

SOME CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING TRAINING IN PERFORMANCE ORGANIZATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The present paper deals with some aspects of professional training in organizations, focusing on ways of conceiving and structuring the organizational training. The authors analyze the advantages and the costs for a training program as a long term investment and also the tactical steps for a training process, starting from analyzing the training needs and finishing with setting the learning objectives. In a functional manner we research problems like content, requests and ways of stimulation for professional training.

The professional training is provided by the entire array of actions for forming and perfecting, in order to better execute the tasks. The existence of some employees that can not keep up, professionally, with the changes that take place in the way the activities develop in modern organizations represents the biggest problems that worry the management system. What is professional experience? In a large acceptance, it is "a training process along which the participants gain the theoretical and practical knowledge needed for completing tasks efficiently".

In every day jobs, the people that are well trained, from a professional point of view, regardless of their position in the organization, are preferred and rewarded. The professional training isn't measured in the number of diplomas or certificates, although they have their importance. The measurement is more difficult because the professional training can be gain through many ways, thus being influenced by many factors. A synthetic analysis, for the improvement of professional training points out the necessity of some actions (R. Mathis and others, 1997):

- exactly knowing the need for technical training and its' evolution
- informing the interested parties regarding the professional training possibilities
- organizing clear records regarding professional training for people in the organization.
- motivating employees and supporting them for improving professional training
- identifying tasks for applying the gained knowledge
- controlling the actions for professional training
- continuously developing the actions for professional training without stopping the initiatives.

Professional training has two main components: professional shaping and perfecting. Through shaping we try to develop new capacities while through perfecting we try to improve the present capacities. The professional training has a double impact: for the organization and for the individual. The impact for the organization aims for the shaping the "professionalism in a profession" and the impact for the individual aims for "career", "promotion".

The organization seen as a social invention for achieving common goals through group effort, actually represents the practicing of one profession in society. The fundamental purpose of any profession is to serve a precise social need. The management of the organization must uplift the profession and must grant it, through its activity respect. It is a continuous cultivating process for the personnel and for the professional and organizational qualities, keeping the ethical ideals. The profession has some associated characteristics. Without those we can not talk about "professionalism in a profession". The main characteristics of a profession are:

- **formal and informal recognition** by society which consists of: acknowledgment of power and its privileges; establishing a clear statute; high standards for training and current activities; continuous perfecting of the knowledge and training level;

- **progressive nature** - any profession must be permanently innovative and progressive otherwise it will have a static and self-isolation effect. The progressive nature of a profession is given by self-analysis and constructive criticism of those that practice it, no matter if they are managers or employees.

- **highly ethical behavior** – the existence of an ethical code, related with the requirements of the job; the exact usage of the ethical code. The approval of an Ethical Code must be accompanied by a permanent training and improvement of the people without which the moral fiber of the society will be weakened. Also, as an essential component, we must take into account the exclusion of those that commit abuses or those that do not satisfy their duties.

No profession can't afford to have among its members that are not honest or that are corrupt. Other factors that can influence the dynamics of the profession are: public acknowledgment, political influences and employee's attitude.

First of all the professional training is a instruction process through which the organization creates new abilities or perfects those that are already present, abilities needed for a high output. For this reason it is very useful to analyze the training process as an entity so that we can observe the way it is structured and the way it adapts to the organization's need.

General considerations regarding organizational training

Often, in the organizational life, we can have one of the following situations: you can have a lot of work and don't have the necessary time; you must justify or cover a mistake made by one of the employees; to always be interrupted by employees that ask you insignificant questions; to lose a promotion because none of the other employees can replace you.

If these things happen it means that the employees need to be trained. But training isn't necessary only when things go bad. When an employee has finished a project or found a solution to a problem the training will help him progress.

Training also means¹:

- * assistance given to the employees to help them learn from the current chores
- * a conscious process, with intention, that adds value to the professional experience of the character, so that "a ten years experience" means much more than a one year experience repeated 10 times.
- * an absolutely necessary process for the employees so that they can maintain the present level of performances and also improve it. It would be excellent if the good results are as predictable as let's say the direct effect of physical labor.

Unfortunately the problems that require training have superficial causes and hidden causes.

On the other hand training does not mean:

¹Stimson, Nancy, 1998, *Instruieste-ți angajații*, Ed. Rentrop&Straton, București, p. 14 și urm

- ✓ courses or formal training
- ✓ the feedback that is usually registered by the management – although it isn't formal, the training activity has a more premeditated and conscious word.

