Choose the Best
Data Collection Methods
for Your Needs Assessment

solver

question. listen. learn. innovate.

THE IMPORTANCE OF NEEDS ASSESSMENT IN YOUR ORGANIZATION

The needs assessment process is an important step in an organizational or human resource development project. Its role in obtaining and allocating resources for projects is well recognized.

By implementing a training needs assessment process you will be able to identify the performance gaps and align learning projects with organizational objectives. It will also help manage training budgets effectively.

Training needs assessment is used to determine how to develop the skills, knowledge, and abilities of employees to achieve organizational goals, through training.

" Need assessment refers to a process of collecting information about an expressed or implied organizational need that could be met by conducted training" (Barbazette, 2006).

It is done in order to find out answers to such questions:

Why is training conducted?
Who is involved in the training?
How can the performance deficiency be fixed?
What is the best way to perform?
When will the training take place?

NEEDS ASSESSMENT - THE 4 STEPS PROCESS

1. Identify the Business Needs

2. Perform Gap Analysis: desired outcomes–actual outcomes = gap

3. Select the learning methods – things to consider:
- a. Solution to a problem
- b. Cost
- c. Return on investment
- d. Legal compliance
- e. Time - sometimes the amount of time involved in training can interfere with the employees' ability to complete other job duties

4. Make an action plan - After all the training options have been assessed, you will have a list of training priorities and specifications.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Identifying training needs is a process of information gathering. Data collection is crucial in understanding how each employee's knowledge, skills, and abilities can be put to value.

Not every method is appropriate for each company. We suggest to choose the method or methods that best suit your goals from the following:

1. Questionnaires
2. Observation
3. Interviews
4. Focus Groups
5. Tests and assessments
6. Asking the senior manager in charge
7. Looking at the competition
8. Existing data
9. Customer feedback

1. Questionnaires

Surveys are a great place to start. It's important to know the opinion on the people involved in the learning process. They will be the ones that have to take in the knowledge and deliver better results. You need to know how competent do your employees feel and how they think they can improve. Most questionnaires use a combination of questions such as:

-Alternative choice questions
-Multiple choice questions
-Ranking questions
-Fill in the blanks
-Open-ended questions

Advantages

• Can be on paper or in electronic form, which makes it inexpensive
• Easy to analyse, summarize, and report
• It can be applied to a large group in less time
• Can be made anonymous, which ensures that responses are more honest, without fear of repercussion

Disadvantages

• For reliable data, a large number of respondents is needed
• Choosing an appropriate answer scale can be difficult
• Only provides information directly related to questions asked
• It takes an important amount of time to develop an effective and detailed questionnaire to get desired results
• Wording of the questions must be well understood by all respondents
• Respondents can treat it lightly and answer without reading carefully

2.   Observation

Observation can be a great training needs assessment method. The best way to do it is to conduct multiple observations over time, making them informal and unanounced. Employees should be aware that these observations aren't punitive but for training purposes only.

Advantages

• You derive first hand data
• Identifies job environment conditions that help or hinder
performance
• Allows you to find out the non-training issues in the job environment that are
important
• Can be combined with an "on the job" interview to observe the employees' mental
processes
• Enables you to creates a step-by-step procedure that can be standardized for all
learners
• Generates data relevant to work environment
• Minimizes interruption of work

Disadvantages

• Difficult to identify where a specific task begins and ends
• Some people will act differently than normal because they know they are being
watched. Interviewing them after observation can help control for this effect
• The amount of time involved
• You only have access to what people do - not how well they do it
• If the activity is not a very "practical" one the result can be misleading

3. Interviews

Conducted on focused topics through one-on-one discussions, interviews are usually accompanied by notetaking or recording. Based on the type on information you want to find out, any person from the company can be interviewed, from the storage responsible to the top managers.

