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Training: A Critical Imperative in the Growth of Universities

Abstract

Training has been found to be the best method of remedying any observed performance deficiencies of employees. The write up is intended to drum home to Managers the significance of training and the need to develop a systematic method of training.

Keywords: Training, Development, Orientation, Management

Introduction

The application of managerial techniques to the public sector tertiary institutions as part of a larger worldwide movement to results oriented management styles to all kinds of public sector organizations has reduced waste and unbridled spending for public universities worldwide (Hood, 1991). The new thinking is the concept of management as specialized and separate functions focused on achieving cost efficiency in state services.

In tandem with trends of globalization, Public Universities in Ghana have begun to be run on corporate lines, with the ultimate aim of obtaining efficiency. This is as a result of the fact that state support to most tertiary institutions has been dwindling and would sooner or later stop. The Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA) is a very good example of how a public tertiary institution has been able to wean itself from state subvention. According to Dessler, (2000) one very important intervention to achieving corporate excellence has been identified as training and development. Collard (1993), maintains that one of the major successes of Japanese approach has been the very extensive training programmes that have been used in their total quality programmes.

The need for training in most organizations especially the University for Development Studies which is still in its formative years has become imperative ever than before. Over the years attempts have been made to improve upon the manpower base of the university resulting in a sustained granting of scholarships to promising Lecturers to pursue postgraduate programmes both in Ghana and Abroad. Most have returned but a number of the beneficiaries have vacated post. The paper would suggest what to do to those who have abused the privilege in the later part of the write-up.

Despite the widespread speculation that outsourcing would be the wave of the future, there has been no rush by firms to outsource training services. Rather, efforts are being expanded on in-house training capabilities or in-sourcing rather than utilizing more outsourcing for its corporate training needs (Willis, 1999). In the year 2001 in the United States of America, organizations with more than 100 employees budgeted 56.8 billion US dollars on formal training for their employees (Schaaf 1998).

It is widely agreed that organizations that take training seriously and apply time and other resources to its provision, are more likely to succeed than those who engage in less or no training, or merely pay lip service to it (Leslie, 1995). The days when employees did the same routine job everyday with little involvement in the work process outside their area are rapidly coming to an end. Employees, not just new recruits, increasingly need to be trained to keep up with changing technologies.

What is Training and Development?

Training is defined as an attempt to improve employee performance on a currently held job or one related to it (Bernadine, 2003). According to Bernadine(2003), this usually means changes in specific knowledge, skills, attitudes or behaviour. To be effective, training should involve a learning experience, be a planned organizational activity and be designed in response to identified needs. Ideally training should be designed to meet the goals of the organization while simultaneously meeting the goals of individual

employees. Gomez-Mejia (1995), defines training as “any systematic attempt to change employee behaviour through the learning process in order to improve performance”

According to the Manpower Services Commission, training is a planned process to modify attitude, knowledge and skill behaviour through learning experience to achieve performance in an activity or range of activities. Its purpose in the work situation is to develop the abilities of the individual and to satisfy the current and future needs of the organization (MSC, 1981). Training needs exist when there is a gap between what one does now and what he/she needs to be able to do. Training needs can apply to areas of knowledge or skill that one needs to carry out a specific aspect of one’s role such as;

1. Carrying out a new task
2. Performing an existing task at a higher level
3. Implementing some change in your job
4. Becoming more familiar with an area of work (OSD, 2009)

Development also refers to learning approaches designed to help employees grow, such activities do not have to be linked to improving employee’s performance on their current job. For example at Ford Motors, a new System Analyst is required to read Fords Standards for Users Manual before starting work (Bernadine, 2003).

Difference between Training and Development

The terms training and development are often used in practice as if they were interchangeable. The Oxford dictionary defines the two concepts in the following way:

Train – To instruct and discipline in or for some particular art, profession, occupation or practice; to make proficient by such instruction and practice

Develop – to unfold more fully, to bring out all that is potential contained within.

Training is described as a job-specific form of education. It could either be organization-specific or general. For example, an institution trains its staff in a particular work processing package that it uses. This training would be specific to that particular organization, but could also be transferable to other companies (if they used the same package).

Development on the other hand reflects a less specific activity which relates to potential.

Development is about the future. It does not necessarily relate to the job an individual presently undertakes. It could be a set of experiences that provide the individual with a basis for future career moves. It could also be used to enhance the skill levels of an individual in anticipation of future change in the nature of work or products.

For example, the planned introduction of high-technology equipment is frequently preceded by introductory courses for those affected.

Development is being increasingly used to describe the full range of training and development activity, the argument being that it is a less restrictive term than training does not preclude the use of training activities within its sphere of influence and is more easily associated with the concepts of individual and organizational growth. This is often associated with the notion of human resource development, in which individual career and organizational development are brought together in an integrated approach to mutual benefit (Beardwell and Holden, 2001). However, it is important to note that from the perspective of Human Resource Development, sometimes training and development are bedfellows.