Training is the process of systematically changing the behavior and the attitude of the employees, with the purpose of increasing their efficiency inside the organization. The main functions that are attributed to training are:

- ⇒ it is a part of the corrective action when the performance standards are not met;
- ⇒ it is a powerful motivational instrument for the employees – it is a form of providing safety and health for the employees at the job site.

Training is used, mainly, to solve problems related to employees' performances. Every time there is a difference between what an employee is supposed to do and what he is doing, this difference can be adjusted through training. But training doesn't target only the improvement of some performances but also the improvement of the performance potential of the organization, so that through training the management system can anticipate what its employees want on the long run and adapt accordingly.

Training is closely related to other human resources activities, that target the development and the improvement of the organizational human being:

- training and personnel planning – the identification of personnel needs leads either to bringing new employees into the organization, either to development through training of the present personnel. Training can be seen as an alternative to employee selection. The resources need in order to find qualified personnel outside the company are redirected toward training its own personnel. This allows for the occupation of the vacant position through inside promotions.

- training and performance evaluation – performance evaluation facilitates the identification of discrepancies that can be reduced through training programs

- training and development – a distinction is often made between training and development of the employees. In a way the distinction refers to those that participate at these kind of programs (it is said that managers develop and employees get trained)

Training is oriented especially on improving employee performance for their actual job, while development includes all types of activities (also training) that help increase their employees' potential for future positions.

The advantages of the training process and the costs involved

The training programs have some characteristics that must be obeyed when we want to create them. First of all, the programs are structured as much as possible. It is good to establish the tasks for a certain job or activity. Secondly, they are adapted to the person that will be trained considering its psychological side. Thirdly it is mandatory to establish what training standards must be achieved by the individuals. This way the training programs have a practical and concrete side, that is very important when talking about their efficiency.

The advantages of training are multiple¹. For a more detailed presentation we've split the advantages into three directions: management system, execution personnel and the organization as an entity.

In a synthetic matter the main advantages of training for managers are:

- training is an investment, a long term strategy for gaining success
- a more efficient department
- a greater confidence in the employees in order to delegate chores
- the development of personal managerial attributes
- increase reputation as “people former”

¹Stimson, Nancy, 1998, op. cit. p. 16 și urm.

- the reduction of the time spent for “solving urgent problems” which will allow saving personal time and using it exclusively in the managers' interest
- promotions and salary increases.

The main advantages for the employees are:

- as people better understand and do a chore, they do it with pleasure. Any chore that help the employee obtain a better result is always welcomed, and individual training can be the best way for it
- the acknowledgment of the importance people have for the organization and for the management system
- the development of abilities
- increase in work satisfaction
- increase in interest for chores
- increase in independence and responsibility for the job
- development of the capacity for doing variable chores, more interesting and more difficult
- promotions and benefits increase.

Among others the most important advantages for the organization are:

- ✓ personnel that is more motivated and more competent
- ✓ managers that are more motivated and more competent
- ✓ increase in the quality of the products and processes
- ✓ additional profit

An aspect that can not be neglected during the training process is that related to costs and expenses. All the activities that are based on the training process cost: instructors, financing for “external” courses, material preparation and the place for the internal training, administrative expenses (transport, accommodation and food), permanent or partial cease of production activities for those that take part at the course.

This is way, often high costs lead to abandonment regarding the introduction of training programs when it is more expensive to train an inside employee for a job than it is to recruit him from the outside. Thus it is mandatory that the training must be done when necessary. We must check that the training is in line with the actual needs of the personnel, if the new knowledge is useful and if it is possible to use it inside the organization.

Professional training process: an X ray analysis of the training needs

A training program implies a succession of activities that are interdependent, and that have the same goal. The first of the activities that must be analyzed during a training program is the identification of the training needs for the personnel, objective establishment and resource allocation. The next step implies choosing a technique and the content of the training in detail: who will be trained, by who, how, when. Finally the process is composed of the actual training accordingly to the established parameters, so that this complex activity can be evaluated based on well defined points that have been previously established in order to determine if the objectives have been reached and how.

The training must be directed towards completion of some objectives for the organization, like: improvement of the quality of service, the usage of more efficient work methods, activity improvement. The resources must be used only for those programs that better contribute to the achieving of those objectives, only if there is a defined need of the organization¹

The training needs can be defined as actual needs or future needs between wanted and obtained performance, that can efficiently be corrected through a training program.

