

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT
ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE LEARNING

SHRMTM

SOCIETY FOR HUMAN
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Needs Assessment

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PROJECT TEAM

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Needs Assessment

Activity 1 – Test Your Knowledge of Needs Assessment (Knowledge Check)

Objective: To test understanding and retention of information presented about needs assessment.

Location: Lesson 1 of module.

Method: In-class exercise (written or verbal).

Estimated Time to Allot: 10 minutes.

Directions: Please complete the quiz to test to your knowledge of transfer.

1. The purpose of a training needs assessment is to:

- a. Determine the performance gap.
- b. Develop the evaluation outcomes for training.
- c. Determine if training is the most appropriate intervention.
- d. Assess the financial need for training.

2. Training is considered an appropriate intervention when the performance gap results from a:

- a. Job-fit misalignment.
- b. Knowledge or skill deficiency.
- c. Lack of effective communication.
- d. Use of ineffective or outdated equipment.

3. Conducting a needs assessment is the step in the instructional system design (ISD) process.

- a. First
- b. Second
- c. Third
- d. Fourth

4. Which of the following is NOT one of the steps in a needs assessment?

- a. Person/learner analysis
- b. Task analysis
- c. Organization analysis
- d. Trainer analysis

5. Which of the following is not a reason to conduct a needs assessment?

- a. To make sure trainees have the basic skills or confidence to succeed in training.
- b. To determine if content and activities are consistent with what trainees will experience in the work setting.
- c. To evaluate whether training resulted in a positive business impact.
- d. To make sure that there is organizational support for training.

6. Joe is an internal director for training for Company XYZ. He is asked by Jim, the director of accounting, to develop an internal controls training class to increase the ethical behavior of the accounting analysts. What should Joe's response be to Jim's request?

- a. Joe should tell Jim that he'll develop the course.
- b. Joe should ask Jim if the CEO is aware of this request.
- c. Joe should ask Jim whether a needs assessment has been performed that shows a knowledge gap of analysts' understanding of internal controls.
- d. Joe should tell Jim that unethical behavior is the result of a lack of motivation to do the right thing and that Jim hired the wrong people to do the analyst jobs.

7. Jill is an internal trainer, and her manager gives her a needs assessment project to begin. Jill's first step in the needs assessment will be a(n):

- a. Organizational analysis
- b. Task analysis
- c. Person analysis

8. Tom just graduated with a BS in HR management, and his new boss asks him when training programs are the best interventions for performance problems. Tom says:

- a. Training works best to address "can't do" problems.
- b. Training works best to address "won't do" problems.
- c. Training addresses resource and supervisory support issues.
- d. Any of the above would be a sufficient answer.

9. Abdul is conducting a person/learner analysis as a part of his training needs assessment. It is likely that Abdul will spend time interviewing or surveying:

- a. The CEO.
- b. His boss.
- c. Current trainers in the organization.
- d. A random sample of the organization's shareholders.
- e. Prospective trainees.

10. Shakira, a new training analyst, knows that task analysis is an important component of the training needs assessment for a new interpersonal skills training class. Which method listed below would be most appropriate to gather this task analysis information if there are emotional concerns (including resistance) of prospective trainees regarding this training?

- a. Face to face interviews.
- b. Paper survey with closed ended questions only.
- c. Prior performance appraisals of current employees.
- d. Focus groups.

Activity 1 – Answer Key

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF NEEDS ASSESSMENT (KNOWLEDGE CHECK)

1. c

2. b

3. a

4. d

5. c

6. c

7. a

8. a

9. e

10. a

Activity 2 – Case Study and Discussion

Objective: Students will identify the steps of the needs assessment process and assess whether the steps and methods were used correctly.

Location: Lesson 2 of the module.

Method: Outside reading and in-class discussion.

Estimated Time to Allot: 25 minutes.

