

# Training Needs Analysis

## Introduction

Effective training or development depends on knowing what is required - for the individual, the department and the organisation as a whole. With limited budgets and the need for cost-effective solutions, all organisations need to ensure that the resources invested in training are targeted at areas where training and development is needed and a positive return on the investment is guaranteed. Effective TNA is particularly vital in today's changing workplace as new technologies and flexible working practices are becoming widespread, leading to corresponding changes in the skills and abilities needed.

Analysing what the training needs are is a vital prerequisite for any effective training programme or event. Simply throwing training at individuals may miss priority needs, or even cover areas that are not essential. TNA enables organisations to channel resources into the areas where they will contribute the most to employee development, enhancing morale and organisational performance. TNA is a natural function of appraisal systems and is key requirement for the award of Investors in People.

The analysis of training needs is not a task for specialists alone. Managers today are often responsible for many forms of people management, including the training and development of their team, and should therefore have an understanding of training needs analysis and be able to implement it successfully.

Effective TNA involves systematic planning, analysis and coordination across the organisation, to ensure that organisational priorities are taken into account, that duplication of effort is avoided and economies of scale are achieved. All potential trainees should be included in the process, rather than rely on the subjective evaluation of managers. Ideally, managers should also receive training in the process of TNA itself, to clarify what they are trying to achieve and what their approach should be.

## National Occupational Standards for Management and Leadership

This checklist has relevance to the following standards:  
D: Working with people, unit 7

## Definition

A training need is a shortage of skills or abilities, which could be reduced or eliminated by means of training and development. Training needs hinder employees in the fulfilment of their job responsibilities or prevent an organisation from achieving its objectives. They may be caused by a lack of skills, knowledge or understanding, or arise from a change in the workplace.

Training needs analysis identifies training needs at employee, departmental or organisational level in order to help the organisation to perform effectively. The aim of training needs analysis is to ensure that training addresses existing problems, is tailored to organisational objectives, and is delivered in an effective and cost-efficient manner.

Training needs analysis involves:

- monitoring current performance using techniques such as observation, interviews and questionnaires
- anticipating future shortfalls or problems
- identifying the type and level of training required and analysing how this can best be provided.

## Action checklist

Training needs can be sorted broadly into three types:

- those you can anticipate
- those that arise from monitoring
- those which result from unexpected problems.

### 1. Ensure that the identification of training needs is integrated across the organisation

Training needs discovered in one department are likely to exist in others. It is pointless for individual managers to throw their own limited resources at each problem as it arises, duplicating efforts and dissipating energy.

Most organisations have a personnel function which organises training delivery. You may not be the person responsible for coordinating the system, but you have an important role to play in collecting the best information you can on the training needs of the people who work for you and passing it up the line.

At the very least, liaise with other managers to aggregate training needs information, so that a range of appropriate training and development activities can be planned.

### 2. Anticipate future needs

Training needs often appear at the organisational or activity level. For example, the arrival of a new office or workshop equipment, may well have training implications for everyone using it.

Alternatively, an organisation that decides to enhance its level of customer service as part of a corporate strategy knows that a programme of training and development is essential for its success.

### **3. Develop monitoring techniques**

Some training needs can go unnoticed because they creep up on the organisation gradually. Active monitoring systems are essential to spot these and can make a valuable contribution to the process of collecting information on performance gaps and training needs.

**Variance analysis** is one approach to monitoring. This sounds technical but is a simple tool used by managers to monitor budgets. It translates neatly to the identification of training needs. When a budget is agreed, expected monthly expenditure is detailed. Any major variance from the forecast - upwards or downwards - triggers an investigation into why it happened and what the implications will be.

In TNA, the budget numbers are replaced by performance standards and indicators which are as specific as possible. It could be, for instance, that even in a 'soft' issue like customer satisfaction, a standard can be set that says 95% of customers feel they received excellent service (the 5% allows for the small number who will always find fault, and those who always rate an experience as less than 100%, on principle). Carrying out customer satisfaction surveys allows you to measure any deviation.

**Asking questions** at appraisal interviews can act as a form of survey, as the same issues are being addressed throughout the organisation. Identifying training needs is one purpose of appraisal.

In addition to training needs that emerge as a result of an appraisal interview, a worthwhile approach to investigating one-off problems is to interview staff and customers. Regularly ask a random sample of people for their views on the same set of questions relating to general performance - for instance customer satisfaction levels.

### **4. Investigate unexpected problems with care**

Monitoring will indicate where gaps and problems exist. However, it is possible to make the wrong assumption when faced with a particular set of circumstances. For instance, unusually rapid staff turnover in a small section may lead to a conclusion that unsocial hours worked there are the issue. However, staff exit interviews may indicate that turnover is a result of cramped working conditions and poor ventilation – issues that training cannot resolve, even though the monitoring process has helped identify the problem.

On the other hand, it could be that:

- the behaviour of the section head is the root cause
- errors at the recruitment stage mean that unsuitable people are being taken on.

In either of these cases there is a training need - in the first case with the section head and in the second with those doing the recruiting. This could include you.

### **5. Identify the level of need**

It could be that a training need is limited to a single individual or activity but it is more likely to be relevant for a number of people, a whole department or across the organisation. For example, if the organisation traditionally treats customers as a nuisance, it needs to change its overall approach. In this case, giving one or

two people training would address the training need at the wrong level; organisation development is needed rather than individual training sessions.

## 6. Consider what type of training will be most appropriate

Consider whether the training needs can be met by using internal expertise or whether external assistance will be necessary. Will informal training be suitable or are formal training courses required? Take into account the number of people to be trained and the resources available.

## 7. Take appropriate action

If the training needs are within your own span of control, probably at individual or maybe at activity level, you can plan action to meet the needs. If the needs are broader, you will need to make recommendations and proposals to those responsible for planning and implementing training interventions in your organisation. This may involve drawing up a report specifying the training needs you have identified, your recommendations for meeting them and the expected benefits of the training.

### Managers should avoid:

- making snap assumptions about performance problems
- organising training without first establishing a need
- taking a one size fits all approach. A course which one person found helpful will not necessarily meet the needs of a diverse group of individuals
- focusing on obvious training needs at the expense of those which may only be discovered through systematic monitoring.

### Additional resources

#### Books

**Making training and development work: a best practice guide**, Thomas N Garavan, Carole Hogan, Amanda Cahir O'Donnell  
Cork: Oak Tree Press, 2003

**Learning needs analysis and evaluation**, 2nd ed., Francis Bee & Roland Bee  
London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2003

**Training needs analysis in a week**, Tom Holden  
London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2002

This is a selection of books available for loan to members from the Management Information Centre. More information at: [www.managers.org.uk/mic](http://www.managers.org.uk/mic)

### Internet resources

**Business Link:** [www.businesslink.gov.uk](http://www.businesslink.gov.uk)

Go to Skills and Training under Employing People for a guide on how to fit training to your needs, which includes guidance on identifying training needs.

**businessballs.com:** [www.businessballs.com](http://www.businessballs.com)

Templates for assessing skill needs are included under training needs analysis.

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