A Brief Analysis of the Significance of Continuous Workforce Development

Wang Jiajing

School of International Education, Ningxia University, Yinchuan 750021, China

ABSTRACT. *The technological cycle accelerates, business model changes and nature of work evolves. Under such circumstance much more rigorous requirements and standards are proposed to employees and organizations. Only by updating and acquiring core knowledge and skills by continuous development can organization keep pace with the latest market trends and operate for a long time in fierce competitive market. This essay aims to explain the significance of being a learning organization and continuous workforce development. Strategies that organization can adopt to develop employees and responsibilities of different people when develop employees are also detailed.*

KEYWORDS: *Significance; Continuous Workforce Development; Strategy*

1. Definition and evidence of learning organization.

Learning organization is organic, humanistic and sustainable development organization that creates learning atmosphere consistently to nurture, exert and expand employees' creative and innovative thinking and capabilities in order to achieve organizational desired objectives and goals. In learning organizations, employees are inspired to make commitments to organization and work hard to achieve shared organizational vision and goals. People who learn consistently can get a good command of the most updated knowledge and skills which help enhance their productivity and efficiency. More products with higher quality and more excellent service are available to customers. This helps organization earn customer loyalty and customer retention thereafter more profits and market shares can be generated. Besides, their innovative and critical thinking can be nurtured or strengthened which plays an increasingly important role in problem-solving and trouble-handling. The organization will have less internal and external problems to solve.

Learning organization facilitates working environment to be harmonious. Learning organization set free people's collaborative aspiration, which will result in the improvement of organization cohesion. Self-interest is less significant compared with organizational goals. People tend to cooperate with others to accomplish tasks

and achieve common goals. Generally, the collective power can gain unexpected outcomes that are far more satisfactory and outstanding than individual's efforts, which in turn will motivate people to work together further. Fewer conflicts among colleagues will facilitate operational process. A harmonious and pleasant working environment in learning organization is more likely to retain employees and thus expenditures caused by recruitment and training new staff because of the turnover of some people can be reduced.

Learning organization can improve organizational competence. In the era of knowledge and economy, the ability to acquire knowledge and apply them into practice determines whether organizational core competence is weak or strong. Learning organization expands the depth and breadth of information exchange with outside world to attain update knowledge and advanced technologies. This enables it to make fast responses to changeable environment and survive for a long period of time.

2. Definition of continuous workforce development

Continuous workforce development is a long-term and persistent learning processes in which employees are trained to develop a certain level of personal and professional knowledge, skills and attitudes continuously to enhance their tangible and intangible capabilities which can help them perform their job and adapt the changeable working environment well through various activities contained in the process. Continuous workforce development is also considered as a set of solutions to satisfy employment needs. It provides various flexible and high-quality training programs for employees to ensure adequate supply of qualified individuals who can meet organizational needs. It positively impacts organizational future success by changes to culture, attitudes and employees' potential.

3. Reasons for continually developing employees

3.1 To reduce training gaps

There are gaps between actual performance and expected performance as individuals do not have corresponding knowledge, skills or attitude to perform certain roles or functions in an organization. Continually developing employee provides learning opportunities for employees that make up their shortages by conveying knowledge and skills and help them meet or exceed expected position requirements and standards. Finally, the productivity and efficiency of employees can be enhanced. They can also make responses to changes quickly and it is much more flexible for them to find other jobs if they have to leave a company.

3.2 To improve work efficiency

Continuously developing employees is to let employees participate in organizational management process rather than merely accept tasks. Especially in team work, employees paly not a few roles with managerial characteristics. Utilizing new technologies to improve customer service and product quality is not enough. What they also need is communication, coordination, interaction and problem-solving capabilities. Training them how to use informational tools ensures work performance system operates efficiently.

3.3 To enhance employee loyalty and commitments

Human resource is valuable and immeasurable assets in an organization. Products can be duplicated sometimes but intelligence cannot be. Individual's potential is infinite and can be exerted largely under trainings. With the improvement of capabilities, staff can even responsible for more challengeable and risky tasks. If they complete these tasks well, they will feel a sense of self-actualization which is a kind of spiritual satisfaction and cannot be satisfied by material stimuli. Most of employees desire to show their value and achieve self-fulfillment in a position. Such achievements are more useful to stimulate staff to work hard and make commitments to organization as they satisfy employees' needs at the highest level. Employees' commitments to organization inspire them to work hard and pay more attention to the quality of products and service that is essential to earn more potential customers and retain more existing customers, namely to occupy more market shares and earn more profits.

4. Benefits to the organization of continuous workforce development

4.1 Reduce labor turnover

Employees are able to responsible for more challengeable and sophisticated working programs which can satisfy their self-actualization demands. They achieve their own goals as their self-worth is put to good use and leadership skills are being nurtured and valued. Besides, continuous development empowers employees to deal with problems independently. Employees who participate actively in the management process will gain a strong sense of belonging. Therefore, they are willing to work in the organization. In other words, organization earns employees' commitments and loyalty. Low turnover rate saves a large amount of money in severance and recruitment and training new one to do the job. More money will be available for advanced production line investment.

4.2 Enhanced employees' motivation

Employees with the shared organizational vision and goals are stimulated to

cooperate with others and work hard to achieve the shared organizational vision and goals. The more excellent performance, the better rewards and the more developing opportunities employees will get. The better rewards and the more developing chances, the more motivated employees are. This is a positive circulating. Besides, delegation makes employees to participate in managerial process in which they observe, analyze and improve the way they work. They will feel excited if they realize that they have positive influence on better outcomes. Employees with a high morale are more likely to make contributions for their organization. As a result, more sophisticated and overall more economically competitive products and services will be offered.

4.3 Fewer skills shortage

Continuous development updates and improves employees' knowledge and skills in many aspects to confront with unpredictable challenges. The inconformity between employees' actual skills and special requirements of certain position can be reduced. Organization has more qualified and capable staff to perform jobs and accomplish tasks well.

4.4 Stability within organization

In the process of continuous development, employees will have a better understanding of organizational mission and vision statement, culture, structure and other relative factors. This motivates staff to form the consistent world view, life view and value view with organization. High cultural recognition creates a harmonious working environment and working relationships within organization. Besides, fewer turnover rates mean less time and expenditure will be spent on recruitment, retraining and position adjustment. Last but not least, organization is more capable to confront with changeable and challengeable outside environment as a result of continuous development. The trouble-handling capabilities are improved, which is beneficial to the normal and stable organizational operation.

4.5 Flexibility within organization

It is possible for employees to be able to undertake different functions and hold different positions in organization through continuous development. For example, they can be trained to deal with the human resources issues as well as the financial issues. If someone has to leave organization because of some reasons, it is convenient for them to fulfill vacancies. They can gradually become multi-skill people who can handle sophisticated and troublesome problems. Meanwhile, it is simple for them to be promoted and find other jobs in elsewhere.

5. Principal strategies to develop employees

There are many motivation theories that will influence design of our training program. In 1959, Herzberg proposed two factors theory. He claimed that the feelings of satisfaction and dissatisfaction cannot be considered as opposites of one another since the factors causing satisfaction and dissatisfaction are totally different. He thought the opposite of satisfaction should be no satisfaction rather than dissatisfaction. Similarly, the opposite of dissatisfaction is no dissatisfaction instead of satisfaction. Satisfactory factors can lead to satisfaction and trigger motivation. Dissatisfactory factors refer to those trigger negative emotions and behaviors, namely hygiene factors. Hygiene factors are irrelative to work contents and work itself which include salaries, interpersonal relationships, working environment, organizational policies and management. They are all about work environment and work relationships. If these factors cannot be satisfied, employees will feel dissatisfied, unwilling to complete tasks or even strike. Employees' sense of dissatisfaction will be eliminated and previous work efficiency will be maintained if these factors are satisfied while it is difficult to let employees feel satisfaction and thus they cannot be motivated to carry out positive actions. Motivation factors are related to work contents and work itself that contain meanings and challenges of work, work responsibilities, appreciation, achievement, promotion and development. When these factors are satisfied, employees work enthusiasm will be stimulated to a large extent and work efficiency will be enhanced. However, though these factors cannot be satisfied, employees will not feel dissatisfied. The two factors are core determinants of employees' morale and performance.

Under this theoretic framework, the hygienic factors such as good work environment and high salaries should be fulfilled first, which can eliminate dissatisfaction of employees but cannot motivate them. If team leaders in this company want to motivate staff, they must provide motivation factors like allocating more challenging tasks to staff, implementing rotation system to increase job variety or delegating. When design training program, this motivational theory should be emphasized and how to use it into practice should be highlighted.

5.1 Professional training

Training can enhance employees' knowledge and skills directly and effectively. By identifying training needs and considering organizational current status, organization should adopt the most appropriate training methods. There are several common training methods. The most traditional one is teaching method that is training specialists convey knowledge verbally. Discussion method includes seminar which mainly takes form of lecture and team member discussion. Employees can also be trained through interesting games in which they compete with others to achieve expected objectives under certain game rules. The role play method can help employees understand work contents in depth and improve their problem-handling capabilities. Case study method is to require employees analyze and comment on complex cases and then to find out the solutions to problems. Other training methods

like work shift method, online training and work instruction methods can also be adopted. Organization tends to combine several training methods to achieve the optimum training outcomes.

5.2 Empower

A lot of managers spend much time on settling problems by themselves while actually these things are not necessary to be dealt with personally. Delegating responsibilities to employees can help them develop their capabilities faster. For instance, empower employees to take part in decision-making process and deal with sophisticated issues independently. Although it is difficult or maybe impossible for employees to do things as well as managers would do. There is every possibility that they fail initiatively and need additional instructions, employees do learn a lot in this process. They can do better and better and meanwhile managers are less involved in multifarious tasks. It is a win-win process. Stretch assignments which are considered as one of the best ways to develop and learn could also be allocated by managers to employees. Instead of selecting the most qualified employees for the assignment, what is more important is that managers should choose the accurate assignment for employees.

5.3 Develop emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence has been de-emphasized in corporate environment. However, emotional intelligence such as self-awareness, self-discipline, motivation, empathy and social skill are as significance as knowledge and skills required by particular jobs. Organization should bring in experts to teach employees how to develop emotional intelligence such as read body-language and carry on non-violent communication. Besides, organization can organize various team building activities to improve employees' social skills. Only when the organization is in harmony can employees feel ease and satisfied. Therefore, tasks get done more effectively and efficiently.

6. The responsibilities of individual employees, line managers, training staff and senior managers in continuous workforce development

6.1 The responsibilities of individual employees

6.1.1 To be proactive

Employees must draw the attention of management by their excellent individual and cooperative work performance and then to speak up their ambition and willingness to make progress in their career. They should also identify gaps between their actual qualifications and required qualifications of their position. This helps

them have a better understand of training needs. It is their responsibilities to tell their training preferences such as training times, forms, and places etc. to management.

6.1.2 Keep positive attitudes

When taking part in continuous workforce development programs, positive attitudes are absolutely necessary. The entitled and complacent attitude will hinder their development in the programs. It depends on individuals whether to regard extra responsibilities as a developing exercise or extra workload. It is their responsibilities to make the most training sessions rather than make most complaints as it wastes a lot of time.

6.1.3 Obey organizational politics

Not everyone has the equal developing chances and not everyone is willing to participate in developing programs. When someone has opportunities to take part in development programs while others do not, it is possible to form the negative workplace politics. Employees who do not get the opportunity should not resent or gossip those who get the opportunity and those who get the opportunity should not look up down on employees who do not get or give up the opportunity.

6.2 The responsibilities of training staff

Training staff usually review qualifications of new employees and test their weakness and strengths. Their main responsibility is to design the most appropriate training programs to acclimate employees to the organization and facilitate employees' skills development.

6.2.1 Develop and deliver training programs

By identifying training needs first they plan how to construct the appropriate and effective training programs. They consider production of training materials such as course materials, videos and other training facilities. They also schedule inside or outside programs to boost employees' performance such as lectures and team building. Under training strategies and plans they carry out the specific training activities and direct employees to participate in.

6.2.2 Evaluation training programs

During and after implementing training programs, training staff should have to record the effects on employees and determine improvements can be made next time. The focus is to supervise whether employees' performance has been enhanced and

whether training expectations have been met. It is their responsibility to communicate with employees regularly in order to target training needs preciously, ask more proposals for improvement and handle questions and common concerns of employees.

6.2.3 Report to administrators

Training staff keeps abreast with the latest trends and tools of training so they should suggest management whether the organization should update training programs with fresh characteristics. They should also report the training process regularly to management. If there are any issues cannot be dealt with, they should turn to management. They should also need to recommend areas where need more training resources and give feedbacks whether there are adequate budgets to carry out training programs.

6.3 The responsibilities of line managers

6.3.1 Find out training needs

Line managers in different departments connect with employees directly so they are much more familiar with employees' training needs. By comparing employees' actual performance with expected performance, it is simple for them to find out the shortage capabilities. Besides, line managers should pay attention to employees' individual career development planning. By identifying the gaps between their expectations and existing status line managers must recognize extra qualifications which are needed to be nurtured.

6.3.2 Make training plans for their department

According to different job requirements, individual strengths and weakness and training needs line managers make the most appropriate training plans for their department which must state clearly training reasons, who will have the opportunity to participate in training, training contents, how to train, who deliver train and training time etc. . They play the liaison role between top management and employees. They report the current status of their department and training plans to top managers. They also put forward to some useful recommendations about how to improve training programs.

6.3.3 Monitor and evaluate training program

Line managers should balance the relationship between departmental working tasks and training programs to ensure the training programs are held successfully. They must create favorable and convenient conditions to support employees to

participate in all kinds of training activities organized in the organization. Meanwhile, they may designate team leaders to monitor and facilitate the whole training process. After training, it is their responsibilities to assess employees' behavior and performance to identify the training results and if necessary, to make adjustments or improvements for training programs.

6.4 The responsibilities of senior managers

6.4.1 Identify organizational training needs

Senior managers do not connect with employees directly. They identify training needs with respect to organizational long-term goals. The final result of training is to achieve organizational objectives and goals. Such training needs are holistic and at the strategic level. Senior managers will set different operational indicators to be accomplished for each department. This provides a direction for the specific training needs to be identified at each department. They will audit whether the training needs and programs have positive and direct influence on organizational long-term success and determine whether to carry out these training programs or not.

6.4.2 Give support for learners who back in the workplace

Senior managers must create favorable and convenient opportunities for employees to participate in training programs. Sufficient budgets and materials must be allocated to carry out training programs. They should also encourage employees to take part in the managerial process and listen to some constructive suggestions about how to develop employees.

6.4.3 Monitor and evaluate training programs

They must collect feedbacks about training programs regularly to monitor training process intimately. If there are not enough budgets and materials to be use, they should make responses efficiently to ensure consecutive training. They should evaluate whether training programs facilitate the achievement of organizational goals and objectives. If so, giving corresponding rewards is necessary and if not, adjustments and improvements must be made. Finally, they should give feedbacks about the success of training programs to low level management and training specialists.

This report only list three essential responsibilities of the four different groups of people respectively. However, it is known to us all that in the actual continuous workforce development process, their roles and responsibilities are sophisticated and interactive rather than only three limited responsibilities.

7. Conclusion

Company should establish KPI system as well as fair reward and punishment policies. Conducting performance appraisal on employees helps them understand their responsibilities and outcomes that they are required to achieve in training. If employees achieve training objectives or perform better than expectations, corresponding rewards such as extra bonus, holidays, free travels and more promotional opportunities should be provided. If they do not have enthusiasm to participate in training and do not achieve objectives, they will lose promotional opportunities within the next two years. Rewards mean the acknowledgement of employees' efforts and values and can inspire their enthusiasm to participate in training and exert best potential to perform well. Punishments deny some attitudes, behaviors and performance of employees in training process. This stimulates their self-reflection ability and forces them to envisage existing problems in training and correct them. Too many rewards will make employees become mercenary and excessive punishment will greatly undermine the enterprise of employees. Only appropriate combination of reward and punishment can make functions.

Split goals into long term and short term goals. Long terms goals are general and only give a direction for what needs to be achieved. Time taken to achieve them is long and maybe not very precise. Employees do not know what to do and to achieve specially. It is difficult to build lasting momentum and employees may develop inertia. Short term goals are specific and specify time bound. Employees know clearly what actions they should take to achieve these goals. Specific deadline can inspire employees' morale and force them to exert potential. Only short term goals are achieved can long term goals be achieved.

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