Directions: Please distribute the following case to students to read the case before class and be prepared to discuss the following questions during class:

- A.** Reiterate each step of the needs assessment process and identify if and where in the case each step was attempted by the trainer. Were any steps missing? Explain.
 - B.** Were the needs assessment steps correctly and effectively executed by the trainer? Were appropriate sources and methods for needs assessment used? Explain.
 - C.** What, if anything, would you have done differently if you had conducted this needs assessment? Explain your answer.
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CASE

Organization Profile

DrugCureAll (DCA) is a pharmaceutical company headquartered on the East coast of the United States. DCA researches, develops, manufactures and sells pharmacological remedies and treatments for individuals with diabetes, epilepsy, cancer, arthritis and AIDS. Operating globally, DCA reported \$1 billion in net income last year and employs 20,000 workers. To be socially responsible in the industry, DCA makes a concerted effort to ensure its drugs are available to those in low income categories.

DCA hosts a research and development (R&D) unit at corporate headquarters, as well as departmental personnel in marketing, sales, finance, information systems, legal, risk management, accounting, public relations and human resources. DCA also has a manufacturing facility. DCA's business strategy is a differentiation strategy based on quality and customer responsiveness. In other words, DCA tries to distinguish itself from other competitors in the pharmaceutical industry by accepting no less than top quality output from every employee in making and selling its products and by making its products as readily available in the marketplace as possible. While the company's R&D costs are notably excessive, which in turn affects

product costs, DCA tries to be sensitive to elderly, sick and low-income patients who need assistance purchasing the company's products.

The Situation and Key Issues

Consistent with its business strategy, DCA recruits the brightest students from top schools across the United States to fill its positions. DCA expects high performance and rewards employees slightly ahead of the market. DCA chooses to develop professional-level employees with frequent job rotations throughout the corporate staff to ensure that high-potential employees are well-rounded and understand all parts of the business en route to management positions.

In particular, for its finance and accounting positions, DCA hires top graduates from business and liberal arts programs across the country. DCA believes that bright people achieve results regardless of their training, and they value diverse perspectives in decision making. As a result, a new hire in accounting may have been a psychology major at an Ivy League school or a finance major from a top Midwest business school. DCA has seen both types of individuals contribute, exhibit high performance and achieve promotions in the organization.

Recently, some managers in the accounting department at corporate headquarters have complained to HR and the training staff about new accounting hires who appear to take longer than usual to get up to speed in their jobs. The managers say that most of the new accounting hires are lost when it comes to the organizational hierarchy: who is affected by their work; who should be copied on their reports and memos; and how all the separate areas relate to each other. Moreover, managers claim that while some new hires are mathematically sharp, others struggle with quantitative accounting problems. In addition, some new hires have great computer skills while others take longer to get familiarized with the basics (e.g., in Excel, the real-time general ledger system). Managers do report that almost all of the new accounting hires are very good presenters, articulate and possess sufficient writing and business etiquette skills.

In the most recent corporate staff meeting, the accounting director, Jill Styles, turned to the HR director, Pedro Warren, asking: "Please create a training program to get our new hires in accounting up to speed. We want them to hit the ground running, and we need your help! Let's call it the New Accounting Analyst Training Program." Pedro promises to investigate the situation and get back to all corporate staff members at next quarter's meeting.

The Training Staff

Ellen Ahmad is the training analyst assigned to the finance and accounting department at DCA. Ellen, a top finance graduate from Michigan State, joined DCA about 2 and a half years ago. Ellen started in purchasing and worked there for 15 months before moving to accounting for 14 months. She recently transferred to a training support role for the finance and accounting department.

Ellen is approached by Pedro, the HR director, and informed about Jill Styles' request in the last corporate staff meeting. Pedro asks Ellen to conduct a thorough

needs assessment of the new accounting analyst situation. Pedro wants to present Ellen's findings at the next quarter's corporate staff meeting.

The Trainer's Efforts So Far

Ellen asks Pedro what Jill said about the new accounting hires' strengths and weaknesses. Pedro shares with Ellen the notes he took during the meeting as background information. Ellen then decides to interview a few of the accounting managers and supervisors who sit next to her at DCA headquarters. Ellen interviews them one-on-one and records their comments. Most of these managers said they liked their new boss, Jill Styles, and said they were on board with Jill's observations of the new hires.

