PROCESS IMPROVISATION TO ELIMINATE THE PERENNIAL CONCERN OF LAG BETWEEN TRAINING IDENTIFICATION AND TRAINING DEPLOYMENT THUS MAKING TRAININGS PROACTIVE RATHER BEING REACTIVE

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Abstract

Organizations across the globe vest enormous efforts on their human capital which is the assets in the current knowledge economy and the information age. The impetus is to facilitate superior performance of employees which translates to greater value creation for its customers, stakeholders, organization itself & employees. This is achieved with recurring and consistent investment for the capability building of its employees. Human Resource strategy & processes should be designed to help organizations to achieve it.

However the critical success factor for organizational capability building is to respond to its business needs through various learning and development interventions. But in reality there exists a lag between the learning cycle and the business cycle which creates a disparity between training need identification and organizations ability to address the training needs. This has however remained as a perennial concern faced by organizations from the sectors such as Energy, Material, Industrial, Automotive, Manufacturing, Health care, Information Technology, Tele-communications and Utilities.

This paper focuses on addressing this perennial concern though a process which enables organizations to make their training deployment to be proactive rather than being reactive hence eliminating a lag between the business cycle and learning cycle. This field has attracted significant interest from organizations across geography and sectors. Interaction of the author with various organizations in pursuit for a process to achieve desired objective has been captured. In this paper a practical process model is illustrated which is scalable & adaptable which increases its ability to be adopted and implemented at other organizations. The process proposed has been implemented and the outcomes (both qualitative & quantitative) has been recorded which gives a lot of credibility to the proposed model and proves its ability to add value to organizations.

Keywords: Proactive Learning, Human Resource Strategy, Process Improvisation, Learning Strategy, Learning & Development, Capability Building, Organisation effectiveness

1. Introduction

An organization invests substantially to the development of their human capital with the intent to generate greater value for the organization. The focus of Human Resource function is to ensure employee's capability building plan is in line with organizational growth plan. To achieve the capability development plan an organization has multiple avenues to be deployed to employees, but the challenge is agility assuming the content quality is taken is ascertained.

Business & strategic plan is the first plan an organization does at their defined frequency (which in most cases would be anywhere from 1 year to 5 years) and based on this other business priorities are aligned namely the budget planning, manpower resource planning, investment planning, capability building plan, operational plan and so on. In most pragmatic condition, by the time learning plan is devised a lot of time is lapsed by then.

The focus of this paper is to propose a model and an approach to help learning plan align with business plan and remove the lag between these two plans which in current state is a perennial problem most organizations suffer from. Also the model is applied to a Fortune 250 organization as a validation of the claims.

The single most unique proposition and exposition of this paper is its connect with application and provides a working overview of executing it across organizations.

2. Understanding the perennial problem

Organizations have their own plan to conduct training need identification. Few do it along with the performance discussion; few do it during goal planning exercise while others do it separately. The concern is not how the training needs identification is done but how its outcome is used and training intervention is deployed. On studying various organizations from Energy, Material, Industrial, Automotive, Manufacturing, Health care, Information Technology, Telecommunications and Utilities it takes anywhere between 1 to 3 months in a calendar year to conduct the training need identification. During this time, employees do not have any visibility to their learning plan.

In order to make training need identification exercise actionable they need to analyze the data and come up with a training schedule for employees. For organizations for various organizations across sectors this may take anywhere between 0.5 to 1.5 months.

In a nutshell from the time training need identification exercise commences till the time employees can actually go through training modules, it may take anywhere between 1.5 to 4.5 months depending upon the size & complexity of the organization. Refer the Figure-1 for illustration.

This makes traditional training process in organizations reactive in nature as they respond with a delay on temporal scale to deploy trainings which have been required by employees with a substantial delay.

