

TRAINING NEEDS ANALYSIS.

Checklist 090

» INTRODUCTION

Providing effective learning, development and training opportunities depends on knowing what is required - for the individual, the team and the organisation as a whole. A training needs analysis (TNA) to establish where training is needed is particularly vital in the context of today's fast changing environment. TNA will help to keep people's skills and abilities current and, in turn, give organisations a competitive edge.

Analysing training needs is a vital first step for any effective programme of training and development, enabling organisations to channel learning and development to where it is most needed so as to improve organisational performance. TNA is a natural function of appraisal and performance management systems, and is a key requirement for the 'Investors in People' award. It is also often needed in the context of making funding applications, meeting standards set in service-level agreements or complying with legal requirements such as health and safety standards.

Managers today often carry responsibility for developing their team, so it's essential for them to understand the principals of TNA. The process requires systematic planning, analysis and coordination to ensure that organisational priorities are taken into account; duplication of effort is avoided and economies of scale are achieved. All potential trainees should be included in the TNA process to make it a collaborative and inclusive exercise. Ideally, managers should receive formal training on how best to approach and implement TNA in order to maximise its impact.

This checklist outlines an approach for carrying out TNA within an organisation. Whilst most large organisations have already developed cultures of continuous improvement and self-managed continuing professional development (CPD) for their employees, organisation-wide training needs analysis can still be helpful in some circumstances, for example, when new technology is being introduced on a wide scale.

» DEFINITION

A training need is an individual, team or organisational level requirement for skills or abilities which can be fulfilled through training, learning or development interventions.

A lack of adequate training can prevent employees from fulfilling their job responsibilities and hinder organisations in achieving their objectives. TNA should aim to detect where and how this may be happening, and establish the need for training and development in specific areas. The aim of TNA is to ensure that training addresses existing or foreseeable problems; is tailored to organisational objectives, and is delivered in an effective and cost-efficient manner.

TNA involves:

- › monitoring current performance using techniques such as observation, interviews, regular performance appraisals, 360-degree feedback, employee surveys, and questionnaires
- › anticipating future shortfalls or problems that may arise as a consequence of changing business needs, fluctuations in the market, growing customer expectations, or evolution of the organisation's vision
- › identifying the type and level of development required and analysing how this can best be provided.

Training needs fall into three broad types:

- › those which can be anticipated
- › those that arise from monitoring and performance appraisals
- › those that result from unexpected problems.

» ACTION CHECKLIST

1. Understand the needs of the organisation

Before you can accurately assess the needs of the workforce, it is firstly necessary to ascertain what the organisation requires in order to remain competitive. Armed with an understanding of organisational needs in terms of competencies, skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviour, you can begin to get a picture of what training and development is required. Refer to the organisation's strategic objectives to gain insight into its short and long-term goals and use the insights you gain to measure the extent to which the current workforce is equipped to fulfil requirements. If the organisation has an approved competency framework for individual job roles, use this as a benchmark against which to assess the standards all employees are expected to attain. In this way you will swiftly be able to identify problematic 'gaps' and red flag areas for improvement at all levels of the organisation.

2. Ensure that the identification of training needs is integrated across the organisation

Development needs discovered in one department are likely to exist in others. In most organisations the human resource (HR) function organises and co-ordinates the overall delivery of training and development. For this reason it is usually pointless for individual managers to throw their own limited resources at individual problems as they arise, duplicating efforts and dissipating energy. While managers may not be responsible for co-ordinating the system, they have an important role to play in collecting information on the training needs of their people, and passing it on to the HR or training department.

At the very least, managers can liaise with other colleagues to aggregate training needs information, so that a range of appropriate cross-departmental training and development activities can be planned.

3. Anticipate future needs

Development needs often emerge at organisational or activity level. For example, the introduction of a new software system may well have training implications for those who must work with it; or a strategic decision to enhance the level of customer service is likely depend on a general programme of customer service-related training for its success.

Other areas to look out for are:

- › over-dependence on one or two individuals who hold vital skills or knowledge
- › changes in products or policies
- › overall changes in internal work processes
- › new legislative requirements.

4. Develop monitoring techniques

Some training needs can go unnoticed because they develop gradually within an organisation. Active monitoring systems are essential to spot these, and provide regular information on performance gaps and training needs.

Variance analysis is one approach to monitoring. This sounds technical but it is a simple tool for monitoring budgets. When a budget is agreed, expected monthly expenditure is detailed. Any major variance from the forecast, up or down, triggers an investigation into why it has happened and what the implications will be.

This technique translates neatly into the identification of training needs. For TNA purposes, the budget numbers are replaced by performance standards and indicators - these should be as specific as possible. For example, for a 'soft' issue like customer satisfaction, a standard of 90% of customers feeling they received excellent service could be set. This can be monitored by carrying out customer satisfaction surveys.

