

An Empirical Study on Assessing Trainees' Expectations and Their Perceptions

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Abstract

Today, training has become a common activity in all enterprises in order to enrich four important components of their business environment such as technology, quality improvement, product development and customer satisfaction. The most important goal of the training is to inculcate the essential skills, which are required for employees to improve the productivity and thereby enhancing the awareness levels of the employees. At the end, the entire program is being measured in terms of the responses from the trainees who underwent the training. The responses from the trainees have to be measured in relation to their expectations and perceptions. The present paper discusses the use of SERVQUAL model to measure the trainees' expectations and their perceptions towards various dimensions of the training. The important core dimensions were: Personality, Business, Managerial Skills and Entrepreneurial Competencies. Aspects of the training had been compressed into these four dimensions using factor analysis. The questionnaire method was administered and the collected data were analyzed with the help of appropriate statistical tools.

Keywords: Servqual Model, Trainees Expectations, Trainees Perceptions

1. Introduction

Development of an organization is necessarily based on innovative labor force, technology, quality management, and customer satisfaction. Among the above factors, innovative labor force can be created only by the activities of training and development in the organization. Therefore, training program is the most powerful activity of HRD for employee empowerment and improving overall effectiveness of an organization. Among many organizational interventions, training program is most powerful activity (Guzzo, Jette and Katzell (1985). Today, the HRD is being properly aligned with processes, strategies and overall organizational system. Training is one of the important roles of HRD. In the recent trends, the training has phenomenal growth and used for many purposes such as creating professional relations among individuals, profit maximization through loss minimization, rectifying deficiencies of the employees etc. There is a wide ranging and largely unresolved debate regarding precise contribution of formal and informal training activities to the overall performance of the organization (Campbell, 1999; Johnson, et al, 2000).

Developmental activities have to be done systematically and organically. This means that training has to cover the most important issues and context in relation to the training needs. Training needs could be understood

through collection of feedback from the employees. Training evaluation has been used to find the effectiveness of the program in terms of analyzing training inputs and outcome from the training program. It is also helping the evaluators to decide about supplementary programs, if needed. The ultimate aim of any training program is to fulfill its objectives after intervention. A learning experience that seeks a relatively permanent change in individuals will improve their ability to perform on the job (Decenzo and P Robbins, 2002). Training evaluation makes the best judgment about value of the training program. Therefore, any training has three important activities. They are: identifying the areas needing change, planning and implementing the program and evaluating the program. Some of the expected economic and technological changes expected in the year 2000 are increase in the rate of skill obsolescence requiring more retraining; a trend towards more technologically sophisticated systems requiring more complex cognitive skills; a shift from manufacturing to service industries requiring more interpersonal skills; and more effective cross cultural skills (Goldstein and Gilliams –1990). Therefore, it has been proved that the training is a part of performance management, which improves the standard of the employees in an organization. It may be tailor-made or set for the training needs. However, it is ultimately used to inculcate the critical skills for the trainees of an organization.

In the present study, the researcher had taken up the case of trainees, who underwent training for sharpening and enhancing their knowledge/skills in the respected industries. There were four different groups of trainees who underwent the program. The training was a typical tailor made program. The common capsule was given to all types of trainees. Major aspects of the training for the study were: Personality, Business, Managerial Skills and Entrepreneurial Competencies. All the aspects in the training were compressed into the above four parameters, with the help of factor analysis. These four factors are expected to present in the program and these were treated as service quality of the training.