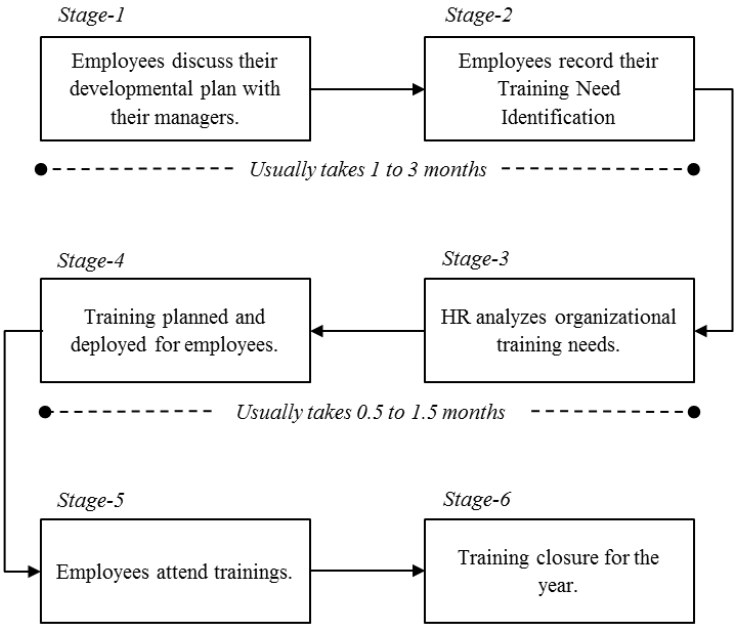

Figure-1

3. Implication of this lag on employees & organization

The supra mentioned lag between the identification and deployment of training ends up impacting an organization in more ways than one. With a detailed study on its implication to organizational success these are the dominant ones:

- Employees have fewer months in a year to go through their intended trainings; as during the lag time the number of intended & focused training is lesser. With lesser trainings to be offered in the lag period it leads to a break in the momentum of the learning rhythm for employees.

- Business proceeds to its intended plan but employees have to wait till the time their intended trainings get deployed. This creates a disharmony between business expectation and trainings delivered.

- Owing to lesser time available to employees, the tendency to go through trainings at the later part of the year is much higher, leaving employees with lesser time to apply those learning. Ability to infuse productive learning methodologies is greatly restricted with this.

- Learning & Development teams of Human Resource function faces challenge of spending higher time on tactical challenges rather than on creating contemporary learning opportunities.

- Organizations who have metrics such as trainings hours/days or number of trainings completed in a year, exerts more pressure on employees as they are pushed towards meeting those matrices in shorter time frame. Refer Figure-1, Stage-5 & 6.

- Ability of an employee to plan their training (or for that matter their learning plan) is reduced as they don't know by when the trainings will be planned & deployed.

4. The proposed model

In the proposed model in order to avoid and negate the gap, the entire process of training identification and planning is preponed before the start of the training year; refer Figure-2 for reference. However being cognizant of the fact as by then the identification of trainings by employees don't even start, hence the author proposes to rely heavily on data analysis and engaging with business stakeholders in advance.

The proposed model works for an organization which is established and its business model does not seem to be changing radically and focus to a different sector. Till the time we operate under this premise the model holds good and helps remove the lag and make training availability right at the starting of the learning year, thus making it proactive rather than being reactive.

