

## A guide to training needs assessment for your organisation

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The process of *assessing training needs* for employees in any organisation is often done in a haphazard and unscientific way. The consequences are enormous, often reflected in wasted financial resources and lost time that could have been directed towards more productive activities. The challenge often emanates from a lack of understanding of what *training needs assessment* is and what process to follow to come up with credible results from such a process. *Training needs assessment* refers to a gap in the *employee's capacity* that *impacts negatively on their performance*. This *training gap* affects the employee's capacity to deliver according to the requirements of the job both in the immediate term and in the future. *Training needs analysis assessment* refers to the process of identifying why an employee is failing to perform to the required standard.

The assumption in both the definition of *training needs* and *training needs assessment* is that the performance standards required from such an employee are explicit to the employee and those who supervise them. In practice, this is not always the case. Sometimes the employee is clueless of the performance standards required. Due to this process, the approaches used in *assessing training needs* in organisations do not bring out the correct *training needs* for the employees.

### ***Training Needs Assessment steps***

The first step in a *training needs assessment* is to understand the business strategy of the organisation. This understanding gives context to the whole process of *assessing training assessment*. The same business strategy impacts on the performance standards that an individual employee is required to achieve. Without this understanding, you could end up with *training needs* that do not support the business strategy

Step number two requires that the person doing the *training needs assessment* have a clear understanding of the performance standards in each job occupied by the individuals being assessed. This understanding will help you to assess the gap between what is required and what currently the incumbent employee is delivering.

The third step after having a detailed appreciation of the required performance standards is to establish if there is a performance gap. Often what people refer to as the *training gap* is a performance gap. Let us take an example of a Business Development Manager whose performance standards required that they grow export revenue by 30% every year. Over the past 4 years, their performance has been averaging 20% giving a performance gap of 10%. This is not a training need, it is a performance gap. It is therefore hard for anyone to talk about *training needs assessment* when they have not established a performance gap first.

In step four you start asking yourself why there is a performance gap in this Business Development

Manager's performance. At this stage, you do not know why the gap exists and any suggestion of a reason could be purely speculative on the part of the manager

### ***Training Needs Assessment methods***

At this stage, we start from the premises that we have identified a performance gap. The next question is focused on why there is a performance gap in the Business Development Managers' performance. Too often once the performance gap is established we rush to deploy our *training assessment tools*. The most common approach deployed at this stage is to ask the concerned employee to indicate what training they need for them to deliver. The assumption in this approach is that the individual employee concerned can identify the causes of their performance gap. The results too often are that the employee ends up giving the manager a wish list sometimes remotely linked to the performance gap identified. This approach to *training needs assessment* does not work and it will lead to the organisation wasting its resources. Surprisingly despite the glaring weaknesses in this approach to *assessing training needs*, it is very common in organisations.

Another *training needs assessment* favoured by most organisations is to ask the responsible manager to first identify *training needs* and proffer solutions. In some instances, the manager can hit the cause of the training gap properly and in some instances, they hit in the dark. An assessment of most of the training interventions offered to individuals seems to show that managers are not very good at identifying training needs.

The key question that must inform a *training needs assessment* approach is; why is there a performance gap? To answer this question correctly you would need to know what drives individual performance in the first place. Remember these employees with performance gaps were hired meeting most of the requirements of the job especially the academic, professional and minimum experience required for the role. Therefore, what could be the sources of this performance gap when the individuals seem to meet these minimum requirements?

Decades of top-notch scientific research and evidence by top scholars such as Schmidt and Hunter has consistently laid bare the factors that drive individual performance in a job. Based on meta-analytic studies especially a study by Schmidt (2016) clearly shows the following as having the greatest influence on individual performance;

1. **General mental ability (Cognitive ability)** – in the non-technical language it refers to the individual's capacity to think and find solutions to problems. For the more sophisticated, it is the level of Intelligence (I.Q) the person has. This explains over 45% of the variation in individual performance.
2. **Job Knowledge** – this refers to the level and capacity to apply the technical knowledge that an individual has. It is estimated to predict over 40% of the variation in individual job performance
3. **Personality** – The personality trait that predicts performance the most across all jobs is conscientiousness. Others traits are more specific to roles. They still need to be considered.
4. **Work Experience** – This factor although it can predict performance, its contribution is only 2%.
5. **Education** – This refers to years of education. The contribution to performance is only 1%.