Personality • Self Confidence • Decision Making • Entrepreneurial Qualities • Social Interaction • Broad Vision • Achievement Orientation • Innovativeness	Business • Learning about Business • Practical Knowledge • Awareness on Business • Making appropriate Referrals • Project Formulation • Knowing pros and cons in Business • Selection of right Business
Managerial Skills • Decision Making Power • Capability to administrate the works • Managing Customers • Managing human resources • Ability to motivate the employees • Time Management • Crisis Management	Entrepreneurial Competencies • Mobilization of Resources • Accepting the Changes • Information Seeking Behavior • Commitment to Work Hard • Understanding the Technical Aspects

2. Literature Survey

The researcher has reviewed some of the empirical studies which are directly or indirectly related to the present study. Kirkpatrick (1959) provided four levels of criteria for evaluating a training program. They are: reaction, learning, behavior and results. Russel et. Al (1985) examined the relationship between the use of a corporate designed training program in basic sales procedures and corresponding store level results criteria (i.e. sales volume per employee and store image as evaluated by employees). Wagner and Roland (1992) used the third level of Kirkpatrick model to measure behavioral changes among the employees. Three approaches were used for measurement of behavioral changes (i) Questionnaire completion by the participants before and after the training (ii) Supervisory reports completed on the functioning of work groups before and after the training and (iii) Interview with managers. The result of the measurement was that there were no significant changes in the behavior among the employees. Grenough and Dixon (1982) suggested that measurement should identify what results the training should provide, what results have occurred, how present results are worthwhile, and how results will be used. Barrett and Connell (1998) had conducted a research to estimate the returns from in-company training. They have differentiated between general and specific training. In their final results, they had found that the general training has increased productivity but the specific training has no such effects. They had concluded that there might be a problem of matching new skills with old processes. Meyer and Raich (1983) compared the sales performance of behavioral-modeling-trained versus

non-behavioral-modeling-non-trained groups. They compared sales commissions per hour (before training and after training) of seven stores incorporating a new behavior modeling training approach to that of seven control group stores that received on - going and non-behavioral modeling training programs. Mathieu, Tannenbaum, and Salas (1992) found that the best performance was produced when trainees were motivated to learn and reacted positively to the training. Miller and Friesen (1980) suggest that training employees in skills related to adaptation may help in making the changes functional.

Mathieu et al (1992) found that if the reaction was positive then the trainees' were highly motivated. Gist (1988) found that older trainees (over 45 years) had significantly lower performance than younger trainees. Martocchio (1992) looked at the impact of the context of training had on trainees' performance. Gist (1988) found that participants trained by behavioral modeling method significantly outperformed trainees in the training condition. Bretz and Thompsell (1992) found that participants showed positive reaction for learning based training (LT) than lecture-based training (IL). Ganster, Williams, and Poppler (1991) focused on training to improve an individual's effective use of task knowledge. Burke and Day (1986) found that lecture/discussion/role play was very likely to generalize across situations using objective learning criteria. Russell et al (1984) compared a behavioral modeling trained group to a group trained without modeling films. They found that the behavior modeling trained group had more positive reactions to training and superior cognitive learning, but found no significant difference in on the job behavior. Moon-Hariton conducted a study at the engineering section of GE Company. Two years after the adoption of the training program, it was measured. The questionnaire was prepared and circulated among employees for their feedback.

3. Trainees' Expectations and Trainees' Perceptions

The purpose of the paper is to assess the trainees' expectations and their perceptions. It examines trainees' expectations before the training and their perceptions after the transfer of knowledge. Transfer of knowledge means the interactions among the trainer and the trainees and the content and method, during the training process. Perception means what the trainees basically feel/perceive about the training contents, methodology, and trainers' competencies. Perceptions of trainees are formed based on the above said training activities. The responses from the trainees are related to the various factors of four parameters - Personality, Business, Managerial Skills and Entrepreneurial Competencies. The main goal of this work was to measure the trainees' expectations and their perceptions towards dimensions of the training. The SERQUAL method was applied to find the difference between these two parameters. The SERQUAL model was accepted as a good predictor of overall service quality (Babakus and Boller, 1992; Bolton and Drew, 1991; Brown and Swartz, 1989; Carmen, 1990; Parasuraman et al, 1991). The SERQUAL Scores on all dimensions of service quality were measured by the difference between the customers' expectations and perceptions (or) the customers' perceptions and expectations (Sachdev and Verma, 2004).