Advantages

• Provide rich detail
• Produces consistent data across interviews that can be compared to identify patterns and trends
• Can be used to "flesh out" quantitative data collected in a survey
• They allow more detailed questions to be asked
• They are useful to obtain detailed information about personal feelings, perceptions and opinions
• Good at uncovering causes and solutions of problems

Disadvantages

• They are very time consuming for the volume of data gained
• There is the risk that the interviewee will say what they think the interviewer would like to hear and not what they actually think
• Interviewees must truly represent the targeted population
• Their success depend success depend a lot on the skills of the interviewer
• Difficult to schedule and analyse

4. Focus groups

Provides data through group interviews regarding job environment, current level of skill and performance, and perceptions of desired skill and performance level.

Advantages

• The facilitator can make note of nonverbal behaviours that accompany statements
• Skilled facilitation results in all focus group members being heard rather than just the more verbal participants
• Useful with complex or controversial issues that one person may be unable or unwilling to explore
• Questions can be modified to explore unanticipated issues

Disadvantages

• Time and resource consuming to organize, you need more than just one facilitator to run the group and make notes
• Group members provide information they think you want to hear
• Status or position differences may limit participation
• Can fall under the influence of particularly verbal members and give a false impression of unanimity

5. Tests and assessments

Gets you information about what the respondents know, can do, or believe regarding the training need being investigated. Types included: knowledge assessments, true/-false, fill-in-the-blank, or essay questions.

Advantages

• Examines trends and patterns in the data over time
• Provides consistent measurements, giving reliable data
• Does not involve individual employee confidentiality issues because data is used in aggregate form
• They usually require expert input to be properly designed, pre-tested, and interpreted

Disadvantages

• Don't always reveal the thought processes behind why a participant answered a certain way
• Some participants can perform poorly due to test anxiety
• Can be challenging to include both knowledge and skill assessments

6.   Asking the senior manager in charge

This is a very common and in many ways effective strategy.

Advantages

• It illustrates the way employees' activity influences a department / project
• You will get relevant information on employees' competence, work ethics and emotional intelligence
• It is not time consuming

Disadvantages

• The greatest disadvantage is that this method is based on personal evaluations so it can be very subjective
• For large teams, the managers can have a hard time finding traits relevant for the entire group

7.   Looking at the competition

It's important to know where you stand in your industry. How's your closest competitors doing in terms of sales numbers and customer satisfaction? Are they doing anything better? It doesn't mean you should change your entire business model, but maybe employees could use a quick refresher in some areas that will make them more competitive.

Advantages

• Can be made together with other areas (executive, marketing) as a common Competitive intelligence needs assessment action

Disadvantages

• The information is based on a totally different company culture, many things cannot apply for your work environment
• Takes a lot of time gathering the right data

8. Existing data

Includes looking at records and reports, finished work, job descriptions, annual reports, financial statements, staffing statistics, 360-degree feedbacks, turnover rates, absenteeism, customer complaints, training evaluation data, and so on.

Advantages

• It's very objective
• Shows you if the work being produced is reflecting the appropriate knowledge, skills, and abilities you expect for a certain role or position
• Focuses on finding specific performance gaps

Disadvantages

• Usually collected for purposes other than training needs assessment, so training issues must be inferred from patterns in the data
• No control over the methodology that was used to collect the data

9. Customer feedback

Customer feedback is a good method to specifically indicate improvement areas. You will need to formulate each question in the feedback form so that it is directed toward a specific service or performance.

Advantages

• Can make improvements with constructive feedback
• Get valuable insights about your target audience

Disadvantages

• May not give enough time for implementing their feedback
• It usually has low response rates

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TAKEAWAYS:

Conducting a thorough data collection is vital to the success of your training needs assessment.

There are many factors you should consider when choosing a method for needs assmessment, including:

- your main objectives
- the target group
- the timeframe for collecting data
- your budget for collecting information
- the necessary infrastructure
- the availability of the respondents

Need some more advice on picking an appropriate data collection method?

We would be happy to talk through your thought process with you and provide our advice!

Reach out to us here: teodora@solver-consulting.ro

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