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Using Training to Improve Communication in the Workplace

LaSonia M. Tiebi
Bellevue University

ABSTRACT

Businesses spend so much time and money hiring and training the right employees. Companies use caution not to be wasteful of their resources and one way to do that is to ensure that the training program is up to par. Improving workplace training to improve corporate communication is never a wasted investment. This white paper discusses three solutions to this managerial communication problem and suggests one final solution that is likely to help any member of the workforce with their training problems.

Keywords: *Six sigma, ROI, talent management, business education*

I.   INTRODUCTION

Nothing adds to a new employee's anxiety level more than starting a new job with incomplete or inadequate new hire training. No matter the level of the organization that the employee is hired, adequate training is a must-have for success. Quality organizational trainers know that they must keep an eye on the bottom line. Organizations want to generate revenue and since people are usually the most valuable asset to a company, it would be wise to provide quality job training to protect the company's investment. In recent years, the US spent an estimated $134 billion on employee training. According to a study on retention in The Journal of Economic Education, the annual rate of retention loss of material learned averages between 13 to 23 percent. It is safe to say that American employers are losing between $17 and $30 billion a year on unused training (Baun et al, 2010).

For example, when a new manager is hired externally, they are expected to learn the ropes quickly and get results from his or her high performing team. Consider the following scenario that demonstrates the effects of poor training for externally hired employees. A newly hired manager named Seth is set up to start work with Company Z on Monday. As an external hire, he is informed that he will do formal training for one week and peer mentoring the second week with the expectation that he will start managing his own team on week 3. On day one, Mandy the trainer, speaks in acronyms even after being reminded that Seth is new to the company. Mandy also came to class unprepared and forgot to make sure that Seth had all of his logins for their computer systems. As a result, he was not able to gain hands on experience and did not get much use out of the exercises. By the end of week one, Seth is feeling stressed and not quite prepared for the next phase of training but says nothing out of fear of being labeled as a slow learner. The second week comes and Seth's peer mentor, Bob, works too quickly without any explanations and takes several breaks to socialize with friends. It becomes clear Bob was chosen to train Seth because his team performs well and not because he is a great trainer. The director of Seth's

department, Karen, wonders why Seth does not show up for week 3 of work. She checks her e-mail and sees a notice of resignation from him stating that he accepted another position as he did not feel like he was set up for success with the training that he was provided.

Proper training and identification of adequate mentors for a new employee helps prevent attrition and keeps an organization from suffering the dreaded revolving door syndrome. Without a stellar training program, employees will be unprepared to do their duties and could ultimately get separated for poor performance or could voluntarily leave the company. It costs thousands of dollars to train each new member of the organization so taking no action to improve training could be financially overwhelming. Companies could benefit from investing in a quality new-hire training program, which would heavily improve organizational communication. This white paper is written to assist members of the workforce that wish to improve the quality of their training programs and retain their top talent. The paper includes suggested methods for achieving these goals with several options that could suit a wide variety of organizational training needs. Despite the need to evaluate organizational training for effectiveness, literature has shown that the evaluation of training is often incomplete (Siniscalchi et al, 2008). To overcome this limitation and prevent potential legal aspects of this problem, solutions will be provided as part of this white paper.

II.   BACKGROUND/PROBLEM

Identifying top performers and enabling talented workers to thrive are not new ideals in workplace development. However, few workplace analysts have been able to find evidence to support that organizations recognize the need to implement a plan beginning with recruiting and ending with succession planning. Learning professionals would need to be willing to address talent needs with excellent employee training and start preparing for the demands of the future workforce (Laff, 2006). Part of this managerial communication problem has been that companies have been unsure of where the responsibility lies with

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fixing a new hire training problem. Is it the human resources department's role or is it up to the training department to overhaul the new-hire onboarding process? Even if that is fairly determined, how much money should a company invest in their training program? Why is it necessary to implement scrutiny of a corporation's educational process? The existence of these questions further perpetuates the need for this research so that members of the workforce can find a training solution that best fits their needs and will bring value to their organization.

Industries mostly affected by this managerial communication problem are fast paced work environments which include the need to learn new information quickly. Technology companies are often faced with the need to constantly innovate to keep up with competitors. Innovation is regarded as an important basis for sustainable competitive advantage in organizations and innovation and the management of technology is assuming an increasing importance in strategic management training (www.bized.co.uk, 2013).

Legal aspects of this managerial communication problem include issues with safety and security. Most companies, especially technology companies, have policies in place concerning data retention for customers and employees. A researcher named Thomas (1999) concludes that 70% of security breaches are as a result of well-intentioned employees inadvertently violating security policies. Security breaches can be minimized with effective training programs coupled with hiring trainers that are excited about their jobs. Trainers are partners in the training operation, and act as both the face and the foundation of a business. They are the most important factor in determining whether employees will be happy and feel comfortable servicing customers with the knowledge they gained.

