up which can hinder the effectiveness of a training programme.

As the training is conducted in an outsourced environment and the findings of this paper has already highlighted the difference in concepts of training effectiveness between government and private sector organization a new role emerge for ensuring the effective training delivery is the programme coordinator. While the importance of programme design and scheduling is felt in the government organization, the private sector gives importance to pedagogy and learning outcome along with the programme design. Hence the Programme facilitator who is mostly into programme design must have a clear idea about the training need of the client organization. The importance of design and scheduling in government also reflects the systematic approach which is a symbol of the bureaucratic culture. The programme facilitator should be skilled enough to adjust with the systematic requirement of the clients from government, simultaneously ensure a definite learning outcome as desired by the client of private sector.

7. LIMITATIONS

This paper only evaluates the training programme at a reaction level but necessarily comes with an evidence of transfer of knowledge to workplace. The author also plans to conduct further research comprising same set of participants after a gap of six months to explore the behavior and result level outcomes of this training. Some of the themes identified during the coding process have generated relevant factors that are vital from the training effectiveness point of view. However, the frequency against those parameters is quite low. The relevance of such parameter may be validated further by the author or other researchers in the training programmes conducted in similar environment.

8 CONCLUSION

The nine factors identified though this qualitative study such as programme design, faculty/trainer, pedagogy, course content design, scheduling, non-academic infrastructural support, learning outcome, classroom environment, programme objective are found to be vital and relevant factors

which can influence the effectiveness of any training programme. The qualitative method has helped in open exploration of these parameters without deliberating on the standard parameters found through many a quantitative research. The public and private sector comparison has helped in exploring the change in the effective success parameter of training in different context and particularly where a systematic training need is identified vis a vis the absence of such rigor in the other. This research has implication for the HR managers and the learning and development professional that identify the training need select the participants and also are responsible for the return on investment. The participants of training programme can also draw some learning from the findings of this paper which may help in identifying the motivating factors in a training programme. This research will also add value to the training managers those who are coordinating and designing the programme, instructional designers those who are into content development, the trainers those who design and deliver a defined learning and the management of both government and private sector organizations who are investing their time and money with a definite return on investment from training.

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