

THE ROLE OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT IN ORGANISATIONS

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Abstract

This paper offers suggestions and tools for employees and their supervisors to help employees achieve greater success in their current position and plan for career advancement. The paper argues that a skilled and knowledgeable workforce positively impacts organisational performance. Employee development should be a shared responsibility which requires collaboration between the employee and supervisor. The supervisor's role as a performance coach includes such activities as clarifying performance and behavioural expectations, helping employees understand the organization as a whole, helping employees understand the organisations' long and short-term goals, identifying learning opportunities, giving positive and concrete feedback and providing necessary resources. In addition to meeting current performance expectations, employees must be able to adapt to meet evolving organisational needs. For example, new skills and knowledge are often required to keep pace with technological change and new departmental procedures. The attainment of knowledge, skills and abilities can be achieved in numerous ways; many at no or low cost within the organisation.

Key terms

Role, organisation, staff development, employees, supervisors

Introduction

The concept of staff development recognizes that all people may improve their capabilities and become more efficient at what they are doing (Laabs, 2000). Much of the time we are likely to say 'this is an area in which I think I can do better'. We may be aware that we can improve by observing the performance of others. Sometimes, however, we need another trusted person to help us identify those areas in which we need to better our performance (Logan, 2003). Once we have done this, there are various ways in which we can get others to assist us in the process of self-development.

Responsibility for initiating training

Responsibility for initiating training is shared by those in need of training, their immediate supervisors, and those in management positions from the district regional or head office (Moses,

2009). As Nunn (2005) states, those who are in need of development are actually the ones in the best position to initiate training. Thus employees are likely to have a fairly strong awareness of their own training needs. If they wait for others to organise training for them, they may find that their training needs are not satisfied for a long time, if ever!

Supervisors also have an interest in arranging training for themselves and for their subordinates. As the chief administrator of the organisation he or she has a responsibility for ensuring that production takes place efficiently. If this is not happening because the workers are incompetent or lack confidence, the supervisor should initiate in-service training. At the head office there will be officials with a controlling or advisory function – superintendants, inspectors and advisers. The actual designation of the post does not matter: their job entails ensuring that sound production takes place in their organisations. They, too, have a responsibility for ensuring that staff development is possible for their workers and supervisors. Any one of these parties can sit back and wait for someone else to initiate training, but it is really a joint responsibility, and each of the members of the partnership can be the one who facilitates staff development.

Identification of needs

Moses (1999) suggests that the employee knows in what areas he or she is in need of training. Similarly, the supervisor and other administrators will know in what areas of management they are falling short.

This intuitive knowledge is not sufficient for the development of a fully adequate training programme. Detailed questionnaires completed by the workers will point more clearly to the areas in which training is needed. But in the absence of a scientific approach a great deal can be achieved by a group of workers using brainstorming techniques, provided they are completely open and honest.

Brainstorming

In brainstorming as Nunn (2005) advises, one member of the group is chosen to write up on a chalk-board all the ideas suggested by other members of the group. Employees will call out the problems they experience, and each will be written down without discussion or comment. When no-one has any more suggestions, the members of the group will discuss the problems briefly and group together those that are related. Only after this, is there a detailed discussion of each of the problems and the sort of training which would help to overcome it. During this discussion, there should be no particular reference to the person who first identified the problem: it is discussed in general terms, but as experienced at that particular organisation. If too many problems have been identified for discussion, the group decides which one is most pressing, and another time is set for the discussion of the other problems. In the paragraphs below some of the likely problem areas likely to be identified in a school set-up are briefly reviewed.

Management / administration

Problems identified may include:

- The lack of participation by the staff in management decisions
- Poor planning, for example, when dates for important staff and subject meetings are not set sufficiently far in advance, when there is a lack of relief cover when a teacher is absent from class.
- Poor communications when, for example, staff members are unaware of the details of decisions which affect them.

Didactic

Teachers may feel that they would achieve greater success with their pupils if they had greater competence in teaching methodology. Specific problems may include:

- Depending too much on the textbook and using a lecturing approach.
- Having academic knowledge of a subject but not knowing how to transmit this knowledge to the pupils.
- Classes being too large for adequate attention to be given to the pupils' individual problems.
- Pupils achieving poor test results, despite seeming to understand their work in class and doing their homework.

Teaching content

The content to be taught is set out in the syllabus. Many teachers depend so heavily on the textbook that they forget that the syllabus must be regularly consulted, as this is the document which should determine what should be covered and how much attention should be given to each aspect. When there is a change of syllabus, the teachers may need guidance on interpreting the new document, and may find that there are sections of the syllabus which they simply do not understand because of advances in the subject since they underwent training.

Assessment

The syllabus normally has very specific instructions about the way in which assessment is to take place. Teachers' problems may however be of a very practical nature, such as:

- How to get a test or question paper neatly typed and copied.
- How to organise security so that pupils do not have access to questions before the time.
- How to keep an accurate record of marks awarded during continuous assessment.
- How to set examination questions that adequately cover the syllabus.

Child development

Teachers who are either unqualified or who have subject qualifications but no teaching certificate / diploma may need to learn about the stages in child development and about how to motivate children to learn and to discipline them fairly.