¹ Stimson, Nancy, 1998, *Instruiește-ți angajații*, Ed. Rentrop&Straton, București

This formulation has been criticized because it specifies that the performances are only bad. But as well there can be a difference between a good practical result and an extraordinary one which can be achieved. The discovery of the training needs can be associated with the work of a real detective. In order to do this different types of data are used before the decision for training is made.

For a correct identification of the training needs, so that they have utility in the future, it is necessary to examine the objectives for an organization and the factors that can influence these objectives in the following period. This way we can avoid wasting resources for training programs in fields that will become useless in the future.

The manager, the person that is the “detective” in identifying training needs must evaluate the offer of capable employees in the organization and he must do an evaluation of the organization. This way it is put together that so called “qualities stock” in which the employees are classified according to their qualifications, knowledge and experience, and this can be revised periodically. An efficient solution when we don't have managerial talent can be job rotation, through which the employees get familiarized with a variety of responsibilities.

The need for training can be identified and outlined mainly through analyzing work results. We will analyze and summarize data regarding: absence, personnel fluctuation, complaints, work accidents, employees' attitude, reduced efficiency. All of these can be a signal of insufficient training for the organization's personnel.

At an organizational level we must take into account the training needs that result from: introduction of new work procedures or work technologies; preparation for promoting some employees; replacing some employees that will retire or that will quit; orientation and integration of new employees.

The analysis of the job requirements represents another valuable source of information regarding the training needs. We must specify the duties for each post, so that they are clear for each employee, the knowledge that he must possess, qualities (that he must be able to obtain) and attitude (the way he must perceive the job) needed for performance.

The need for training in an organization will be appreciated by evaluating the difference between what is done and what should be done by each employee. The evaluation of abilities, knowledge and interest for the employees in a company in accordance with the requirements, by using the evaluation charts represents another potential source for identifying the need for training. The evaluation interviews can aim for the identification of the main weakness of the employee followed by establishing the plan to overcome them in an adequate manner. We can also use personnel questioning in order to determine their need for training and improvement. The training must be presented in such a way that it isn't perceived as a punishment and it must be seen from a positive point of view regarding the score of the training which can facilitate its acceptance.

The discovery of a difference between the actual performance and the desired one doesn't have to lead automatically to the training solution. A decrease in output is often seen as a need for training. A careful analysis can identify objective causes: due to the lack of equipment, long hours and increased volume of work in comparisons with the number of workers. With other words these are structural problems that do not include the individual but the system.

Training unfortunately isn't the answer to all the efficiency problems in an organization

The training can be considered a solution when: there is a lack of abilities and not motivation or inadequate work conditions; the employees have the capacity and the desire to learn; the management encourages the professional development and the application of knowledge gained through training.

The training can be a possible solution but not the perfect one. It becomes the most efficient solution when it has the best cost-benefit ratio for resolving an organizational problem. Other solutions can involve a redesign of the position or the hiring of new staff. But often the training isn't the result of such a careful planning. When it has an informal feature (work related advices, counseling) the training must be offered assuming that the need for development is common to all employees.

Establishing the learning objectives

Besides identifying the need for training, during the training process we can identify another important step, that is, establishing the learning objectives besides the operational objectives. The learning objectives specify what needs to be done in order to satisfy the learning needs.

The learning objectives must be specified simple and clear, as rigorous as possible, but we must be careful not to insert indicators that are too complicated for measuring performance. Presenting the desired results with the help of some measurement units clarifies the way the objectives are mentioned, but also present some risks.

There are three fundamental elements for learning: knowledge, skills and attitude. These three fundamental elements stand out and this is why they require different types of training.

Knowledge can be accumulated from the following sources: explications given by the manager or other employees, written material like: procedures, announcements, books, periodicals, electronically stored materials, audio video materials. There is a wide range of training products that can be bought or each person can create his own materials. This category of materials is especially important when the learning needs are common to many persons, in different time periods, especially when they aren't in the same place.

The best way to get **skills** is by demonstrations. The demonstration consists of: preparing the trainer and the person that will be trained, exemplifying the skills to be considered in the presence of the person that will be trained, determining the employee to do what the trainer has demonstrate before, feedback. The last steps can be repeated as many times as needed.

Determining others to change their **attitude** is a difficult and long process, and it is never easy. The changes in character in the desired way can appear also when the involved attitude doesn't change. But if we need a different attitude then the progress can only be graduate. The attitude changes that can be seen are usually obtained as a result of a dialog in which the trainer asks questions with a lot of tact and carefully listens to the answers.