The State of Training and Development in our Public Universities

In most Ghanaian Universities training and development has been reduced to mainstream staff development i.e. the attainment of higher degrees such as the acquisition of HND, Bachelors and PHD. The majority of staff offered study leave either pursue a Diploma, Bachelors or PhD programme.

New staff employed it seems get very little or no orientation at all and one would have to struggle to learn On-the-Job-Training (OJT), sometimes without supervision. Although OJT is a form of training, the employee should get some orientation before he or she undergoes OJT under some form of supervision. Assuming one is employed and posted as Faculty Officer to say the WA Campus where the Registrar or a Deputy/Senior Asst. Registrar is not physically present and where the Dean has just been elected how does one learn on the job?

A number of staff recruited into our Universities plunge headlong into their jobs with very little practical experience. The recent intake of Assistant Registrars in University for Development Studies is a perfect example. Newly recruited Assistant Registrars are posted straight to schedules they have little or no experience at all. There is usually no planned or orientation for them and many of them complain. The creation of a Quality Assurance Units in the various universities under the Office of the Vice-Chancellor particularly in the University for Development Studies has seen the beginning of planned orientation workshop for the training of newly recruited academic staff. But it must be noted that the Training and Development Unit should be involved or informed about any training programme being run in the University for coordination.

A casual interaction with some new staff at the University for Development Studies and even some old staff reveal that they would require orientation in some areas such as: Leadership, teambuilding, supervision, time-management, problem-solving, decision making, hiring/recruiting, quality process improvement, public-speaking sexual harassment, managing change, diversity, ethics, Outplacement/retirement, organizational exit etc.

Some unruly behaviour of secretaries and drivers towards superior officers and some clients have sometimes been reported. Evidence also abounds about in-fighting, open confrontation, insubordination and nasty scenes being caused by staff of the University. Front desk staffs of most Universities need some training on telephone etiquettes and manners, interpersonal communication, conflict-management. Senior level management can also undergo training in basic Information Technology skills such as introduction to basic computing, troubleshooting, networks, excel, PowerPoint, internet-searches and browsing. Senior staff and senior members could also undergo some basic training in motivation, supervision, Job satisfaction, communication, time-management, leadership and delegation. Periodic interactions and talks to staff by Vice-Chancellors or Registrars about the mission and vision of the various Universities as spelt out in strategic plans would immediately put staff in perspective and spur them to work to fit into the vision and mission which could go a long way to re-engineer and build the capacity of staff.

Importance of Training and Development in Today's Corporate World

Training and Development remain a critical function in today's universities. They are important and contribute to the bottom line of corporate performance. The USA has invested substantially, in the last decade in training and development. Most institutions worldwide have come to view training as key to organizational survival and success. It has become increasingly important in preparing workers for new jobs. For example, in Japan, with the increasing number of women entering traditionally male-dominated factory jobs, more training is needed to help them cope up and learn the necessary skills. Employers are now waking up to this reality.

Peter Drucker, a well known management author says that the fastest growing industry in the USA will be the continuing education and training of adults due to the replacement of industrial workers with knowledge workers (Drucker, 1994). Chief Nielson, VP of Human Resources at Texas Institute notes "Our Challenge is creating an environment in which people love to learn; hence the company mandates a minimum of 40 hours of training per year". International Business Scholar, Jeffrey Pfeiffer and John Veiga, cite training as "an essential component of high performance work systems". As an example they describe the Men's Wear house, a Specialist retailer of men's tailored business attire that attributes it

success that is the increase in its stock value by over 400% to the emphasis it has placed on training (Bernadine, 2003).

Training plays a central role in nurturing and strengthening core competencies which have become a backbone of strategy implementation. In addition, rapidly changing technologies require that employees continuously hone their knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) to cope with new processes and systems (Bohlander et al., 2001). Jobs that require little skill are rapidly being replaced by jobs that require technical, interpersonal and problem-solving skills. Other trends in the field of management such as empowerment, total quality management, teamwork and international business make it necessary for managers, as well as employees, to development the skills that will enable them to handle new and more demanding assignments.

To become a leading edge University, a University would have to be more concerned with the type of programmes to institute to enhance workplace learning and performance. When Marriot Hotel recruits new staff, it enrolls them in six week training course with bias on hotel duties, self esteem and stress (Dessler, 2000). Apart from the fact that training benefits the employer, it has been viewed positively among employees. In a recent survey in the US, approximately two thirds of employees, regardless of age or gender view the training they have received from their employers to be useful in helping them perform their current job and duties. They also viewed the training their employer provided as critical for determining whether or not they would stay with their current firm (Gomez-Mejia et al, 1995).