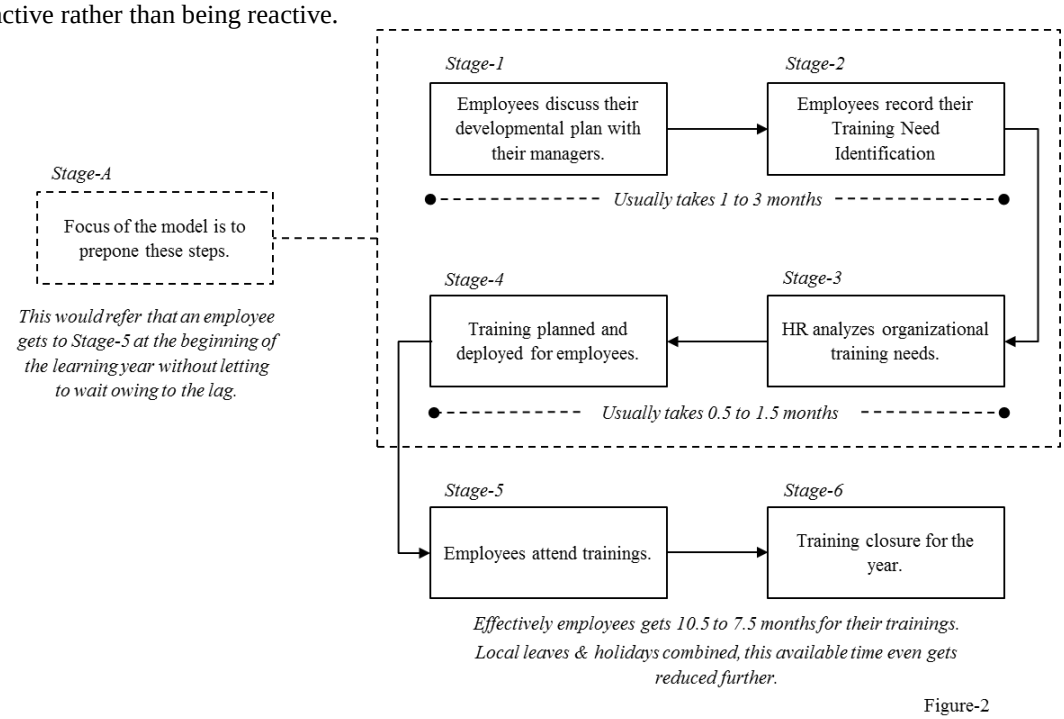

Figure-2

In accomplish Stage-A (refer Figure-2) the team needs to have few preparation to be done. Breaking the requirement into two parts namely- quantitative & qualitative data points.

- Quantitative data
  - Training records for each employee for last 2 years.
  - The above data is required for the entire organization.
  - Individual development plan for last 1year.

- Qualitative data
  - Council of business leaders to vet the trainings requirements for future.
  - Cross Functional Team from various business groups or departments to validate the data.

Figure-3 elaborates the functioning of Stage-A of Figure-2.

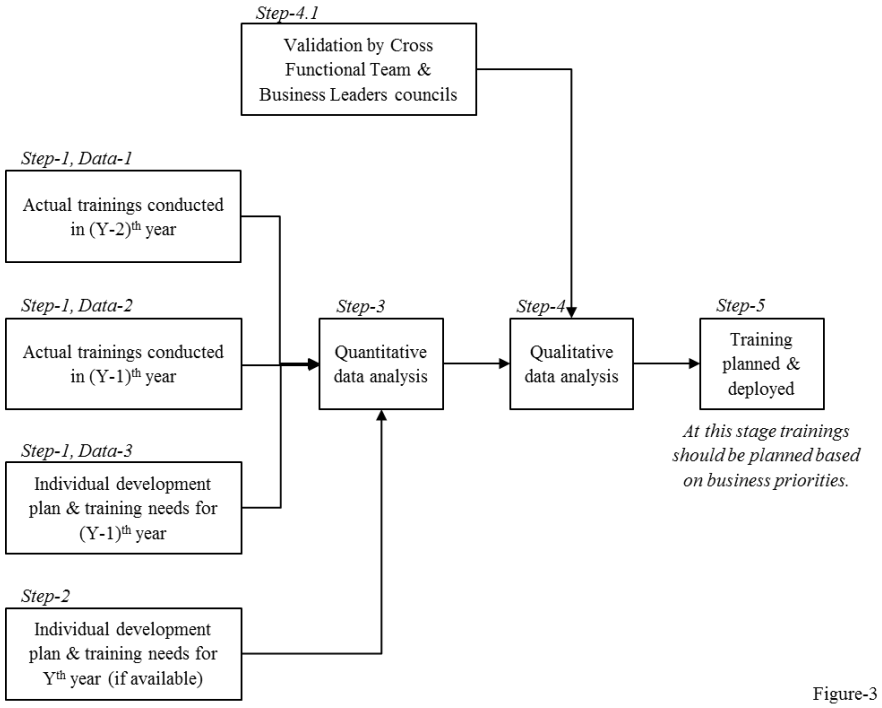

Figure-3

Illustration & working principal of Figure-3 is as under:

- *Step-1*: Data analysis of past trainings conducted and individual development plan for employees need to be analyzed.
  - *Data-1*: this data contains the actual trainings which have happened across the organization in the $(Y-2)^{th}$ and the data for which needs to be mapped against each employee. Data spread should bare minimum have list of employees, the trainings they have undertaken & other details which the respective Human Resource professional deem necessary to be considered.
  - *Data-2*: this is same as Data-1 but for the $(Y-1)^{th}$ year.
  - *Data-3*: for the (Y-1)th year, what were the development plan or unique training needs which have been identified should be recorded against each employees.