Establishing the objectives and the performance standards represents the best way for improving performances. The objectives and standards mainly have the same purpose – defining the chores that must be carried put by an employee and how well. The main difference is represented by the fact that the objectives are used to define performances for a future task, while standards refer to the performance of activities that take place on a regular basis. For this reason, usually the objectives have a deadline and the standards do not mention one. This difference is less important than the characteristics that are common.

The objectives and the standards must be agreed upon by the manager and by the employee; they must describe the final results; they must be specific and ideally measurable; they must reflect the desired level of performance, they must be mentioned in writing. The objectives and the standards that a manager imposes for an employee are less efficient than those that are agreed upon with him. It is very probable that the employees are more motivated when the objectives and the standards have been suggested by them, even when we are talking about outside standards, the manager together with his employees can decide if they accept them as they are or if it is necessary to adapt them to the specific situation. The conversion process for the objectives and for the standards is very important. It is amazing how many differences are between the way the chores are perceived by the

manager and by the employee himself, and the simple discussion regarding the expectations of each party can resolve many problems related to the desired performances. The objectives and the standards must describe the desired final results and the employee's role in obtaining them, with specific activities that he has to do.

It is said that the final results that depend on the moral of the employees or upon the level of communication, can not be measured, but these type of results are the ones that need to be measured. Some ways of measuring the moral of the employees are: questionnaires regarding employee attitude, years on the job, the number of suggestions made by the employees for improving performances, the number of analysis for establishing the level of performance; the number of employees that require training, etc.

Establishing the desired level for performances is a risky action. The objectives and standards must be doable and stimulating. There is no other factor that can reduce stimulus than an employee that has encountered a failure, by establishing a level that can not be reached through his performances. At the opposite pole, if the objectives and standards are too easy to archive then we will have a reduction in motivation because the employees will not be able to use their entire potential. The manager's level of expectation represent the key factor. If the manager expects mediocre or reduce performances then this is what he will obtain; only high expectations, but reasonable, will determine superior performances. For the manager it is important to establish an motivational optimum as a base for selecting the most adequate performance standard.

The objectives and the standards must be presented in writing because it helps to clarify the manager's intentions, it points out and outlines any difference between manager and the people with which he is working; it represents an objective proof useful for further analysis. Putting down in writing the objectives and standards does not mean the usage of complex formulas – the simpler the formula the better.

The elements for professional training: content, requests, ways of stimulating

As we've shown at the beginning of this paper, the professional preparation is a training process along which the participants gain theoretical and practical knowledge needed in order to do their present job¹. In the daily activity the people that are prepare well from a professional point of view, independent of the function that they have are preferred and rewarded accordingly.

The measurement of the training efficiency is more difficult because it is obtained through different ways, being influenced by a series of factors. The professional training is composed of all the training actions in order to exercise the profession as efficient as possible.

The content for the training or improvement programs

The specialized literature offers a great diversity of definitions for professional training. Most of them point out the content for the professional training process: shaping and professional improvement.

Through shaping we try to develop new capacities and through improvement we try to improve the capacities that already exist. The notion of professional shaping includes, according to some authors, professional qualification, perfecting, specialization, forming through experience and professional information. The shaping programs are important because through them the organization keeps up with the dynamics of the activities, thus anticipating new abilities and knowledge needed for the people in order for them to remain efficient from a professional point of view.

¹ Robert Mathis, Panaite Nica si Costache Rusu, *Managementul resurselor umane*, Edit. Economica, Bucuresti, 1997.

The improvement can be considered as a stage of shaping which consists in accumulating knowledge regarding the basic profession. The improvement is regarded as a constant relation to the perspective needs. There are situations in which the dynamics of the activities needs new abilities and knowledge, which can not be purchased. This is where forming appears. On the other hand the dynamics of the activities needs adaptation, modernization, innovation for some knowledge and work practices that existed. This is where improvement appears. Forming and improvement are interlaced, sometimes being hard to appreciate if some activities are part of forming or perfecting.

The existence of these two processes is dependent on applying in practice what has been learned. To effectively apply means to continue the forming and improvement process through concrete solving of the problems. The evaluation of the usage of the things learned is materializing in: the quantity and quality of the knowledge, the modification of the behavior, the perseverance in applying the knowledge, changing the mentalities, increasing the efficiency of the organization.