4. Research Methodology

The primary aim of this study was to examine the impact of training in terms of analyzing trainees' expectations and their perceptions. The researcher had employed descriptive research design to find the association between the variables. The participants who took training were considered for the analysis. The total population of the study was about 159. After rejecting some of the invalid responses, the total responses were exactly 122. The responses were classified based on the trainees' fields such as Group I: Automobiles-27 respondents, Group II: chemicals – 33 respondents, Group III: Textiles – 52 respondents, and Group IV: Electronics – 10 respondents. These respondents who had already availed the training program and responded after a year i.e the delayed questionnaire method (One year after the training) was administered to collect the data from all participants. The comprehensive questionnaire has got both direct and indirect types of questions. The researcher employed survey method in which mail interview was undertaken. The questionnaire was administered after inclusion of all possible questions and were tested them thoroughly. Both closed and open-ended questions were used in order to test the trainees on their expectations and perceptions.

5. Statistical Applications

A set of statistical tools is being employed according to the relevance of information required for the study. The one-way analysis of variance is applied when the experimental variables are in interval scale and the numbers of samples are in more than two groups. In order to find out significant difference among from group of trainees regarding various dimensions, the F statistics has been calculated through ANOVA.

F ratio = Variance between groups/Variance within groups is calculated and compared with the respective table value of F.

Multiple regression is applied to analyze the impact of more than one independent variable on dependent variable. The multivariate statistical technique of factor analysis has wide applications in various social researches. Factor analysis has been applied to narrate the variables related to a particular object into a smaller set of new composite dimension with a minimum loss of information.

6. Analysis and Findings

According to SERQUAL applications, that is, in the case 1, the positive SERQUAL scores indicate that the customers perception are lesser than their expectations whereas in the case 2 the positive SERQUAL scores indicate that the customers perception are more than their expectations. In the present study the first formula had been applied to calculate the SERQUAL scores from various dimensions such as Personality, Managerial Skills, Entrepreneurial Competencies and Business of the training program among the trainees together.

The resulting SERQUAL scores (Refer Annexure I) show that all dimensions of the training program are positive which indicate that the trainees' perceptions are not up to the expected level in each dimension of the training. The SERQUAL score is identified as higher of 0.3967 in the case of Managerial Skills aspect of the training followed by the Entrepreneurial Competencies dimension of the training with the SERQUAL score of 0.3241. The mean overall trainees' perception is 3.0064 whereas their mean of expectation is 3.3024. In total, the SERQUAL score is 0.2960 which also indicates the lesser perception compared to expectation on various aspects of the training.

The SERQUAL scores on four different dimensions of the training may be different among the trainees, who are classified on the basis of profile variables such as Sex, Age, Education, Occupation, Family Size, Family Income, and Personality traits etc. The one-way analysis was administered to see the association between profile variables and the SERQUAL scores on personality, business, Managerial Skills and Entrepreneurial Competencies (Refer Annexure II). The resulting F statistics is calculated at 5 percent significant level. With respect to the SERQUAL score on Personality dimension of the training, the significant difference among the trainees is identified when they are classified on the basis of Age, and Personality traits since the respective F statistics are significant at 5% level. The significant differences identified for Business aspect are: Age, Type of Industry, Education, Material Possession, and Personality traits. The significant differences identified for Managerial Skills aspect are: Type of Industry, Education, Material Possession and Personality traits. The significant difference identified for Entrepreneurial Competencies is Material Possession and Personality traits. The highly associated profile variable with the SERQUAL scores on all four dimensions of the training is Personality traits of the trainees.

As explained, the dimensions of the training are compressed into personality, business, managerial skills and entrepreneurial competencies with the help of factor analysis. The SERQUAL score on the above said four dimensions of the training may also influence the perception on the business performance among the trainees. The multiple regression analysis was carried out to analyze the above effects (Refer Annexure III).