Unfortunately however it seems training proposals and programmes receive little attention among many Ghanaian employers and organizations but in the developed world institutions spend enormous amounts of money on training each year, close to 30 billion US Dollars. (Dave, 1990) In spite of this colossal amount only a relatively few companies are involved. In fact less than 200 US companies spend more than 2% of their annual budget on training (Dave, 1990).

Orientation

Orientation – A must do for Emerging Universities. The most important training opportunities for many organizations come when employees start with the firm, it is at this time that employers have the chance to set the tone for new employees through orientation in the process of informing new employees about what is expected of them on the job and helping them cope with the stress of transition. This, according to Bernadine (2003) is where new employees are informed about their roles and responsibilities in an effort to ease their transition into the institution, and also to familiarize with their co-workers and supervisors, the organizational values, ethics and culture, institutional policies and procedures and requirements of their jobs (Bernadine, 2003). In an organizational setting, this would equate with the socialization or induction process for new employees to a company, examples of which would include meeting appropriate managers and colleagues, and learning about the basic rules, procedures and product range of the company (Martin, 2005).

Orientation is an important aspect of socialization. In the recently held Inter-Faculty Lecture at the Nyankpala Campus of the University for Development Studies – Tamale, it came out that most people in management positions did not receive or received little orientation before they settled in their new position such as HOD, Deans and Directors.

Orientation is an important aspect or phase of the socialization stage of the staffing process. Perhaps no organization accomplishes its objectives quite effectively as the military. As soon as a new recruit steps off the bus, they are confronted by the stereotypical “in your face drill sergeant”. The recruits know immediately who is in charge and that only absolute unquestioning obedience is acceptable. But management expert’s cautions that it is not suggested that other organizations copy the military and demand unquestioning obedience from new employees.

According to Cook (1992), the objective of employee orientation is threefold (1) to assist the new employee in adjusting to the organization and feeling comfortable and positive about the new job (2) to

clarify job requirements, demands and performance expectation; and (3) to get the employee to understand the organization's culture and quickly adopt the organizations goals, values and behaviour.

Employee orientation provides new employees with basic background information they need to perform their job satisfactorily, such as information about the dos and don'ts of the organization. Orientation is important not just for the institution but for the new employee. Several studies have indicated that starting an new job is a very stressful event for many people. One important function of organizing orientations for fresh employees is to provide the new worker with tools to manage and control their own levels of stress. He further suggests that institution use an orientation opportunity referred to as Realistic Orientation programmes for the Employees Stress (ROPES). This Programmes help new employees to cope with transitions to a new job and reduces turnover which saves the company both time and money. It provides realistic information and demonstrates coping skills and identifies specific potential stressors (Gomez-Mejia, 1995).

Breach of Study Leave Terms

Most Universities including the University for Development Studies spend lots of money on staff development but unfortunately some staff abuse these privileges by not returning at the time they ought to. A considerable number of staff are constantly asking for extension of their study time whilst others have finished and have refused to come back to take their appointments. Article V of the approval of study leave letter of University for Development Studies states:

“That if you fail to comply with the above conditions you would become liable to such disciplinary proceedings as the University would consider appropriate”

This is quite nebulous and gives room for a variety of interpretations. Defaulters could capitalize on the lacuna and influence insiders to play it soft. It is suggested that this clause should be forwarded to the legal unit for a review. The writer would also like to recommend to management that after the stoppage of their salaries as is often the case for those who refuse to come home. Management could also write to the home office of the country where the staff is studying and inform them about the refusal of the student to return management should include in the bond form a clause such as you will be surcharged to pay three times the salaries paid to you plus interest at the prevailing interest rate to the university or any agent acting on behalf of the university. When these fail, Management should liaise with Interpol to surcharge and recover the full cost of the scholarship.

Conclusion

Concluding, on the growing importance of training and development, Bernardine(2003) maintains that training is likely to continue to soar in the future given the recent trends in the work force According to him as the workforce shifts from manufacturing to the survive industry, increasingly more workers are needed in the service based industries. In addition to this, increasing technology demands that current employees enhance their skills and technical sophistication. He further assert that Xerox spends about 7 Million Us dollars on its training centre to assist its sales staff in gaining additional training to better meet customers need for handling documents.

It is evident that training and development is very helpful to employees, and has over the years become increasingly popular as a tool for increasing employee and managerial performance in organizations. Most institutions provide some formal training and spend millions of dollars doing so. Emerging public Universities in Ghana should as a matter of priority pay more attention to and provide the requisite funding for training across all sectors and strata of the University. Finally, training programmes should be integrated with the career development of staff and the vision of the University. Wilson (1994) quoting an anonymous source sums up the efficacy of training and development;

“If you want one year prosperity, grow grain, but if you want ten year's prosperity, grow men and women”.

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