



Original Article: **Assessment of Training Needs of the Office staff
(Management assistants and Development Officers) in the
National Hospital of Sri Lanka**

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Abstract

Introduction: In the dynamic landscape of healthcare administration, the role of hospital office staff is pivotal for maintaining the seamless functioning of the hospital. Training Needs Assessment is a proactive approach to aligning the skills of hospital office staff with the evolving demands of the healthcare landscape, ensuring compliance and promoting excellence in administrative practices and, consequently, contributing to improved patient outcomes.

Objective: This study aims to identify the training needs of hospital office staff in the National Hospital of Sri Lanka (NHSL).

Methodology: A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted in NHSL with the office staff from June to August 2023. The total population was 181. Among them, 123 people were selected from simple random sampling proportionately to the category. The

self-administered questionnaire was used to collect the data. The questionnaire assessed the activities and capabilities of office staff necessary for their daily tasks. Participants were asked to score these activities based on their importance and current performance level. Mean scores for the importance of the training areas and current performances were calculated, and gaps were identified by subtracting. Training needs with the highest gaps (gap equal or more than 2) were prioritized as training needs for office staff in NHSL.

Results: Procurement for the public sector, handling audit inquiries, file management including personal file management, salary conversion, pension management, gathering, organizing, analyzing statistically, & disseminating data and information were prioritized as training needs for next year.

Conclusions and recommendations: Those prioritized training needs were included in the next year's (2024)

annual action plan with the permission of the Deputy Director General -NHSL.

Keywords: Training Need Assessment, Management Assistants, Development Officer, Office staff

Introduction

Training Need Assessment (TNA) is defined as a “method to determine whether training is necessary and, if so, what specific training is required to bridge the gap between the desired and current capabilities of participants” (1). The process involves five main steps: identifying organizational goals and functions, determining the design of the need analysis, collecting data through various methods such as interviews and questionnaires, analyzing the data, and providing feedback. Several types of need analysis can be used, including performance analysis, feasibility analysis, needs versus wants analysis, goal analysis, and job/task analysis (2), (3).

Training Need Assessment ensures that training programs are directly aligned with organizational goals and address specific employee skill gaps, leading to more efficient and effective training initiatives. By identifying the precise needs and capabilities of the workforce, TNA helps prioritize resources, reduce unnecessary training costs, and enhance employee performance. Additionally, TNA fosters a more targeted approach to professional development, leading to improved job satisfaction and retention rates as employees receive relevant and beneficial training to their roles. Overall, TNA contributes to the strategic growth and competitiveness of an organization (2) (3).

National Hospital of Sri Lanka (NHSL) is the largest hospital in Sri Lanka, with more

than 3300 bed capacity and around 7400 staff. It serves as the key training centre for undergraduate and postgraduate medical students, as well as other healthcare professionals. The Health Education Unit in NHSL is responsible for performing training needs analysis, incorporating the requisite training into the annual action plan and conducting training and educational programs for the hospital staff. However, the Health Education Unit primarily focuses on the clinical staff.

Objective

To assess the training needs of the office staff (Management Assistants and Development Officers) at the National Hospital of Sri Lanka

Justification

Assessing the training needs of office staff in a hospital is a critical and strategic undertaking with multifaceted justifications. Firstly, it serves as a proactive measure to optimize the performance and efficiency of the office staff. By identifying and addressing specific gaps in their knowledge and skills, organizations can enhance the overall productivity of administrative processes (4). Sri Lanka National Hospital is the largest tertiary care hospital in Sri Lanka, and it has more than 180 office staff. For every annual action plan, it is necessary to include staff training needs in the coming year. It will be a waste of resources if we request or include training without proper training need analysis. Therefore, it is necessary to assess training needs yearly. There is no proper questionnaire to assess training needs analysis for office staff in hospital settings. This questionnaire will be used as a common questionnaire for assessing the training needs of office staff and preventing resource waste.

Resource allocation is a key consideration for any organization. By assessing training needs, hospitals can allocate resources judiciously, investing in targeted programs that address areas requiring improvement. This approach prevents unnecessary spending on generic or redundant training initiatives.

In conclusion, assessing the training needs of hospital office staff is a strategic investment with far-reaching benefits, encompassing organizational effectiveness, regulatory compliance, employee satisfaction, and the overall delivery of high-quality healthcare services.

