BEST PRACTICE FRAMEWORK FOR CONSTRUCTION WORKFORCE TRAINING

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Abstract. The failure to contend with fragmented nature of construction and change has often led to mismatches between the training offered and the workforce training needs in the Malaysian construction industry. Consequently, many training initiatives have fallen short of its intended objective. On the premise that the way forward to critically rethink the current training approaches by assimilating best practice training concepts, this paper critically investigates the best practices that can be applied in the training offered to the Malaysian construction workforce. This paper will be looking at various possibility of construction training methods. A best practice framework to underpin effective construction training is proposed at the end of the paper.

Keywords: Construction workforce, Training, Best Practice, Training Best Practice

INTRODUCTION

The Malaysian construction industry identifies training as the fundamental approach to assist the meet the increasing demand for adequately trained and qualified workforce (CIDB, 2007). Despite the numerous initiatives introduced to promote and improve the training of the construction workforce, success has often been limited. A research investigating the approaches for improving the framework for training in the Malaysian construction industry was undertaken, and a significant part of the research was devoted to investigate the context within which training should be conceived. This paper presents the findings from part of the research. It suggests that for training to be effective, it must be supported with sound appreciation of human resource management concepts augmented with a firm understanding of the factors that affect the training processes. To enable this, a framework to perceive training based on best practice is proposed.

THE TRAINING FRAMEWORK

The research training conceptual framework was developed by drawing data from current and key concepts on training from literature, research papers and examples from other successful industries. The themes drawn and culminated were as follows:

Training

Training spawns from the realms of learning. Within the context of human resource management, training should be aimed at promoting as much continuing learning and re-learning of people as possible as it can be very significant in contributing to their performance improvements (Paton & McCalman, 2000; Mullins, 2004). Successful training initiatives, which can be measured through its effectiveness, pivots on the basis from
which the training is developed (Philips and Stone, 2002; Laird et al, 2003). They are hallmarked by positive outcomes where the benefits can be derived collectively by the trainee, the employer, the job.

**Training Best Practice**

The absence of other recognised tools for managing change coupled with the concern that training provisions must to be able to satisfy the ever-changing needs at the workplace has made best practice thinking dominant in training (Hassan, 2005). Best practice operates within a flexible framework that encourages re-thinking of the present approach, the exploration of different methods and/or processes in different circumstances while maintaining focus on continuous learning and adoption of innovation into the management process (Zairi, 1998; Kozak, 2004; Dalkir 2005). For this to happen in training, the right paradigm in managing the organisation and its people must be in place and the organisation must place adequate emphasis on the appreciation and development of its people. Training was conceived from the culminating views from scholars on training (Charney & Conway, 2004; Bee and Bee, 2003; Buckley and Copple, 2007, Donovan et al 2004) as an evolving cyclic process which can be classified into: (i) Training needs and Training Needs Analysis (TNA); (ii) Training Design; (iii) Training Implementation; and (iv) Training Evaluation processes. Findings derived from the each process needs to be considered within the next training cycle to ensure a continuously improving training provision.

**Training needs and Training Needs Analysis (TNA)**

Training needs analysis (TNA) is a vital part of the training design process which endeavors to investigate the performance ‘gaps’ of people in their job to identify what needs to be learnt. Without TNAs, there can be no way of knowing if the training process is correctly designed (Bee and Bee, 2003; Gibson & Bartram, 2000). For TNAs to be holistic, the three processes of: (i) identifying the range and extent of training needs from business needs; (ii) specifying the needs precisely; and (iii) analysing how best training can be carried out must be observed. This should be carried out at the organisational level, job-level and person level within the organisation to be accurate (Truelove, 2006).

TNA approaches need to be carefully articulated. The ‘supply-led’ approach which is usually trainer-driven can be inaccurate as trainers could lack management experience or knowledge on real operational issues; the ‘demand–led’ approach is often too business orientated and usually emphasises on bottom-line which often leads to neglect of employees needs; the ‘process-led’ approach tends to be too localised for divisions or departments for the training processes to be introduced in an effective manner; and ‘trainee-centred’ approach, which relies on self-assessment, has drawn strong criticism as they often reflect employee wants instead of needs. An integrated approach combining these methods to annul out any weakness would be ideal but can be expensive and time-consuming (Chiu et al, 1999).

