TALENT DEVELOPMENT THROUGH DETERMINING SKILL GAPS OF EMPLOYEES

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Abstract. The main purpose of this study is to identify the training and development needs of organization to implement Talent Development practices which help to bridge skill gaps of employees with new and important skills. There is limited number of research articles related to this topic, hence, this research can enlarge the amount of papers with similar analysis. In order to analyze training needs, Westminster International University in Tashkent (WIUT) has been chosen as a case study for this research. In this study, secondary and primary qualitative research methods were utilized and several interviews were organized. At the end of the paper, specific recommendations for training and improvement needs were provided.

Keywords: talent development, skill gaps, organizational performance, talent development needs.

1.0 Introduction

Over the past decades, organizations are troubling to hire the best and talented individuals because of fast-paced business environment and talent scarcity. As a result, brand image, performance and competitiveness of the organizations are suffering. So as to solve these problems, one of the Talent Management practices namely Talent Development is gaining popularity. If talent development strategies do not fit the organizational goals and focus, then it will be inadequate to prioritize talent development. Prior to implementation of particular talent development strategies, it is important to take organizational mission, objectives and needs into consideration (Taylor, 2021). According to Taylor (2021), there are several reasons why organizations should facilitate talent development program. These are:

Future proofing the organization – With the help of talent development, organization can make sure that they have talented employees with appropriate skills and competencies to reach organizational goals and increase competitive advantage in the future.

Improved employee engagement – creating appropriate career development for each employee plays crucial role in employee engagement. Therefore, succession planning should be adequate and take human resources skills and interests into account.

Generating new ideas & business opportunities – employees, who are supported to learn and develop, can bring new ideas and knowledge. They even can identify new ways to generate more income to the organization.

Developing more effective managers – managers are the ones who identify the skill gaps of employees. However, what if they are not equipped with the knowledge to find out the skill shortages of workforce. So that not only new workers can take training and development, but also managers can improve their skills and competencies with Talent Development program.

Increased employee retention rates – the last and the most important**,** the best achievement of talent development would be retention of talented employees. The more the organizations invest for the employees' career and growth, the more it can obtain loyal employees.

It is recognized that talent development is essential to both national and international talent management. The value of talent development is evident in the performance of the organizations in managing talent, despite the fact that the research and scholarly articles on this subject are extremely limited. Instead of talent replacement, talent development primarily focuses on achieving "zero talent outages" and building a strong succession plan (Dalayaga and Baskaran, 2019).

2.0 Literature review

2.1 Talent Development

Talent development is the process of developing skills and competencies of employees to enhance organizational performance. To be more precise, talent development creates the best learning and training environment within the organization, which in turn enhances employee engagement, productivity and skills (Kaliannan et al., 2022).

2.2 External and Internal talent development

Fast changing environment of today's life is encouraging employers to be more attentive to their current workforce. Some data analysis is proving that skill requirements for each position are increasing by 10% year by year, which means that many skills become irrelevant within 3 years (David, 2022). Consequently, external talent acquisition is becoming less burden and organizations are using it only when they really need to fill some vacant places with external workforce. Furthermore, *external talent development* that means investment on talent acquisition is time-consuming and requires much effort.

Internal talent development activities are typically carried out to be ensured that there are "zero talent outage" and planned succession rather than talent replacement. Hence, talent development within the company is estimated as a vital component of Talent Management procedure since it more relies on gaining advantages by improving skill and competencies of internal talents with training, learning and development programs (Dalayga and Baskaran, 2019).

2.3 Impact of talent development on employees' and organizational performance

Another critical point in talent development is challenging employees. Human resources are not active and productive when they are relaxed and passive. Nevertheless, they usually use their skills to the utmost when they strive to accomplish tasks that are more complicated. For that reason, managers should pay strong attention to give workers complicated tasks along with training and development process (David, 2022). Besides, organization can encourage employees to work harder by positioning them into more compatible jobs places.

On the other hand, some organizations are not paying enough attention to their talents. It is not only causing loss of best workforce, but also it is negatively influencing on profitability, service quality, future growth and brand image of companies. Subsequently, organizations are coming to the point when in order to increase performance and bring optimum growth; they should develop their talents with the help of organized and planned talent development programs (Mishra, et al., 2019).Finally yet importantly, talent development includes putting right people in the right workplaces, since people who have not suitable skills, knowledge, attitude and behaviors for their current positions, may cause serious circumstances in organizational operations (Frimpong et al., 2016).

Although, there are numerous researches related to overall talent management, research articles ontalent development are still lacking. The aim of this research is to analyze the training and development needs in order to improve talent development practices in a certain organization.

3.0 Methods

As aforementioned, Westminster International University in Tashkent (WIUT) has been chosen as a case study to analyze the "Training and Development Needs". One way to assist universities turn their present transactional human resources systems into valuable strategic tool is to use talent management as a framework. From the perspective of talent management, universities must identify key, high-value roles in both teaching and research due to the significance of both activities (Bradley, 2016).