Professional shapng is composed of: initial qualification and adopting a new job. Professional improvement: the workers that are already qualified in a certain field will gain new knowledge, skills, that are considered to be part for the job, multi-qualified, re-qualified

A special attention must be granted to the persons that will participate at these programs. For the organization's employees the selection criteria must grant equal chances to all, considering the work place, the training expenses, age of the participants and their motivation.

The responsibility of supplying adequate human resources is attributed to the hierarchical supervisor and to the human resource department. The human resource department conceives the training program, coordinates this program, supplies the necessary means for the training, coordinates the carrier plans, supplies data and expertise for structural development.

Requirements for professional training

Professional training is a professional investment in human resources of an organization, the effects can be observed immediately and in perspective. It leads to the increase in employees' performances and to structural, social and technological changes. Once the content of the program has been established the clear structure for the objectives, which are monitored through the training programs, are next.

Establishing an efficient training program consists in knowing the activity and achievements of the persons that work in that field. The objectives of the professional training can be made up of: perfecting the capacity of solving problems, executing specific jobs, solving new tasks, improving the communication capacity, preparing changes, etc.

The identification of the requests for professional training implies a complex analysis which consists in correctly defining objectives and training programs taking into account that those that participate at trainings differ when age, studies and experience are concerned. The identification process is a process that recommends the necessity of a directed education, which allows for the development of individual abilities in order to solve some tasks.

A scientific identification imposes the usage of adequate methods with a high degree of objectivity. The most important methods used for the determination of the necessary for training are, among others, the following¹:

➤ *self evaluation* – it is important for two reasons. First of all, we know the perception of the individual with regard to his own learning need and secondly we see how

¹ Queeney, D., 1994, *Assesing Needs in Continuing Education – an essential Tool for Quality Improvement*, Bass Publishers, San Francisco

interested is an individual with regard to a certain field. The specialist warns that there are two problems in using this: this isn't a structured method and the degree of subjectivity is very high. It is a very useful option in forming a general perspective for the needs of learning perceived and it can be used complementary with other two methods.

➤ *focus-group* – it is focused quantity method, which is efficient when the researcher doesn't have sufficient information and wants to receive it from the source. We are talking about a group of 6-8 people, that are engaged in a structured dialog, lead by researcher in an informal manner. Surpassing self evaluation this method identifies a general field of interest at a socio-professional level, aiming for to fructify the discussions opened between the members of the researched group.

➤ *the Delphi method* is used when trying to find multiple perspectives regarding needs for learning and when the resources available are limited. In order to limit the subjectivity the method can be used in two, three stages.

➤ *questionnaires* – or interviews are used on a large scale in order to obtain the information for interest, problems, perceptions and preferences of a person or group. Depending on the objective we can identify preparation problems, perception regarding them, the achieved level, the nature of the problem: subjective - it depends on the individual, or objective – it depends on the system, structure.

In establishing these requirements we start from the present level of preparation, evaluated through testing of knowledge, at the beginning of the training program. From the information analysis regarding knowledge, skills, work habits, attitude, we can establish the content for the program, so that the thematic does not contain useless information but also doesn't exclude the information needed.

Establishing the requirements for professional training implies going through the next stages:

- mentioning the objectives for the organization, for the structural components and for each individual
- establishing new knowledge that are needed for the employees in order to do their jobs in an efficient manner
- establishing the training methods, the institutions that will be called and the resources available
- putting together the program for professional training

Forms of stimulating professional training

The forms for stimulating the professional training are:

a. Motivation. In order to stimulate the professional training of the personnel different types of models can be applied. The motivation can be intricate or extricate.

The intricate motivation results from interest that the persons shows in improving his knowledge. The extricate motivation is the result of some rewards and external penalties.

If the motivation is stronger the degree of assimilation for the knowledge is higher. The employees will learn when the results are important to them from a material point of view, but also due to the desire to know and to have a better statute, etc.

b. Reward. In order for the training to be a success, the employees must have reasons to learn and also the possibility to apply what they've learned. The things that they've learned help them, either in achieving a goal, either for avoiding unwanted situations.

The reward for accumulation new knowledge can be interior or exterior.

c. Punishment. The punishment has as purpose the avoidance of unwanted actions or attitude by a person. The reduction of the knowledge can lead to responsibilities unfulfilled responsibilities. He will have to call upon his colleagues to ask questions. If he does not receive an answer he will have to get by with the basic knowledge.

The practice stages have as purpose the consolidation and development of the work process for knowledge, dexterity and skills that were gained before. No matter what the organizational method the recruited employees for the training must be motivated and must be serious in completing this training.

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