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Methodology

A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted following the five steps of training needs analysis. Initially, organizational goals and objectives were identified, and the target group, which consisted of office staff (management assistants and development officers), was selected. Subsequently, key informant interviews and focus group discussions were held with the medical officer of education, administrative officers, the accountant, and the chief nursing officer matrons to select how to conduct TNA. A gap analysis, utilizing a self-administered questionnaire, was selected to assess the training needs of the selected category.

The study was conducted from June to August 2023. All the permanent office staff (development officers and management assistants) were selected for the study population. Temporary attached office staff and staff on long-term leave, such as maternity leave, were excluded from the

study. A sample size calculation for a finite population (5) was used to calculate a sample.

Sample size calculation for finite population

$$SS/[1 + \{(SS - 1)/Pop\}]$$

SS = Sample size

Pop = Population

Total population = 181

Development officers – 30 (16.57%)

Management Assistant – 151 (83.43%)

Sample size = 123 (Development officers – 20, Management Assistants – 103)

The total population was 181, and 123 people (proportionate to the available development officers and management assistants) were selected from simple random sampling proportionately according to the category.

The self-administered questionnaire was used to collect the data. The questionnaire was prepared by the Hennessy-Hicks Training Needs Analysis Questionnaire (6), the Training Need Assessment Questionnaire for the Hospital Office Staff - TH Jaffna, and the Recognized Training Needs Analysis of Health Staff – 2019 (7). The questionnaire was prepared in English and translated into Sinhala and Tamil. The questionnaire consisted of 30 activities that are performed by the Hospital Office Staff routinely to fulfil their job tasks and career development. For each activity, participants were requested to give a score based on a 1 to 7 Likert scale according to the importance and the current level of performance.

The investigator took the name list of office staff from the hospital's chief secretary.

Then, they randomly selected the participants and distributed the questionnaire. After one day, questionnaires were collected. Then, data were entered into SPSS and analyzed using SPSS.

Administrative clearance was taken from the Deputy Director General of Health Services – NHSL.

Results

Mean scores for the importance of the training areas and current performances were calculated, and gaps were identified by subtracting. Training needs with the highest gaps (gap equal to or more than 2) were prioritized as training needs for office staff in NHSL (Table 1).

The following training needs were prioritized and included in next year's annual action plan.

1. Procurement for the public sector
2. Handling audit inquiries
3. File management, including personal file management (e.g. file coding, updating, record keeping, etc.).
4. Salary Conversion
5. Pension management
6. Gathering, organizing, analyzing statistically, and disseminating data and information.

Prioritized training needs were included in next year's (2024) annual action plan with the permission of DDG-NHSL.

Further, according to the results, performances for the “Introducing innovative ideas at work” was rated higher than the importance.

Discussion

The results of our research reveal a critical insight into the perceived importance of

various training areas for the office staff at NHSL. By calculating mean scores for both the importance of training areas and the current performances, we were able to identify substantial gaps, thus illuminating areas that necessitate immediate attention and improvement. The significance of this research lies in its potential to inform targeted training interventions, enhancing the overall efficiency and proficiency of the office staff at NHSL.

The prioritization of training needs was guided by the identification of gaps, specifically focusing on those with a gap equal to or greater than 2. This systematic approach enabled us to pinpoint the most pressing training needs for the office staff (8). These needs, determined through a meticulous analysis, have been thoughtfully incorporated into the next year's annual action plan for NHSL.

This training recognizes the importance of procurement in the public sector and addresses the nuances and intricacies of procurement processes. By honing the skills of office staff in this area, NHSL aims to enhance efficiency, transparency, and compliance with relevant regulations.

The ability to effectively handle audit inquiries is paramount for any organization, ensuring adherence to audit standards and facilitating smooth audit processes. This training focuses on equipping office staff with the necessary skills to navigate audit inquiries seamlessly, minimizing disruptions, and ensuring accountability.

