



Why you could benefit from using a training needs analysis



The easy way to identify what people need to learn for work

By

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In the old days training used to be so simple! All you had to do was get a group of staff together, find yourself a trainer, maybe somebody in the company, possibly a manager, or you might go outside the organisation to look for someone. You would let that someone chat to the line manager and then they would get on with creating and designing a training programme. You would pay the bill and to save a bit of money you would put a few more of your staff on the programme because they can take up to 12 participants on the course. So a few more people who maybe at a loose end can be listed on the course as well and then it's done.

The trouble is of course that training like this doesn't work, it never has done and it never will. It's just that it's how it has always been. Too many of us have been at receiving end of such an experience. However, if you are clear about what your training needs are then your training has a much better chance of being successful. In the old days, tasks were much more obvious and specific and people knew what it was that they had to do. The work was often repetitive and narrow so the requirement for training was often completely unnecessary. Nowadays people's jobs and tasks are split much more and change is constant. We have more demanding expectations from customers than we ever had before. We experience a much higher demand for quality and customers are looking all the time for value for money, for safety, for quality and reliability. So how can we be sure that the staff understand and know this?

For a smaller business A **Training Needs Analysis (TNA)** should be based on your company's business objectives and not on what somebody in the organisation said would be a nice piece of training to do. I have often seen staff who have found the outline of a course somewhere and said "Oh! That looks nice, I'd like to go on that" and then all they do then is ask you for the money, and you pay the invoice. If you decide to evaluate the benefits of such a workshop or seminar you must ask.....does this training course help in any way to meet my business objectives? If it doesn't - you are wasting your money.

The problem is the same in larger organisations too. We deliver a number of communications skills training for the NHS. On a recent workshop on Taking Minutes Effectively I asked one of the attendees, a receptionist, why she signed up for the workshop. She said "*I've always wanted to be a secretary and secretaries always need to be able to take minutes and I am hoping that within the next two years I will become a secretary and then this course will have been useful*". In two years time she won't remember the skills because she won't have been practising them and therefore the course would have been a waste of time. A one or two day training course can only introduce you to the skills; it cannot



and will not provide you with permanent experience. Everything you learn as a new skill needs to be practised and practised until it becomes a habit.

Usually a **Training Needs Analysis** is carried out in response to change but occasionally the entire organisation needs to be evaluated. This is when you bring in new processes or equipment that everybody is going to have to use or follow. First you have to analyse how the organisation is structured. You need to ensure that the right staff are in the right roles, otherwise the training solution could fail to reach the people who are going to need it. This needs to go hand in hand with understanding the nature and approach of the change you require.

You may need to arrange training for a number of reasons. And you probably automatically do when you have got new staff or taking somebody on to do a new job. They will often need training to be able to do that job effectively. You may also decide to promote one of your staff to the role of manager. Interestingly it seems we are more likely to choose a manager who has been brilliant at his/her job but does not have the management skills required. The skill they need will be inherently different from their previous role of just doing the job but it doesn't mean they need to go on a full management programme. A TNA it may identify that their resourcing skills and personal organisation skills are above standard for the job but that they need to learn more about managing a team or coaching individuals. They may also need enhanced negotiation or delegating skills.

Another group who may benefit from undergoing a TNA are staff who have been employed for a long time, they work very well and very hard and they actually provide a very good service for you. But could they do more? Can you tell whether they have ambition to do well or be promoted or take on new challenges? Can you see if there is more potential there or indeed whether they are slipping behind and not delivering the service that is needed? In fact are they growing with the business and the job?

It is a highly competitive world now. Customers nearly always have a choice of supplier and you can't afford not to know whether your staff are incompetent or are failing to reach that quality expected by the market. You can't afford now to continue with "sheep dip" training that gets everybody along and train them in one competence that actually your organisation neither needs nor uses.



A TNA can address staff communication issues too. How well do your staff know how to speak to customers? What do they do and what skills do they have to avoid getting into conflict, confrontation, or other difficulties or where they can't make themselves understood. Again the TNA can identify, not only, that the organisation needs to have a very high level of customer service in order to improve sales but can also identify those staff who have less than perfect skills in that area. Once you have established the level of need it makes life so much easier because you can then train them at the competence level required for your business communications.

So the first step is to actually breakdown the work to look at what you need to learn. The task - is it difficult? Is it important to the organisation? How often does it occur in a normal working day? This is the balance that you are going to have to bring together. Sometimes all three are important. That is, it is difficult to do but it is important to the organisation, and needs to be done regularly. Again it may for example be something you sincerely hope will rarely if ever takes place and that people will not have to prove they can act on it. An example of this would be Health & Safety training. It is important that everybody in the organisation knows how to behave in the case of a fire. One hopes that they will never need to use this skill but it is vitally important that people are trained and continue to be trained and checked to make sure that they do know what to do in that situation.