Next, Ellen contacts the recruiter for accounting and asks for aggregate demographic data on all new accounting hires over the last five years in terms of their major, university, GPA, and the number of accounting and computer courses they had taken. Ellen reviews the information and observes that while the GPAs were all very high and that the universities attended were top notch, the new hire majors were all over the board in the number of accounting and computer courses they had taken. Ellen also asks the recruiter for a current job description of an accounting analyst position at DCA. Lastly, Ellen asks the recruiter for copies of any information presented in the annual two-day new-hire orientation in terms of organizational charts and departmental goals/mission statements; she finds that little of this type of information is provided in the orientation other than for R&D staff.

Ellen next accesses a training web site and clicks on a needs assessment link. Ellen isn't sure who the creator of the web site is, but she believes it's a great place to start since she doesn't know anything about needs assessment. The author briefly mentions something called a task/job analysis and shows a quick way to conduct one. Ellen uses the job description she got from the recruiter, follows the author's instructions and comes up with the following task analysis matrix:

Importance: 1 = Unimportant; 5 = Important

Frequency: 1 = Infrequent; 5 = Frequent

Difficulty: 1 = Easy; 5 = Difficult

Accounting Analyst (Essential Job Tasks)	Importance of Task	Frequency of Task	Difficulty of Task
Reconciles accounts.			
Makes accounting entries to the "Balance-It" general ledger system.			
Creates business memos/ reports, distributing them to relevant personnel.			
Presents quarterly accounting updates to Chief Accounting Officer (CAO).			
Analyzes business proposals for potential profitability using Excel.			

Next, Ellen plans to ask all senior accounting analysts she knows at DCA to complete the task analysis survey, and she will then average their responses. She believes that the skills to include in any new accounting analyst training program will be related to those tasks rated in the matrix as moderately or highly difficult, frequently used and of moderate-high importance.

Ellen feels great about the progress she makes in such a short time; she has collected quite a bit of data from various people using different methods and will summarize her findings in a report to Pedro next week. She's really excited to develop a new accounting analyst training program—it will be her first design and development effort!

Discussion Questions with Teaching Notes

A. Reiterate each step of the needs assessment process and identify if and where in the case each was attempted by the trainer. Were any steps missing?

Ellen has at least attempted each of the three needs assessment tasks, including organizational analysis, task analysis and person/learner analysis, as outlined in the section titled “The Trainer’s Efforts So Far.” Some of these analyses were not as effective as they could have been; see answers below for specific analyses.

B. Were all the needs assessment steps executed correctly or effectively by the trainer? Were appropriate sources and methods for needs assessment used? Explain.

Of all the steps, the organizational analysis seems to be most short-circuited and lacking. Garnering this type of information (manager commitment and support, resources, transfer climate, etc.) may not be that difficult, especially since Pedro doesn’t need Ellen’s final needs assessment report until next quarter’s staff meeting.

Ellen has identified and acquired some useful person/learner analysis information from the accounting department recruiter. It will be important to consider the alleged wide range of accounting and computer background skills of new analysts—if a training intervention is developed, should it be required by all new accounting hires or just those who don’t have certain prerequisite skills? This will be a critical design and development consideration. It also will be important that Ellen coordinates any training intervention that might be developed with the firm’s new employee orientation program.

While the source of Ellen’s task analysis process may be questionable, the task matrix is a decent start to conduct a task/job analysis. For comments on each part of the needs assessment process and how Ellen could have improved on each, please see the answer to question C.

In terms of sources, Ellen has involved the accounting recruiter, a couple of accounting supervisors (who sit next to her) and senior accounting analysts she knows. This is likely deficient—how about including prospective trainees (new analysts), other accounting supervisors, stellar accounting analysts and other HR personnel and senior managers who are familiar with the accounting department? Cross-validating findings will be useful for determining whether this alleged performance deficit requires any training intervention.

In terms of methods, Ellen has used face-to-face interviews, surveys and archival information. However, Ellen should include both closed and open-ended

questions to obtain data that can be manipulated quantitatively but that is also rich information that can be analyzed for recurring themes.

