

IMPROVING PRODUCTIVITY IN NIGERIAN FIRMS THROUGH STAFF TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on improving productivity in Nigerian firms through staff training and development programmes. The study was carried out through a descriptive survey of four manufacturing firms across Lagos metropolis. A well structured questionnaire was used to generate relevant data from 50 potential respondents (10 from each firm), which include top management staff, senior managers and managers across disciplines, within the firm, through a simple random selection process. The findings of the study revealed that staff training and development programmes bring about improved staff performance in task execution; and as well enhance skills, knowledge and abilities of managerial staff to handle different responsibilities. This led to the conclusion that staff training and development programmes are quite necessary for Nigerian firms, in order to reap the full dividends attached. Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, major recommendations given include: Nigerian firms should give more attention to staff training and development programmes, periodically. The firms should evaluate services from training and development programmes and use data generated for planning. They should also operate flexible policies regarding selection of staff for training and development among others.

Keywords: *Training and Development Programmes, Productivity, Task Execution and Higher Responsibilities.*

INTRODUCTION

As tasks that staff perform in their firms become more complex due to dynamism in the environment, the importance of staff training and development has also increased considerably. Staff training and development is therefore central to all firms and has become an improvement area of contemporary management. This has even become more critical as the world is going technological; as the desire for improved performance and higher productivity and profit has resulted in the use of modern technology by many firms. The need for firms to invest on staff training and development can therefore not be over emphasized. Osadi and Dibie (2010) asserted that training and development scheme must focus attention on helping people become more comfortable in the presence of change and to work effectively within organizations characterized by technological operations.

Accordingly, specialized management training and development programmes are frequently used to improve the skills and broaden the knowledge of present and potential managers, (Broome and Kurtz, 1987). They viewed training and development programmes

as a collection of theoretical and practical experience aimed at improving job functions. This conforms with the opinion of Ejiogu (1995), that “training is a process of causing a person or even an animal to respond to discipline and instruction; a process of making someone to become more proficient, effective and efficient in the performance of a task or set of tasks”.

Blundell (2003) observed that employers spend much of their resources on staff training and development in the hope of gaining returns in terms of improved performance and consequently improved profits, which results in payment of higher wages to employees or some other forms of financial benefits. It is widely believed that training and development programmes help to build up the staff in term of job skills acquisition and enhanced performance in tasks execution and managerial affairs, which consequently results in improved productivity.

In line with the above, firms now carry out evaluation of training and development programmes, invest in it and employ the use of modern technology, in the process, to see how they could achieve best results possible from such programmes. Keaveny (1994) argued that evaluation in the context of training is an attempt to obtain information (feedback) on the effectiveness of a training programme and to access the value of the training based on the information collected.

In relation to evaluation, Kautto-Koivula (1996), talked about job competence, emphasizing that the most successful ways in maintaining job competence depends on the answer to the following questions:

- What is job competence?
- What are the main domains and structures of professional competence?
- What part of competence can be upgraded by education (training)?

A good understanding of the concept of training and development provide answers to questions stated above. Edet (2000) stated that, training and development appear synonymous, and that writers urge them interchangeably. A distinction however exists between training and development. In the opinion of Madabum (2004), training is the process of acquiring knowledge, skills and attitudes for the sole purpose of executing a specific task more effectively, and efficiently. He believed that “training is an investment and that the reforms can be considerate”.

Schermerhorn (1989) noted that training is not an end in itself but a means of improving organizational efficiency, through improved employee performance. He emphasized further that training is a short term process, utilizing a systematic and organized procedure by which non-managerial employees learn technical knowledge and skills for a definite purpose.

Meanwhile, Ubeku (1975) viewed management training as, “the process of developing managerial staff skills, knowledge and altitude though instructions, demonstrations,

practices and planned experience, to meet the present and future needs of the organization". For Akpan (1982), "development is the process by which an employee is enabled to grow on the job through the acquisition of wide experience and increasing confidence through the exercise of varied and tested responsibilities to enable him reach the top or achieve the best in the profession or employment".

In the consideration of Halbran (1997), "development relates to the occurrence that experienced people encounter as they mature in their job/profession, which is different from simple skills training. In this sense, staff development relates to such procedures and programmes aimed at improving skills, knowledge and abilities of managerial staff of firms". It therefore implies that development is broader in scope than training, and it focuses on the ability of the employee to handle higher responsibilities in the near future. From this perspective, development is considered very necessary for organizations, especially in areas of succession planning as well as advancement along organizational hierarchy. Armstrong et al (2004) identified the difference between training and development in four ways as shown in the following table:

Question	Training	Development
WHO	Non-Managerial	Managerial
WHAT	Technical and Mechanical	Theoretical and Philosophical
WHY	Specific Job Related Purpose	General Knowledge Purpose
WHEN	Short Term	Long Term

Source: Armstrong *et al.*, (2004)

STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Training and development programmes have been identified by several experts as the most vital and effective strategy for achieving organizational goals. Armstrong (2002) defined training as, "the systematic development of knowledge, skills and attitude to perform adequately, a given task or job."