The fitted regression model is:

$$Y = a + b_1 X_1 + b_2 X_2 + b_3 X_3 + b_4 X_4 + e$$

Y = Business Performance Index of the trainees

X₁ = SERQUAL Score in Personality

X₂ = SERQUAL Score in Business

X₃ = SERQUAL Score in Managerial Skills

X₄ = SERQUAL Score in Entrepreneurial Competencies

b₁, b₂, b₃, b₄ = Regression Coefficients of the independent variables

a = Intercept, e = Error Terms.

The analysis was applied to analyze the impact of SERQUAL score in four dimensions of the training on the perception on the business performance among groups of trainees and also for pooled data. The resulting regression coefficients indicate that the significantly influencing SERQUAL scores among the type I group trainees on the perception on business performance is Entrepreneurial competencies whereas among type II group trainees are personality and business. Among type III group trainees, significantly influencing SERQUAL scores are on personality and business whereas among type IV group trainees, this is SERQUAL score on personality. The changes in SERQUAL scores on all four dimensions indicate the changes in the perception on

the business performance to the extent of 78.87 %. The significant F statistics confirm the viability of fitted regression models.

7. Measures

From the above analysis, the researcher found that all dimensions of the training program are positive which means trainees' perceptions are not up to their expected level in each dimension of the training. Therefore, it is confirmed that training has to concentrate on all dimensions with equal weightage. And, the training must be made according to the requirements only, that is, after making complete analysis on specific training needs. The conclusion for the study may be made that the strength of each dimension of the training may be appropriately enhanced to rectify the issue of differences between trainees' expectations and their perceptions.

8. Scope for the Future Research

According to this present research, the specific research could be done in measuring trainees' expectations and their perceptions on trainers' competencies and training methodology. This could help the researcher to understand the differences between trainees' expectations and their perceptions on inputs of the training program. According to the result, the training needs could be altered which is basically needed by the trainees. This practice would meet the expectations of the trainees and final result will show that perceptions of the trainees will be more positive.

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Annexure I. SERQUAL scores on various dimensions in the training

Sl.No	Dimensions	Mean Score		
		Trainees Expectations	Trainees Perceptions	SERQUAL Score(s)
1	Personality	3.2336	2.9135	0.3201
2	Business	3.2827	3.0809	0.2018
3	Managerial Skills	3.6976	3.3009	0.3967
4	Entrepreneurial Competencies	3.0452	2.7211	0.3241
Overall		3.3024	3.0064	0.2960

Annexure II. Association between the profile of trainees and their SERQUAL Scores

Sl.No	Profile	F-Statistics			
		Personality	Business	Managerial Skills	Entrepreneurial Competencies
1	Sex	2.0091	1.8617	2.2169	2.8341
2	Type of Industry	1.2341	3.8121*	2.9041*	1.0946
3	Age	3.0621*	2.8132*	1.2460	2.0621
4	Education	2.1344	3.0239*	2.9609*	1.8617
5	Family Income	2.0132	2.0132	1.4134	1.3791
6	Material Possession	1.3371	2.6972*	2.9031*	3.1236*
7	Personality Traits	3.8112*	2.9617*	2.7081*	2.6572*

Annexure III. Impact of SERQUAL scores of the training on the view on business performance

Sl.No	SERQUAL Scores on	Regression Coefficients				
		Group I	Group II	Group III	Group IV	Pooled
1	Personality	-0.1037	-.02162*	-0.2963*	-0.1716*	-0.1828*
2	Business	-0.0629	-0.1314	-0.1708*	-0.0414	-0.1013
3	Managerial Skills	-0.1124	-0.2091*	-0.0917	-0.0936	-0.1331*
4	Entrepreneurial Competencies	-0.2633*	-0.0678	-0.1121	-0.1061	-0.1981
	Constant	0.9068	1.3464	0.9736	-1.1232	0.8616
	R ²	0.6134	0.6194	0.7232	0.5931	0.7882
	F-Statistics	8.3032*	8.6067*	9.8689*	7.3032*	10.3696*