Language

In many cases, learners have to work through a medium of instruction which is not their home language. Although the subject teacher may have a good grasp of the subject content and be competent in subject methodology, little learning may take place as a result of communication problems. Special in-service training may be needed to overcome this problem.

Seeking assistance

Before looking for outside assistance, the staff of an organisation should make use of the skills they have available on the spot. The more experienced employees on the staff should be able to help those who are less experienced. Those with higher qualifications should be able to help those whose training has been less thorough. Even two workers experiencing similar problems may, by discussing their problems with each other, be able to work out a solution. It should be remembered that every member of staff has something to offer his or her colleagues, and that every member of staff, however competent, can still learn from others. Once everything possible is being done to use the skills available within the organisation, it may still be necessary to look further afield for assistance. Outside assistance should be in the first instance be sought from neighbouring organisations (Dobbs, 2005). In a school situation for example for management problems the circuit inspector could be called on to assist, and if the education office has subject advisers available, requests for subject-related assistance could be directed there.

Outside assistance could also be sought from the personnel of teachers' resource centres, of training colleges, of universities, of other ministries (for example, an agricultural extension officer for biology or agriculture) or even individuals from the private sector (a pharmacist for science, a journalist for some aspect of language work, a banker for accounting and so on). Regional co-operation could also be utilised.

Obtaining assistance

Co-operation with employees at nearby organisations can be arranged by the supervisors or even by the workers themselves. Ideally, the possibility should have been raised during a staff meeting, and the supervisor asked to take the request to the supervisor of the neighbouring organisation. But a worker with a particular need could go directly to his or her supervisor with such a request; or could even initiate contact with a worker from the other organisation. In this

case the arrangements would be informal and unofficial. There is, however, probably more to be gained from a co-ordinated action which involves more of the workers.

An approach to the head office of the organisation for assistance from directors or managers should be conveyed by the supervisor of the organisation, and should be followed up by him or her if there is no response within a reasonable period of time. It must, however, be accepted that the head office staff have many demands made on their time and however willing, there may be delays in setting up an advisory visit or a workshop (Kleiman, 2004).

Approaches to other organisations like similar companies and to other ministries should also be made by the supervisor; approaches to individuals in the private sector may be made by the supervisor or by the employee.

Training formats (in a school organisation as an example)

There are many ways in which training can be done. Depending on the type of problem which is being addressed, some styles may be more appropriate than others. It is also important to provide variety, and not to use the same format every time. Here a number of suggestions as provided by Laabs (2009) are made, each of which will have to be adapted to local conditions and to the problem being addressed.

1. A teacher may sit in on the lesson of a competent teacher, observe what takes place, and afterwards discuss what has been observed.
2. A teacher may plan a lesson, discuss it with a more experienced teacher, make adjustments to the lesson plan in the light of the discussion, and then have the experienced teacher attend the lesson. Afterwards the strong and weak points of the lesson can be discussed.
3. Two or three teachers of the same subject (from the same school or from different schools) may together do their lesson planning, exchanging ideas and discussing difficulties as they go along.
4. A workshop session may be planned, during which one or more teachers demonstrate particular teaching techniques. The less experienced teachers may try these out over the following two weeks and then at a further workshop their successes and difficulties may be discussed.
5. A workshop session may be held during which teachers set test or examination questions, and then work out the answers to one another's questions. In this way, weaknesses in the wording of the questions or in the allocation of marks will come to light.
6. For practical subjects a workshop may be arranged during which the less confident teachers actually do the practical work under the supervision of skilled teachers.
7. For management and disciplinary problems the staff may meet for a brainstorming session, during which problem areas are identified. Thereafter the meeting could break up into

smaller groups, each group working on possible solutions to one of the problems. After a set time, the groups all come together again. At this stage, the possible solutions can be discussed and decisions taken on action by all members of the group, or one or more members of the group may be asked to read an article or a section of a training manual, and lead a training session based on what they have read.

Evaluation of training

Any training which is done should be evaluated. After a training session, the participants should be able to say whether they feel any benefit from it and they should be able to identify the aspects which they found most satisfactory, and those which they found least satisfactory. These details should be communicated to those who arranged the training, so that in future training sessions the aspects which caused dissatisfaction can be minimized or even eliminated, and those aspects which were found to be satisfactory may be further developed.

If the weaknesses of a workshop or training session are not reported, the same faults are likely to occur in the future. However carefully the presenters of a course plan it, they can never be absolutely in tune with the needs of those attending. The larger the group, the more true this is. It is therefore most important that everyone should be completely honest.

In general, it is important that the objectives of a training exercise should be carefully stated beforehand. Training fails if it attempts to do too much in too short a space of time (Dobbs, 2005).

Summary

Staff development can be seen as an important component in building the capacity of organisations to function efficiently. This paper has looked at the need to engage in a programme of staff development and to identify the needs of the staff, and has suggested a number of training techniques that might be employed to achieve the desired results. Finally, it has stressed the need to view staff development as a joint responsibility of those in need of training and those in management positions.

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