An example of this issue costing a company time and money is the case of the credit card company VISA getting sued for fines stemming from a Genesco Data Breach. "This lawsuit is the first time a merchant has sued a credit-card company for fines levied under the Payment Card Industry's Data Security Standards. The attackers installed a packet sniffer on the company's network that siphoned off card data sent from Genesco to its banks. Specialty sports-apparel retailer Genesco filed a lawsuit against Visa seeking to recover nearly $13.3 million in fines," (www.eweek.com, 2013). Companies are often concerned with the costs of complying with regulations and implementing quality training programs but doing so is necessary to prevent legal ramifications such as these.

Solution

Recruiting qualified people is not easy and the process can come with a high price tag. The cost of advertising open positions and conducting drug and background tests really adds up.

Organizations spend so much time and money gathering important information about candidates at the time of hire; therefore it would be a shame to see that hard work go to waste (Ruiz, 2007). In order to get a decent return out of the investment of a quality new-hire training program, an organization must decide on the best training improvement plan. There are several ways to go about revamping a new employee on-boarding training program. The methods included in this white paper are: applying the six sigma method to workplace training; evaluating the training staff and aligning the goals of the training department and the talent management team for a long term plan for success.

Applying the six sigma method to workplace training is about identifying opportunities to minimize wasted efforts. Six Sigma principles target the reduction of unnecessary and redundant training for the new hire or employee. Most of this white paper has discussed the ramifications of a trainee not getting enough training to do their job effectively. This method would also make sure that repetitious and useless information is taken out of the curriculum by way of analysis of the corporate education system (Baun et al, 2010). This would leave more room for the type of learning that will enable the trainee to thrive.

When a company opts to use the Six Sigma principles, the goal is to gain efficiency and to take a systematic look at educating for the job requirements according to workforce needs. To use this method, an expert would be assigned to come into an organization and identify which training details are critical to quality. Then, focus groups would be held to identify gaps in training and communication. After the barriers are exposed, possible training plans are developed and one plan is chosen to move forward. Next, a measurement phase takes place to validate the metrics for the new process followed by a verification phase to make sure the new training program meets the trainee's needs (Baun et al, 2010).

Evaluating the training staff is a method that could help a company make their business education program better and improve overall communication. A business educator's customer is the employee seeking training. New hires are an especially important part of that audience as the trainer needs to capitalize on their enthusiasm during the "honeymoon phase." This refers to the time when a new employee is excited about the company and everything is still new and wonderful in the workplace. Hiring managers should not only rely on years of experience when hiring trainers; they should seek candidates that light up when speaking about giving the gift of knowledge to working adults. They should also be innovative, flexible and patient. These are qualities that show the candidate will be willing to help the company keep up with a fast-paced, innovative and demanding workforce (Thomas, 1999).

Reviewing the talent management's methods and strategies can be a great way to maximize the effectiveness of the training the

new and existing employees receive. When the training department and talent management teams come together, companies are more likely to see a ROI. Ultimately, a return on investment is the bottom line for most organizations. "As the pace of change accelerates, organizations are balancing recruitment with an investment not just in training but in comprehensive talent management strategies," (Little, 2010). Since talent management is a part of human resources and the training department is the subject matter expert for the information to be learned, this merger would be beneficial for everyone involved. This solution also clears up any confusion as to whom the responsibility should fall on for implementing a training improvement plan. Training and talent management could split the responsibilities. These two departments could create a powerful team and implement a new training program with long-term plans for employee retention.

The method of having the training and talent management teams come together is the best solution for this managerial communication problem. The training department would need to make sure that the trainers are professionals from a variety of divisions and levels within the organization. This broadens the training team and gives depth to the business education program. Talent management could make sure that they recruit new-employees who pride themselves on being excellent communicators. They should also enjoy adapting quickly to the continual changes in the workforce (Hart et al, 1994).

The risks and disadvantages of implementing this method as the chosen training improvement plan is that there is no way to know that both departments will be able to sync all aspects of their agendas regarding training. For example, the training department might not see the value in including aspects of long-term employee attrition into the program. On the other hand, this is probably talent management's main focus. The more people involved in any organizational collaboration, the more people need to be available for meetings. Competing agendas and schedules is one limitation of this solution but with proper communication and planning, these hurdles can be overcome.

It would be wise for an organization's improved training program to include research and feedback from multiple departments. A simple mechanism to support collaboration is the concept of a cross-department council, with practitioners from various groups coming together for a specific work-based goal. This sense of community within a company is likely to foster a positive sense of community (Fisher et al, 2005).

III.   CONCLUSION

Companies continue to compete against each other on several levels. To sustain their place on the playing field, organizations must move their profession forward in new directions, with new technologies, skills and training (Fisher, 2005). New employees

need information and it must be of excellent quality in order for them to perform their best and be set up for success. To prevent the revolving door syndrome, companies need to innovate constantly and compete fiercely. One way to do that is to make sure their training program is stellar. Multiple solutions were mentioned throughout this whitepaper such as: applying the six sigma method to workplace training; evaluating the training staff and assessing the relationship between training and long term talent management. Ultimately, the method of having the training and talent management teams come together is the best solution for this managerial communication problem. Investing in training for new and existing employees is smart and many companies are awakening to this reality. While everyone else is busy chasing the next shiny, new product to provide their customers, smart companies are out there polishing their most prized possession (human capital).

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