# TRAINING NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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February 1996
Reviewed July 2002

## Introduction

The training needs assessment is a critical activity for the training and development function. Whether you are a human resource generalist or a specialist, you should be adept at performing a training needs assessment. This paper will begin with an overview of the training and development function and how the needs assessment fits into this process, followed by an in-depth look at the core concepts and steps involved in conducting a training needs assessment.

## Background

Designing a training and development program involves a sequence of steps that can be grouped into five phases: needs assessment, instructional objectives, design, implementation and evaluation. To be effective and efficient, all training programs must start with a needs assessment. Long before any actual training occurs, the training manager must determine the who, what, when, where, why and how of training. To do this, the training manager must analyze as much information as possible about the following:

- Organization and its goals and objectives.
- Jobs and related tasks that need to be learned.
- Competencies and skills that are need to perform the job.
- Individuals who are to be trained.

## Overview of Training and Development

The first step in designing a training and development program is to conduct a needs assessment. The assessment begins with a "need" which can be identified in several ways but is generally described as a gap between what is currently in place and what is needed, now and in the future. Gaps can include discrepancies/differences between:

- What the organization expects to happen and what actually happens.
- Current and desired job performance.
- Existing and desired competencies and skills.

A needs assessment can also be used to assist with:

- Competencies and performance of work teams.

- Problem solving or productivity issues.
- The need to prepare for and respond to future changes in the organization or job duties.

The results of the needs assessment allows the training manager to set the training objectives by answering two very basic questions: who, if anyone, needs training and what training is needed. Sometimes training is not the solution. Some performance gaps can be reduced or eliminated through other management solutions such as communicating expectations, providing a supportive work environment, arranging consequences, removing obstacles and checking job fit.

Once the needs assessment is completed and training objectives are clearly identified, the design phase of the training and development process is initiated:

- Select the internal or external person or resource to design and develop the training.
- Select and design the program content.
- Select the techniques used to facilitate learning (lecture, role play, simulation, etc.).
- Select the appropriate setting (on the job, classroom, etc.).
- Select the materials to be used in delivering the training (work books, videos, etc.).
- Identify and train instructors (if internal).

After completing the design phase, the training is ready for implementation:

- Schedule classes, facilities and participants.
- Schedule instructors to teach.
- Prepare materials and deliver them to scheduled locations.
- Conduct the training.

The final phase in the training and development program is evaluation of the program to determine whether the training objectives were met. The evaluation process includes determining participant reaction to the training program, how much participants learned and how well the participants transfer the training back on the job. The information gathered from the training evaluation is then included in the next cycle of training needs assessment. It is important to note that the training needs assessment, training objectives, design, implementation and evaluation process is a continual process for the organization.

## Needs Assessment

There are three levels of needs assessment: organizational analysis, task analysis and individual analysis.

Organizational analysis looks at the effectiveness of the organization and determines where training is needed and under what conditions it will be conducted.

The organizational analysis should identify:

- Environmental impacts (new laws such as ADA, FMLA, OSHA, etc.).
- State of the economy and the impact on operating costs.
- Changing work force demographics and the need to address cultural or language barriers.
- Changing technology and automation.
- Increasing global/world market places.
- Political trends such as sexual harassment and workplace violence.
- Organizational goals (how effective is the organization in meetings its goals), resources available (money, facilities; materials on hand and current, available expertise within the organization).
- Climate and support for training (top management support, employee willingness to participate, responsibility for outcomes).

The information needed to conduct an organizational analysis can be obtained from a variety of sources including:

- Organizational goals and objectives, mission statements, strategic plans.
- Staffing inventory, succession planning, long and short term staffing needs.
- Skills inventory: both currently available and short and long term needs, organizational climate indices: labor/management relationships, grievances, turnover rates, absenteeism, suggestions, productivity, accidents, short term sickness, observations of employee behavior, attitude surveys, customer complaints.
- Analysis of efficiency indices: costs of labor, costs of materials, quality of products, equipment utilization, production rates, costs of distribution, waste, down time, late deliveries, repairs.
- Changes in equipment, technology or automation.
- Annual report.
- Plans for reorganization or job restructuring.
- Audit exceptions; reward systems.
- Planning systems.
- Delegation and control systems.
- Employee attitudes and satisfaction.

Task analysis provides data about a job or a group of jobs and the knowledge, skills, attitudes and abilities needed to achieve optimum performance.

There are a variety of sources for collecting data for a task analysis:

- ***Job description***-- A narrative statement of the major activities involved in performing the job and the conditions under which these activities are performed. If an accurate job description is not available or is out of date, one should be prepared using job analysis techniques.

- ***KSA analysis***-- A more detailed list of specified tasks for each job including Knowledge, Skills, Attitudes and Abilities required of incumbents.
- ***Performance standards***-- Objectives of the tasks of the job and the standards by which they will be judged. This is needed to identify performance discrepancies.
- ***Observe the job/sample the work.***
- ***Perform the job.***
- ***Job inventory questionnaire***-- Evaluate tasks in terms of importance and time spent performing.
- ***Review literature about the job***-- Research the "best practices" from other companies, review professional journals.
- ***Ask questions about the job***-- Of the incumbents, of the supervisor, of upper management.
- ***Analysis of operating problems***-- Down time, waste, repairs, late deliveries, quality control.

Individual analysis analyzes how well the individual employee is doing the job and determines which employees need training and what kind.

Sources of information available for a individual analysis include:

- Performance evaluation -- Identifies weaknesses and areas of improvement.
- Performance problems -- Productivity, absenteeism or tardiness, accidents, grievances, waste, product quality, down time, repairs, equipment utilization, customer complaints.
- Observation -- Observe both behavior and the results of the behavior.
- Work samples -- Observe products generated.
- Interviews -- Talk to manager, supervisor and employee. Ask employee about what he/she believes he/she needs to learn.
- Questionnaires -- Written form of the interview, tests, must measure job-related qualities such as job knowledge and skills.
- Attitude surveys -- Measures morale, motivation, satisfaction.
- Checklists or training progress charts -- Up-to-date listing of current skills.

## Results of the Needs Assessment

Assuming that the needs assessment identifies more than one training need, the training manager, working with management, prioritizes the training based on the urgency of the need (timeliness), the extent of the need (how many employees need to be trained) and the resources available. Based on this information, the training manager can develop the instructional objectives for the training and development program.

All three levels of needs analysis are interrelated and the data collected from each level is critical to a thorough and effective needs assessment.

## Summary

The purpose of a training needs assessment is to identify performance requirements or needs within an organization in order to help direct resources to the areas of greatest need, those that closely relate to fulfilling the organizational goals and objectives, improving productivity and providing quality products and services.

The needs assessment is the first step in the establishment of a training and development Program. It is used as the foundation for determining instructional objectives, the selection and design of instructional programs, the implementation of the programs and the evaluation of the training provided. These processes form a continuous cycle which always begins with a needs assessment.

## References

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*Thanks to Janice A. Miller, SPHR, and Diana M. Osinski, SPHR, members of the SHRM Training and Development Committee, for contributing this paper.*