- *Step-2*: if organization have started the exercise of identifying individual development plan or training need identification for the focus year i.e. Y^{th} year then it should be considered for analysis.

- *Step-3*: At this stage a detailed data analysis needs to be done, to go about it the premise of operation is, if the organization is established and its business model does not look to be changing radically, then the trainings which employees have gone through last 2 years and their training wants for the last year will not change drastically in the coming year. Hence at this stage, organizations should identify their minimum

criteria to organize trainings and then analyze the data to arrive at the universal set of the three data sets (i.e. *Data-1 to 3*).

- *Step-4*: at this step the output of *Step-3* is to be analyzed for its qualitative elements. *Step-4.1* would speak about how to do it.

- *Step-4.1*: the output of *Step-3* needs to be discussed in the cross functional team from various stake holders from business as they will bring about specific inputs in terms the analysis done. However once the discussion with the Cross Functional Team is done, then the processed data should be reviewed by the Council of various Business Leaders to bring about the prioritization based on strategic alignment to business. This stage is critical in vetting the quantitatively analyzed and curated data.

- *Step-5*: once all the above stages are completed, it is then the responsibility of the Human Resource function to work closely with the respective stake holders to plan the identified trainings across the year. This should be done to drive the organizational training regime.

5. Application of the model- an application based approach

The above mentioned model has been applied to one of the entity with over 1200 engineers. The challenge faced by the organization was multifold:

- The lag between training need identification and deployment of training.
- Employees not having visibility to trainings till late in the training year, hence facing the concerns as mentioned earlier owing to the lag.
- Employees attending trainings were skewed towards the latter part of the training year.
- Inability to inculcate the productive learning capability.

Hence ask of the organization were as under:

- Make training plan available to employees at the starting of the year, hence make the learning process proactive rather being reactive.
- Rationalize the training offering schedule to maintain a constant momentum of training throughout the year while reversing the slope of training offered.

5.1. Case details

Referring to the model in Figure-3, the details were:

- Year of focus (i.e. Y) = 2015
- $(Y-1)^{th}$ year = 2014
- $(Y-2)^{th}$ year = 2013
- Lag in training development and deployment = 3-4 months
- $(Y-1)^{th}$ year data spread = 5700+ unique data points
- $(Y-2)^{th}$ year data spread = 3000+ unique data points
- $(Y-1)^{th}$ year development plan or training requirement = 1800+ data points for the organization

5.2. Past state of trainings in the organization

To validate the construct, historical data on trainings conducted across the year in 2013 & 2014 was collected and analyzed. The data consisting of employees attending training was plotted on a temporal scale (across months) the linear trend line was plotted across. The plot as expected was upward moving indicating towards the perennial problem. Trend line for number of employees attending training on a temporal scale in 2013 (Figure-4).

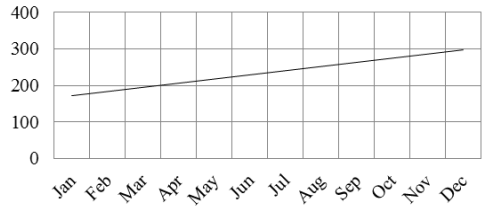

Figure-4

Trend line for number of employees attending training on a temporal scale in 2014 (Figure-5).