Acknowledging the importance of organized file management, this training covers file coding, updating, and record-keeping aspects. By improving file management skills, NHSL aims to streamline processes, reduce errors, and

Table 1 – Importance, performance, and gap mean score for the tasks

	Activity	Importance mean score	Performance mean score	Gap mean score
1.	File management includes personal file management (e.g., file coding, updating, record keeping, etc.)	5.7	3.2	2.5
2.	Government payroll system	5.1	2.9	2.2
3.	Salary Conversion	5.2	2.9	2.3
4.	Handling audit inquiries	5.5	2.6	2.9
5.	Procurement for the public sector	5.3	2.2	3.1
6.	Pension management	5.5	3.1	2.4
7.	Using computers and other electronic equipment (e.g. Printers, Photocopier)	4.9	3.0	1.9
8.	Communicating with the staff effectively (e.g. overcoming language and technical barriers)	5.5	3.9	1.6
9.	Accessing and gathering information and the ability to work online	4.1	3.2	0.9
10.	Working as a member of a team	4.9	3.3	1.6
11.	Preparation and checking of documents (e.g. Salary conversion, vouchers, etc.)	4.3	3.6	0.7
12.	Store/ supply chain management	4.8	3.2	1.6
13.	Referring and understanding the guidelines and circulars relevant to our work	5.0	4.1	0.9
14.	Demonstrating our juniors how to perform tasks	3.5	3.1	0.4
15.	Establishing a relationship with the staff and public	4.1	3.4	0.7
16.	Applying the knowledge gathered from reading guidelines and circulars to our practice (e.g. Salary conversion)	4.4	3.5	0.9
17.	Doing routine administrative work	3.4	3.1	0.3
18.	Managing the work stress	3.9	3.5	0.4
19.	Gathering, organizing, analyzing statistically, and disseminating data and information	5.8	3.9	1.9
20.	Maintaining good relationships with our colleagues	4.8	4.0	0.8
21.	Maintaining inventory	6.2	5.1	1.1

22. Personally coping with the changes in the workplace and managing conflicts	4.7	4.2	0.5
23. Preparation of various types of reports and presentations (oral and written)	5.7	5.3	0.2
24. Giving required information to our staff and public	4.9	3.6	1.3
25. Planning and organizing our work	4.7	4.1	0.6
26. Introducing innovative ideas at work	4.3	4.5	-0.2
27. Preparing duty rosters for your subordinates	5.6	5.0	0.6
28. Organizing our own time effectively (Time management)	5.2	4.8	0.4
29. Utilizing limited resources efficiently	4.6	4.5	0.1
30. Assuring the quality of work and quality improvement	5.1	4.8	0.3

enhance overall document control within the organization.

This training addresses the complexities associated with salary conversion processes, ensuring that office staff are well-versed in salary calculations, conversions, and related procedures. A thorough understanding of salary conversion is critical for financial accuracy and employee satisfaction.

Given the significance of pension management, this training aims to equip office staff with the knowledge and skills required for effective pension administration. Enhancing pension management expertise contributes to employees' financial well-being and ensures compliance with pension regulations.

This training addresses the essential skills needed to handle data effectively in an era driven by data. From gathering and organizing to statistical analysis and dissemination, this training empowers office staff to make informed decisions based on reliable data.

The training needs of a specific staff category within an institution can be assessed through dialogue with institutional Heads, supervisory personnel of the target category, and feedback from clients who utilize services provided by the identified staff, highlighting perceived deficiencies. However, this study focused solely on data collection via questionnaires, which constitutes a limitation. Conducting key informant interviews with supervisors and clients can facilitate a comprehensive 360-degree analysis of training needs.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the training needs analysis conducted has provided valuable insights into the areas where improvement and development are necessary within the organization. The prioritized training needs, which include procurement for the public sector, handling audit inquiries, file management, salary conversion, pension management, and data management, reflect the diverse range of skills and knowledge required for efficient and effective operations.

Addressing these training needs is crucial to enhancing the workforce's competencies

and ensuring that the organization can meet its objectives effectively. The knowledge and skills gained through training in these areas will contribute to the organization's overall success and growth.

Recommendations

As a recommendation, it is essential to institutionalize the practice of conducting a training needs analysis every year. This systematic approach allows us to adapt to changing requirements and align our training initiatives with evolving organizational goals. Moreover, it ensures that any training needs identified in one year but not addressed can be rolled into the following year's action plan. This helps prevent the waste of valuable resources and ensures that training efforts are targeted and aligned with organizational priorities.

Additionally, the gap analysis between the identified needs and the current skill levels should be an integral part of the analysis process. Prioritizing training needs based on this gap analysis ensures that resources are allocated to areas where the organization benefits most, resulting in a more efficient and cost-effective training strategy.

By adopting a continuous and strategic approach to training needs analysis, the organization can stay agile and responsive to changing demands while using its resources best. This approach is a key driver for sustained growth, efficiency, and

overall success in the public sector's ever-evolving landscape.

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