**Training Design**

The design stage of the training follows the TNA stage. During this stage, it is very important that training method/s selected must match the training needs, and the training strategy and planning must be appropriate to the training objective and circumstances (Piskurich, 2003; Hassell-Corbiell 2001; Charney and Conway 2004). A structured training programme design would normally include: (i) review of training objectives; (ii) determine
learning activities; (iii) assess training times; (iv) construct timetable; and (v) briefing the trainers, organisation and the preparation of training materials and equipment.

The key parties that must be involved in the training design should include: (i) the organisation; (ii) the line management; (iii) the training manager and/or the training officer; and (iv) the trainee (Rae, 1995, Barbazette, 2006). It is imperative that the training ‘alignment’ must be correct with the right parties and the training provider’s mission needs to be clearly outlined to establish the training policies and standards (Reid, 2005). The decision to determine the appropriate training strategy should be based on the training compatibility with the objectives, estimated likelihood of transfer of learning to the work situation, available resources and trainee related factors. From this, the training can be designed to be; (i) on-the-job; ii) planned organisational experience; (iii) in-house programmes; (iv) planned experience outside the organisation; (v) external courses; (vi) self-managed learning; and/or a combination of these approaches (Reid and Barrington, 1999). In contrast to traditional training, the design of competence-based trainings must be based on explicit and measurable performance because it needs to reflect the actual expectations and performance in the work role (Noe, 2008, Harrison, 2000).

Training Implementation

Training implementation is putting the training design into practice. The mechanistic ‘traditional’ training approach has now greatly changed, replaced with the modern approach that emphasise more of coaching and facilitating (Morris, 2000). The training spectrum may vary from highly directive to free-learning, guided-learning, lecture/discussion, presentation, instruction and conditioning for individuals or as a group (Reid, 2005; Noe, 2008). The training needs to be different for different people but concurrent with the different kinds of tasks they undertake (Mathews et al, 2001). In most situations, formal training entails deliberate and structured presentation of experiences and must be related to its purpose Task force exercise, case discussion, simulation and games; role-play exercise, group discussion, individual exercise, presentation/lectures and behaviour modelling are the common training methods (Truelove, 2001) and may be carried out through external or internal providers.

On-the-job training is often very effective, flexible and relatively low-cost (Walter, 2001), but can be ineffective if it is too detached from the actual job-environment or, if it does not follow guidelines of standard training programmes (Rothwell and Kazanas, 2004). Competence-based training is often modular outlines. It must take into account occupational constraints such as availability of target groups, training premises, possible need for several programmes and the atmosphere at the job location. The training activity must be realistic to the preferred learning styles of the target group. The delivery of training or learning needs to be clearly focused on what happens at the job place and not just what happens during the learning/training events (Harrison, 2000)

Training Evaluation

Training evaluation is the assessment of the total value of a training system, which considers the training course or programme in social as well as financial terms. It attempt to measure the overall cost benefit of the course (Wilson, 2005; Kirkpatrick, 1998). It must encompass a systematic collection of data relevant to the selection, adoption or modification of training and developmental activities, and
must be an on-going process from which continuous corrective action can be introduced to ensure an ever-improving training (Barbazette, 2006; Walter, 2001). There are differing views as to who should be evaluating the training, but most views tend to agree that senior managers, line managers, training managers, trainers and learners must be included (Noe, 2008; Charney and Conway, 2004). There has been some contention as to the extent of the training evaluation but the four popular training evaluation models developed by (i) Donald Kirkpatrick, (ii) Peter B. Warr, Michael W. Bird, Neil Rackham and (iii) Anthony Hamblin.

FRAMEWORK OF TRAINING BEST PRACTICE

Within the construction industry, training needs to be appreciated within the context of the industry, organisational setting and the surrounding project environment. Much of the construction workforce training needs to be designed at the workplace environment where their effectiveness can be judged by their capability to deliver and contribute to the project success. To aid the holistic conception of training based on best practice, a framework drawn from the culminating training concepts discussed converge as shown in Figure 1.

CONCLUSION

There are many types of training necessary for the Malaysian construction workforce. The training for each category of workforce may vary according to the trade, background of the trainee, the project and the organisational setting within which they perform. Notwithstanding, the appreciation of the fundamentals of training best practice is essential for the design and delivery provisions of effective training. The paper suggests that this should be the principal starting point for the consideration of such provisions.

References:


