EMPLOYEE TRAINING

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ABSTRACT

The need for training in business and industry has become increasingly recognized in recent years. Business and industry regularly provide training for new employees on a wide range of topics. Several methods of training are available for new employees. The findings of this study provide information about both topics and methods of training which will be useful in college of business programs. This study was conducted with 500 recruiters at a Division I comprehensive public university in the Midwest using a random sample during the 2001-2004 academic years. A random sample of 250 recruiters was drawn and a survey was administered via electronic questionnaire. Ninety usable questionnaires were returned. Businesses represented by these recruiters ranged in size from 3 employees to over 250,000 employees. Recruiters were asked to provide information about how employees with less than one year at their company were trained and also what areas were covered. The questionnaire was designed to collect data limited to 13 training topics and 7 training methods. Respondents were given the opportunity to add topics and methods if needed.

Keywords: Employee, Training, Training Topics, Training Methodology, Initial Training

INTRODUCTION

The need for training in business and industry has become increasingly recognized in recent years. In a previously published study, the authors reported that many American businesses engage in training sessions for employees who will interact with international colleagues. Currently, questions about what training programs are being used in business and industry for new employees are of interest to the authors. What does business and industry provide in the way of training for new employees? What methods are used to provide training for new employees? These questions are the motivation for conducting a study focused on training methods and topics in business and industry.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to collect information regarding the methods used by employers to train new employees (those with the company a year or less) and to determine any trends and patterns in training topics.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

New employee training techniques have received a greater emphasis in the past five years as companies realized the necessity of well-structured training programs. In today's high-stakes business world, training programs have evolved into precise, thorough, and comprehensive sessions that are aligned with strategic objectives and specific business goals [11]. According to a sampling of the Northeast Human Resources Association's 4,000 members, job training and development is an organizational priority. In fact, 94 percent of the companies polled said that training is considered either somewhat important or very important to their company [8].

Training has long been recognized for increasing productivity and employee retention, but now more than ever it may be the key to a successful business [3]. New employee training is, in part, aimed at retention. Schettler [9] cites a study which concluded that employees were 69 percent more likely to remain with the company after three years if they completed a full orientation program. Home Depot tries to have every employee spend 6.2 hours each month on training, stating "that training is critical to the company's retention efforts, since the number-one reason employees leave is that they didn't feel adequately prepared for the job" [7].

Companies across the county are reevaluating the success of their training program for new hires. Companies are updating the content and presentation techniques of their programs. "Trainers will have to find ways of 'decomposing' their companies' vast stores of educational material into smaller, more palatable learning events. The three-day seminar or hours-long class will increasingly be cast aside in favor of more individualized, easy-to-access learning

events" [10]. Today's technology offers new employees the opportunity to access company information quickly and easily, often times by using an intranet. Although companies use a wide range of presentation techniques and tend to focus on different objectives in their programs, all of them are still seeking to provide the essential skills employees need.

According to ZeroMission.com, "The quality of employees and their development through training and education are major factors in determining long-term profitability of a small business." Four specific benefits described were increased productivity, reduced employee turnover, increased efficiency resulting from financial gains, and decreased need for supervision [5]. Training must be treated as an investment; in the long run, training costs are worth the investment [12]. Failure to effectively train employees is expensive, resulting in low productivity and unhappy workers [6].

Incorporating an initial training program is vital. According to Chapman [2], good induction training ensures new starters are retained and then settled in quickly and happily to a productive role. New employees need to understand the organization's mission, goals and philosophy, personnel practices, health and safety rules, and, of course, the job they're required to do. During the initial training, companies can also begin to train employees to help them progress in their careers.

There are many different types of employee training, but most training falls into a few general categories [1]. These include harassment training (including sexual harassment among others), workplace safety training, business etiquette/customer service training, diversity training, and ethics training [1]. Other tasks can include skills development, task familiarization, product knowledge, career guidance, team building exercises, human resource management, motivational techniques, correct use of resources and more [4].