C. What would you have done differently, if anything, in conducting the needs assessment? Explain your answer.

Here are some weaknesses in Ellen’s approach to each step in the needs assessment that students might mention:

Organizational Analysis

- Assuming that Pedro’s notes accurately and totally reflect Jill Styles’ comments in the meeting and her overall concerns about the situation is probably not a good idea.
- Interviewing only accounting managers who sit next to Jill will likely bias the results.
- The accounting managers are unlikely to disagree in a face-to-face interview with their boss’ public comments about the new accounting hires (especially in a highly political culture). An anonymous survey of all accounting managers might have been better, including both closed and open-ended questions.
- Ellen should step back and think about how the organization’s hiring and recruiting strategy contributes to the potential performance issues. Because the company hires students of all majors and backgrounds, the new hires (or at least some of them) in accounting may understandably be deficient in accounting-specific skills and concepts and accounting-relevant software.
- Research the available resources and top management support for training at DCA as well as how supportive the transfer climate is at work.

Person/Learner Analysis

- Ellen relied mainly on archival information for person/learner analysis (job description; demographic information). She should also consider interviewing new accounting analysts and learn what they feel (e.g., how prepared they feel to execute all job duties) and if their observations cross-validate others’ feelings.
- Ellen should also interview stellar or exemplar accounting analysts to ensure that the job description provided by the recruiter is accurate and current and also get their input about training needed for new hires. Stellar accounting analysts (with varying years of seniority) will likely have valuable insights to share, and Ellen will want to consider their feedback.
- Ellen should try to determine whether those hires with non-accounting majors and minimal education background in computer skills and accounting are the employees who take the longest to “hit the grounding running” at DCA. Ellen may need Pedro to help her gather this type of current performance information (which is typically confidential).
- Overall, having more people as sources of information is helpful to the extent it would be feasible, such as exemplar accounting analysts, other supervisors, the

prospective trainees themselves, other HR personnel and senior managers familiar with the accounting department.

Task Analysis

- Ellen should have done more research on needs assessment in general, since her finance major probably didn't prepare her well for her training role at DCA.
- Not evaluating the source of information on the Internet is a problem; was the information she read valid, written by a credible source, etc.?
- The task matrix that Ellen has devised is a decent start on this part of needs assessment. Listing the essential job tasks in the matrix is necessary (assuming the job description is current and accurate). The criteria of importance of the task, frequency of the task and difficulty of the task are all relevant to task analysis. The grid could also include a column to indicate whether training is the preferred solution and an explanation why.
- Only surveying senior analysts Ellen knows will produce deficient analyses. Also, seniority is not necessarily correlated with performance, so interviewing stellar accounting analysts of varying seniority levels might be a better approach.
- Ellen should probably not assume there even needs to be a new accounting hire training program at this point (as stated in the case). She should also not assume that only frequent tasks would be included in a training program; if a skill is important even though infrequent, a job aid or training may be needed.

Activity 3 – Proposing a Needs Assessment Plan

Objectives: Students will create a needs assessment plan describing the specific assessment process and methods they will use to collect the necessary data.

Location: Section 3 of module.

Method: In-class application exercise.

Estimated Time to Allot: 20 minutes.

Directions: Using a current performance issue in your organization or workplace, create a needs assessment plan that describes the specific assessment process and methods you will use to collect necessary needs assessment data.

Student responses to this activity will vary depending on the performance issue they identify, the nature of the organization under study and the background (experience, level) of students in the class. Students should share their scenarios and proposed needs assessment process with the entire class so that others can learn from their example. If there is not time for each student to share his/her scenario and proposed process, have students share their information in smaller groups of 3-5 students and then ask for a couple examples to be shared with the entire class.

It is important that the instructor ensures students create a needs assessment plan that includes organization analysis, task/job analysis and person/learner analysis. To the extent feasible, students should also suggest multiple methods and sources from which to gather needs assessment data in order to cross-validate their findings. Multiple methods help triangulate findings and offset the limitations of other methods. Also, by limiting data collection to a few sources, the trainer will lack insights from others who might provide further insights and explanations into the performance issue at hand.

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