Excluding contextual factors, such culture, how the person is being managed and availability of resources, an inquiry in *training needs assessment* must answer key questions related to the above.

### **Training needs assessment questions**

Based on the above factors here are the key questions that need to be answered to *training needs assessment* before going deeper into the approaches to *training needs assessment*.

1. Could the performance gap identified in the Business Development Manager be a result of a lack of cognitive ability for the role? If the answer is yes, unfortunately, there is very little you can do to close this gap, as cognitive ability cannot be improved in adults. The reason is, it is largely hereditary and partly childhood experience.
2. Could the performance gap identified in the Business Development Manager be a result of lack of job knowledge {technical know-how}? If the answer is yes, this can be improved as the concerned employee can then be taken for training to acquire the necessary technical know-how for the job. This is only possible if the person has the cognitive ability to acquire knowledge. If they do not have the required cognitive ability to master the technical aspects of the job, an investment in training will not bring much-needed performance improvement
3. Could the performance gap identified in the Business Development Manager be a result of personality defects? If the answer is yes, again here you cannot do anything as personality is largely hereditary and partly childhood experience. No training intervention would be able to address personality defects. What can occur through attempted intervention is to see temporary changes that often disappear quickly as the individual relapses into their usual and comfortable personality mode.
4. Could the performance gap identified in the Business Development Manager be a result of lack of experience? If the answer is yes, you can bridge the gap through better exposure and mentoring.
5. Could the performance gap identified in the Business Development Manager be a result of lack of education? If the answer is yes, take them to school. Again, this is largely depended on their cognitive capacity to assimilate and learn from schooling.
6. If the individuals concerned are supervisors or managers you may want to add an extra question as you *assess the training needs*. This question is; could the performance gap identified in the Business Development Manager be a result of lack of managerial skills? If there answer is yes take them through a leadership development intervention tailored to the individual's identified gaps.

### **Training Needs assessment Templates**

Once you are clear from answering the questions above, you are ready to deploy the *training needs assessment templates* related to each area. Let's look at what each *training needs assessment template* focus on;

1. Cognitive Ability *Training needs assessment template* - This *training needs assessment template* involves taking the concerned individual through cognitive ability test. Their results

will be compared with a norm group of similar individuals at the same level to see if they have the capacity for the role.

2. Job Knowledge *Training needs assessment template* – Here the individuals are given real-life job knowledge test. In some cases, it can be written or actual job simulation under observation. Through this *training needs assessment template* you would be able to establish if they have the job knowledge or not.
3. Personality *Training Needs Assessment Template* – under this *training needs assessment template* the concerned individual will undergo a personality profiling assessment. Such an assessment would be able to establish if any personality defects are affecting how the individual delivers on their job mandate.
4. Work Experience *Training Needs assessment template*- Under this *training needs assessment template*; you check the relevant experience the individual has against what is required on the job. The gap is very easy to establish with this *training needs assessment template*.
5. Education *Training needs assessment template* – under here, you check what is the required education is for the role and assess if the individuals have it. The gap is easy to establish when you use this template.
6. Managerial *Training needs assessment template*- under this template, the concerned manager is often put through approaches such as the assessment centre where they will undergo several managerial simulations under the observation of trained assessors. The assessors will be able to pool their ratings together and a gap can be established if there is one. The assessments under this template are done based on pre-agreed job related managerial competencies. Another template often used to assess managerial competencies, is the 360-degree assessment. The result is the same as using the assessment centre *training needs assessment template*.

### **Training needs assessment report**

The end product of the processes outlined above, which are used to carry out a *training needs assessment*, is a comprehensive *training needs assessment report* for each individual. The individual *training needs assessment reports* can be consolidated into one departmental or organisational level *training needs assessment report*.

### **Conclusion**

It is simple, to carry out a *training needs assessment* if you take the right approach to this process. There are more solid scientific approaches to *training needs assessment* than what is currently being used in most organisations. If you want to get value from your training interventions, the *training needs assessment approach*, *training needs assessment templates* and *training needs assessment examples* given in this article could act as a guide for you to use when you next carry out a *training needs assessment* for your employees.

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