Too often organisations spend enormous amounts of money on new computer systems but fail to train the staff effectively in the use of the new system. What happens is you have some staff who stick to the "old way", some who avoid using the new system at all and some who battle on through but may be making errors, all of which is extremely costly to the organisation and will impact on the service they give or the quality of their product.

Interestingly, TNAs can quite often throw up completely different results. They may produce evidence that actually there is no need for a training course at all. It can identify that something is wrong with the operation or the process that is causing a blockage which requires a completely different solution.

If you decide to employ a training organisation to carry out a TNA for you, one of the things that they will do is start by checking with you, what your key objectives are for your company - What are you trying to achieve and how will you know when you succeeded. From that, you can discuss and agree what skills and knowledge your staff will need if they are to achieve these objectives. Once you have agreed the questions the TNA starts by interviewing all those involved via an online survey with some face to face interviews. This helps you to identify how people feel about their abilities; their



strengths, their concerns and their ideas for improvement. Once the results have been collated the training company can create a report and draw up a plan which becomes your training plan. As the requirement to achieve your objectives becomes clearer you can then make the decision as to when you want those people to be able to achieve their new tasks, For example, there is no need to train people to use a new computer system until after the computer system has been put in place. There is no need to train people immediately in customer services if their job doesn't entail them dealing with customers.

A real concern is the number of organisations both very large and some small who invite a trainer to come in and run a training programme for them because someone in the organisation thinks it would be useful. The trainer will try to identify as much as possible, what the organisation is trying to achieve with this training the levels of knowledge and experience the individuals have and where the gap is. But a number of businesses are quite content to put on what can only be described as “menu driven training”. Larger organisations are very prone to this; their training departments put together a series of programmes and then invite members of the staff to sign up for them. The reasons that are given for attending are often are scary in the extreme! *“I love courses” “I thought it would be a lovely way to have a nice day out”! “It looked very interesting so I thought I might do it”! “My manager sent me”! “I’ve been doing this job for 22 years, if I’m not doing it properly I wish they would just tell me rather than just put me on a course”!* So you can see there is a whole range of tactics to get people to go on training but so many of them don't need it and often struggle to see why they are on it.

However it does take more than a TNA to make sure training is appropriate you also need commitment to complete the task. A well known corporate company approached us last year and asked help with running a number of one day workshops on *“How to Give Feedback”* for their managers. The HR Manager described that the problem in the organisation was that none of the managers appeared to have any skills in terms of giving developmental or constructive feedback to their staff. As a result, staff often had no idea how well or how badly they were doing. They often didn't know there were any problems with their performance until they ended up in either a disciplinary situation or a capability interview and this is why the HR director was getting concerned. Every time a member of the HR department was being brought into the equation, the cost to the organisation both financially, through loss of staff motivation and loss of potentially useful staff affected everyone. Clearly they had identified a need that was stopping them achieving their business goals. They had measured the ‘gap’ in learning and realised their managers did not possess the skills required



The HR manager decided that all the first line managers in the organisation needed to attend a one day workshop. This was to help the managers to understand the impact of failing to give accurate and timely feedback and learn how to give it however uncomfortable or difficult it seemed to be. They needed to understand that despite being challenging, it was beneficial to the person who receives the feedback. Because of the cost of training 174 managers the learning had to be achieved in a one day programme.

We developed a programme with the HR manager and included the values of the organisation which were proudly displayed on notice boards throughout the building. We also modelled the key steps against their behavioural competencies which we were led to believe drove everything they did. Five days before the first programme was due to start we had a phone call to say that they had decided to postpone. In fact in the end they cancelled it. And why? Because not enough people signed up to do the programme so they decided not to run it!

Now my understanding is that if an organisation has a problem with the way that staff or managers are behaving and they identify it as an essential training need then giving people the “choice” to go on that programme seems bizarre. We need companies to stop thinking about training as just to “treat” people or give them a “day out” or any other reason but to provide training specifically as an investment because it is going to enable the organisation to meet its business objectives effectively, keep their staff motivated and improve the bottom line. If the TNA in this case carried out in the Ivory tower of the HR department had been public and involved the managers it might have helped them to recognise their weaknesses and to see how they could buy-in to the importance of making a change in their behaviour.

A Training Needs Analysis need not be cumbersome or time wasting. It does need commitment and needs the involvement of all those who may be affected by the results. If you would like some friendly, free advice on setting up a TNA for your organisation, please call us on 01793 790331. Alternatively we can set one up and run it for you in-house. Call to make an appointment to discuss where you want your organisation to be in the next few years.

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