Asking questions at appraisal interviews can act as a form of survey, as the same issues are being addressed throughout the organisation. Identifying development needs is one purpose of appraisal and performance reviews.

In addition to including questions about development needs at appraisal interviews, a worthwhile approach to investigating one-off problems is to interview staff and customers. Regularly ask a random sample of people for their views on the same set of questions relating to general performance - for instance customer satisfaction levels.

Gathering useful facts and information can be time consuming. Allow ample time for data gathering and monitoring activities to help support the TNA process.

5. Investigate unexpected problems with care

Monitoring will indicate where gaps and problems exist. However, it is possible to make the wrong assumption when faced with a particular set of circumstances. For instance, unusually rapid staff turnover in a small section may lead to an assumption that unsocial hours worked there are the issue. Staff exit interviews, however, may indicate that the turnover is a result of cramped working conditions and poor ventilation – issues that training cannot resolve, even though the monitoring process has helped identify the problem. On the other hand, it could be that:

- › the root cause is the behaviour of the section head
- › errors at the recruitment stage have led to the employment of unsuitable people.

Both these cases indicate a development need - in the first case for the section head and in the second for those doing the recruiting.

6. Identify the level of need

A development need may be limited to a single individual or activity, but it is more likely to be relevant to a number of people, a whole department or across the organisation. For example, if employees are found to be habitually treating customers as a nuisance, their attitude needs to change. In this case, giving one or two people customer services training would address the training need at the wrong level. Organisation development is needed rather than training sessions for individual employees.

Identifying the level of need is also necessary when planning how to address it. Resources, time and cost will differ depending on the scale of the problem requiring a resolution. Consider the return on investment to ensure the outcome outweighs the input.

7. Consider what type of training will be most appropriate

Consider whether training needs can be met by using internal expertise or whether external help will be necessary. Remember that formal internal or external training courses are not the only option – approaches such as coaching, mentoring or informal peer-to-peer training should be considered. Technological developments have also opened up a wide range of e-learning and blended learning options, including self-managed online learning programmes. Take into account the number of people to be trained and the resources available.

8. Take appropriate action

If the training needs are within your own span of control, at individual or maybe at activity level, you can take action to meet the needs you have identified. If the needs are broader, you will need to make recommendations and proposals to those responsible for planning and implementing learning and development interventions in your organisation. This may involve drawing up a report specifying the needs you have identified, your recommendations for meeting them and the expected benefits of the interventions.

Whilst this may conclude the training needs analysis, this is not the end of the training and development process. You will need to ensure that the development undertaken has been effective and worthwhile for the individual and your organisation. For more details on this, please refer to our checklist on evaluating training and learning (See Additional resources below). It is helpful to put a system in place within the organisation to assess the impact training has had at the individual, as well as department or organisation level. This will help to ensure consistency across the whole organisation.

» POTENTIAL PITFALLS

Managers should avoid:

- › making snap assumptions about performance problems
- › organising training without first establishing a need
- › taking a one size fits all approach
- › deploying existing training to achieve training day targets
- › focusing on obvious training needs, when systematic monitoring may reveal more urgent needs
- › concentrating solely on current needs whilst ignoring future ones.

» ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

BOOKS

Training in organisations: a cost-benefit analysis, John Talbot
Farnham: Gower, 2011

This title is also available as an [e-book](#).

The theory and practice of training, 6th ed., Roger Buckley and Jim Caple
London: Kogan Page, 2009

This title is available as an [e-book](#).

Training needs assessment: methods, tools and techniques, Jean Barbazette
San Francisco, Calif: Pfeiffer, 2006

This title is available as an [e-book](#).

This is a selection of books available for loan to members from CMI's library. More information at: www.managers.org.uk/library

JOURNAL ARTICLES

Reliable TNA in seven steps, Nigel Murphy
Training Journal, January 2015, pp29-32

Transformational L&D, James Flanagan
Training Journal, January 2015, pp34-36

This is a selection of journal articles available for members to download from CMI's library. More information at: www.managers.org.uk/library

RELATED CHECKLISTS

113 Evaluating training and learning

INTERNET RESOURCES

Business Balls: www.businessballs.com
Search for 'training needs analysis' to find a range of information and templates.

The Learning Needs Analysis Toolkit www.conted.ox.ac.uk/courses/professional/lnat
A toolkit and questionnaire developed by the University of Oxford.



NATIONAL OCCUPATIONAL STANDARDS FOR MANAGEMENT & LEADERSHIP

This checklist has relevance for the following standards:

- › Unit DC3: Support individuals' learning and development
- › Unit DC5: Help individuals address problems affecting their performance



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