Stone (2002) defined development as, "a long term educational process, utilizing a systematic and organized procedure by which management personnel learn conceptual and theoretical knowledge for general purpose". For any organization to survive, the need to train and develop her employee for effective handling of organizational affairs is therefore very important. In Nigeria, there are only a few organizations where staff training and development is considered a vital part of their programmes and budgetary allocations made for it yearly. In the contrary, however, little or no attention is given to staff training and development in many Nigerian firms. In such places, the issue of budgetary allocation for staff training and development is not even discussed, let alone making any allocation for it at any point in time. This is quite surprising, when we live in a world where the wide belief/assumption is that training and development improves the individual in such a way that enhances his performance and ability to cope with the present and future situations (Akinwale, 1999).

It is therefore quite imperative and logical that Nigerian firms give more attention to staff training and development in order to reap the full benefits of improved staff competence and performance in tasks and consequently higher productivity and profit.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study has been carried out to determine:

- Whether training and development programmes actually improve skill competence/performance in tasks.
- Whether improved staff performance brings about improved productivity.
- whether improved productivity, brings about improved profit

METHODOLOGY

In the course of this study, a descriptive survey method was used to generate relevant data. The population of the study comprised of top management staff, senior managers and managers (across disciplines) of four manufacturing firms, operating in Lagos metropolis. A total of 50 potential respondents (10 from each firm) were selected, using the simple random system, with 80% response recorded. The research instrument used was a well structured questionnaire, with likert type scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The simple percentage statistical technique was used to analyze data generated.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Table 1: Training Brings About Improved Staff Performance in Tasks Execution
Distribution of Percentages of Responses**

Variables	Frequencies	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	15	37.5
Agree	15	37.5
Disagree	2	5
Strongly Disagree	8	20
Total	40	100

Source: field work 2012

The table clearly shows that training brings about improved staff performance in tasks execution. This finding conforms with the earlier opinion of Ejiogu (1995) that training is “a process of causing a person or even an animal to respond to discipline and instruction; a process of making someone to more proficient, effective and efficient in the performance of a task or a set of tasks”.

Table 2: Development Enhances Skills, Knowledge, and Abilities of Managerial Staff to Handle Higher Responsibilities.

Distribution of Percentages of Responses

Variables	Frequencies	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	20	50
Agree	10	25
Disagree	5	12.5
Strongly Disagree	5	12.5
Total	40	100

Source: field work 2012

From the table it can clearly be seen that greater proportion of the respondents strongly agreed that development enhances skills, knowledge and abilities of managerial staff to handle higher responsibilities. This opinion corresponds with the earlier position of Halbran (1997) that “development relates to the occurrence that experienced people encounter as they mature in their job/profession, which is different from simple skills training. In this sense, staff development relates to such procedures and programmes, aimed at improving skills, knowledge and abilities of managerial staff of firms”.

The quest for improved performance among Nigerian firms has influenced the use of modern technology. This has also contributed in no small measures toward helping more firms in Nigeria to attach more importance to staff training and development programmes, for job skill acquisition and better handling of responsibilities. Kennedy and Donnel (1979) stated that modern technology has positive impacts on staff training and development, human resources management and management skills enhancement; and has therefore been considered and appreciated as vital tool for organizational growth and development. They emphasized that the realization of this fact in recent times has made more organizations to adopt a more positive and systematic approach to employee training and development.

Okigbo (1977) asserted the situation is same in Nigeria, as the importance of training and development has been realized; and given more attention lately. One of the major intents of this study is therefore to find out whether this realization has any serious relationship with productivity.

The results of this study show that staff training and development programmes have significant effects on productivity and profit through relevant job skills acquisition and better handling of organizational affairs at managerial level. This is in strict conformity with the position of Flippo (1979) that well planned staff training and development programmes return values to the organization in terms of increased productivity and greater organizational stability.

CONCLUSION

While simple skills training helps to equip staff with prerequisite job skills for improved performance in jobs execution, staff development programmes enhance skills, knowledge and ability of managerial staff to handle high responsibilities.

In essence, staff training and development programmes have significant impacts on productivity and profit for Nigerian firms through improved staff performance and better management of responsibilities at higher levels.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on findings from this study, it is recommended that:

1. Nigerian firms should give more attention to staff training and development in order to get the best from their staff, in line with achievement of set goals.
2. The firms should evaluate results from training and development programmes and make use of data generated for planning.
3. They should operate flexible policies regarding selection of staff for training and development programmes to ensure such programmes are approved for the right candidates.
4. They should also make staff training and development part of their activities and budget for it periodically.
5. Finally, they should adopt reward policies that encourage excellence.

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