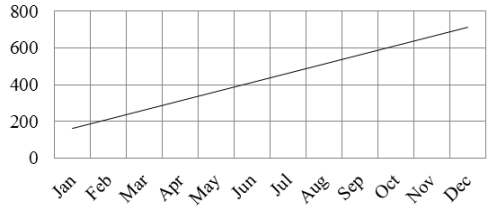

Figure-5

For both the years, there has not been a fixed time when the training plan was shared with employees; however the planning and launch of training have been ad hoc with visibility to only 1 month's plan.

5.3. Proposed model applied in 2015

The model proposed in this paper has been applied to validate the hypothesis in the 2015 in the target organization and the data was measure over temporal scale. The linear plot of the average of trainings attended by employees across a temporal scale as seen in January 2016 is as under (Figure-6):

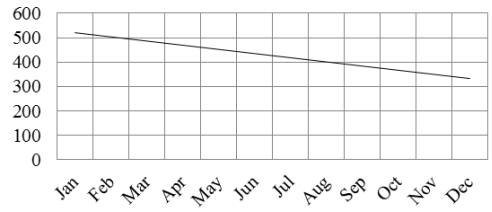

Figure-6

The inversion of the liner trend line is an affirmation towards the hypothesis made in the proposed model. The realized benefits of the model are:

- Training required for 2015 was launched in 1st week of January 2015 leading to proactive training deployment & eliminating the lag. Employees could plan their trainings in alignment to their business requirement at the beginning of the year.

- Drove participation of trainers to take up training assignments as the advance planning gave them time in their hands to prepare for trainings assignments. This also led to increase in training effectiveness. Learning catalog launched for the first time as a one point stop for all training needs for the organization.

- Trend line of number of employees attending training is turned in the desirable state (desirable state is a downward trend line).

- Load towards end of the year is eased out and the trend line reversed- allowing more time for application of the training. (refer hashed zone in Figure-7 below).

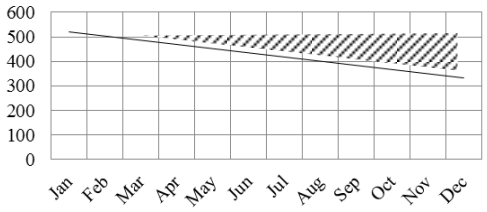

Figure-7

- The philosophy of learning followed in the organization is of 70-20-10 (Lombardo et al) and hence with the application of this model it provides time in the hands of employees to apply (70&20 of 70-20-10 philosophy) of what they have trained into (10 of 70-20-10 philosophy).
- Training team effort reduced drastically as entire tactical requirement of ad-hoc planning and deployment of training has been done in advance (in this case by 5th January of 2015) and the team had more time in hand to focus on newer requirements and continuous improvement initiatives.

- Enabled learning plan to be in sync with the business plan and created a conducive environment for productive learning in the organization.

6. Summary & further points

Author is convinced with the construct proposed in the model and also the application of the same to realize tangible and substantial business value creation. This model is practical, reliable & sustainable. Other prominent points on this model are as under:

- The idle curve of the training trend line is a straight line dipping on a temporal scale, however a higher degree curve would best define the desired curve but for the ease of application and implementation, a straight line should be used.

- The model operates on the construct that training effectiveness is at-par to the organizational standard but this model has the potential to even improve the effectiveness of the application of trainings.

- Format of training enables this model greatly, such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) and virtual learning classes in the format of Web Based Trainings (EBT) and Virtual Instructor Led Training (V-ILT) enables anytime anywhere learning, hence providing the flexibility to the hands of employees who can plan their learning hence enabling this model to eliminate the perennial problem of lag.

- This model relies heavily on data analysis hence organizations which are institutionalized recently can either draw data from their related parent organization or rely on alternate source of data through benchmarking.

- The inclusion of this model is typically for organizations that have been in existence for 3 year or more and do not intend to radically change the mix of its business. For organizations going through a merger or acquisition can also use this model to garner the benefits.

- This model may be of minimal use for startups who have been institutionalized recently, however once these startups stabilize the proposed model can be put to use.

- Value realization of this model is 1 year; however it can be modified to suit business cycles of less than a year too, but with proper consideration.

- This model learns from itself based on how the data analysis logarithm is prepared. In this specific application, the efforts placed in 2016 are much lesser than 2015 which was the first year of its application.

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