Who is selected to conduct the training, where the training is conducted (in-house or off-site), what training materials are used, and the training methodology selected are all crucial to the success of training, whether it is initial or on-going training [12]. Many traditional types of training methodologies are discussed in the literature. However, the shift from classroom training to electronic training is yielding dramatic results at companies such as Home Depot [7]. No matter what the method, effective employee training is the backbone to a successful company.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted with a population of 500 recruiters at a Division I comprehensive public university in the Midwest; these recruiters interviewed potential employees during the 2002-2003 academic years. A random sample of 250 was drawn and sent an electronic questionnaire via email. Ninety usable questionnaires were returned. Businesses represented by these recruiters ranged in size from three employees to over 250,000 employees. Because of their close association with new hires, recruiters were asked to provide information on how employees with less than one year at their company were trained and in what areas recruiters found training was offered. The short questionnaire was designed to collect data limited to thirteen training topics and seven training methods. Respondents were given the opportunity to add topics and methods if needed.

FINDINGS

On-site training was the number one method for training (90 percent), followed by a company handbook (85 percent), peer mentoring (85 percent), and off-site training (60 percent), as shown in Table 1

Table 1. Most Frequently Mentioned Training Methods

Method	Responses	Percentage (n = 90)
On-site training	81	90%
Company handbook	76	85%
Peer mentoring	76	85%
Off-site training	54	60%
Internet	45	50%
Guide sheets	27	30%
Satellite broadcasts, web casts, teleconferencing	9	10%

At the time this survey was completed, on-line training methods were among the least used methods. Note that respondents may have listed more than one training topic.

Table 2 lists the thirteen possible training topics included on the questionnaire. As the table shows, ethical behavior is the number one training topic (85 percent) listed by the respondents with Company Handbook the most frequent methodology. Training for technology is the second most listed training topic (84.4 percent).

In the Other category, respondents listed customer service, sales techniques, product training, leadership, and company information/benefits.

Table 2. Topics by Training Methodology

Topic	On-site	Off-site	Company Handbook	Guide Sheets	Peer Mentor	Internet Training	Other	No specific training	Number of Responses	Percent (n=90)
Ethical behavior	17	4	25	7	10	5	3	6	77	85.0
Technology	27	15	3	6	10	10	2	3	76	84.4
Teamwork	24	4	11	4	13	4	2	4	66	73.0
Sexual harassment	17	1	30	5	4	2	3	1	63	70.0
Business presentations	20	7	5	4	9	3	2	11	61	67.8
Conflict resolution	21	5	10	4	8	4	2	5	59	65.6
Increasing productivity/time management	21	7	2	-	2	-	-	22	58	64.4
Affirmative action	13	1	25	2	2	2	-	6	51	56.7
Writing techniques	9	6	2	3	9	4	2	16	51	56.7
Stress management	11	4	2	-	8	3	4	14	46	51.1
Safety	14	2	8	1	4	1	1	11	46	51.1
Disaster planning	15	1	10	3	4	1	1	15	46	51.1
Ergonomics	9	3	2	-	2	-	-	22	38	42.2
Other	8	3	1	-	1	2	2	-	17	18.9
Totals/Method	226	63	138	42	93	42	28	123	755	
Percent/Method	29.9	8.3	18.3	5.6	12.3	5.6	3.7	16.3	100%	

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study indicate a variety of methods are used to train new employees. Most companies use at least three to five training methods; in-house training is the most popular method. Most companies provide a company handbook for their employees. Ethical behavior led the list of topics covered by companies in training sessions. Presentation techniques and writing techniques rank high in the list of training topics. The findings make it clear that training programs accomplish more than merely introducing employees to new surroundings; rather these programs have evolved into precise, thorough, and comprehensive sessions.

These conclusions lead to the following recommendations. First, educators must expose students to the possibility that their on-the-job training may include a variety of methods and a variety of topics. Second, educators and company trainers need to design a variety of training methods to use for new employee training. Third, a follow-up study should be undertaken every three to five years, particularly to track the use of emerging on-line training methods.

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