In this research, several research papers were analyzed and primary qualitative research was handled with application of semi-structured interviews. Since this is a case study, in order to identify and analyze the Talent Development Process at University, two staff members of WIUT were invited to interview for the primary research purposes. One of the interviewees is the *Director of Administration*, and the second is the *Senior Officer in "Learning and Development" (L&D)* department.

4.0 Findings

In the primary research, 6 questions with sub questions were asked from employees.

4.1 Questions &Responses of Director of Administration and Senior Officer of L&D department

1. *a) How "Talent Development" process is organized at WIUT? Any policies, procedures?*

b) What are the company goals for a year in terms of "Talent Development"?

According to the *Director of Administration*, WIUT strives to create an atmosphere that fosters learning, employee engagement, talent management, and employee development to drive organizational performance, productivity, and results. With this goal in view, WIUT established "Center for Professional Life-Long Education" (CPLE) within its structure. CPLE's scope of work includes the process of training needs identification, development of training plan and training budget, as well as training result assessment. Moreover, *Senior Officer of L&D* department, states that their duties are divided between CPLE and L&D. CPLE is more responsible soft skills and budget of training and development, while L&D department should welcome people, monitor the needs which are required training and control all Certifications that are to be updated every year. Additionally, they both identify training needs by gathering information from the managers and also from the performance appraisal form (which are filled at the beginning of Academic Year). WIUT has online form and it shows them what kinds of trainings are required for staff member individually.

Senior Officer of L&D department adds "yearlong goal of Talent Development initially consists of budget weight. Likewise other organizations, WIUT also has certain amount of budget for certain procedures. We need to know in vision what kind of trainings we should provide during the year. For that reason we gather with CPLE to make analysis of the training needs beforehand. We make 4 analyses regarding to the training needs from performance appraisal at December. After that we discuss some issues with the heads of departments and we send training needs of employees to the CPLE. Then, they make a plan for "Training and Development Needs" of staff and we divide budget between Learning and Development department and CPLE. If all trainings

do not fit the budget, then we will have to prove that which trainings are really required for certain employees who are in certain position rather than others, as it influences WIUT activities and performance".

2. *a) What skills and competencies do your staffs currently have? How did you identify them?*

b) What are the essential skills that staff must have?

c) What knowledge or performance gaps exist within your team (in your department)?

As *Director of Administration* claims that there is a job description for each job position at WIUT, which comprises job summary, duties, person specification: requirements in terms of education, work experience and skills and competencies of the job holder. All current staff members own the skills and competencies mentioned in their job descriptions. However, **some of lecturers have problems in presentation skills**. Therefore, the purpose of talent development program is to enhance their skills to better fit their positions.

According to *Senior Officer of L&D,* performance appraisal helps them to gain the information related to current skills and competencies of employees every year. For the reason that during the grade review process, they discuss what kinds of skills are needed for the certain position. For example, last performance appraisal showed that **some heads did not have leadership skills**.

When it comes to the essential skills that staff must have, both *Director of Administration* and *Senior Officer of L&D* agreed that the pivotal skills involve Computer skills, communication, teamwork, job knowledge to perform better and English language, as they work at International University. Furthermore, *Senior Officer of L&D* included that Uzbek and Russian languages also compulsory since most of the millennial workers are more Russian speakers while Generation Z are Uzbek speakers. At the end, she also stated that **there is a skill gap in English**. As this language is not native language, people do not have chance to practice speaking in English every day. As a result, most of the staff members have some difficulties in speech.

3. *What kind of training programs do you offer?*

In accordance with the information provided by *Senior Officer of L&D,* they provide induction program along with the trainings required by legislation for drivers, firemen, electricians and for other positions. Hence, trainings provided by WIUT are divided into two types, mandatory and voluntary. Mandatory trainings include:

- Fire safety training
- Health and safety training and testing for the members of the permanent commission
- Health and safety training for lift mechanics
- Talent management
- Training for drives (renewing driver licenses for legal entity)
- Training for lawyers
- Training for medical staff on the method of medical drug and alcohol testing
- Training on construction technical supervision

Voluntary trainings include research trainings, language and IT skills, effective management practices and other. CPLE is responsible for development of soft skills.

4. *How accessible are these programs for employees?*

Language and IT skills trainings are accessible for all employees offline. Other voluntary trainings are accessible for the employees whose job positions imply those specific types of

training. Training programs, workshops and seminars can be online or offline. For example, during pandemic, most of the workforce worked remotely (from home). They were given access to the online courses in Coursera learning platform. Also, all induction materials are accessible in online format for all newly hired employees.

5. *Does succession-planning process exist in WIUT?*

Director of Administration affirms that succession planning at WIUT is focused on leadership roles. It starts with talent development programs. High potential employees receive trainings, tasks and challenging assignments. When the talent identification is completed, HR in consultation with the University leadership develops Succession Matrix. Moreover, according to *Senior Officer of L&D,* they have grade review policy and it is the best policy for succession planning of each employee. It depends the on the person as well, since, it depends on the goals that was set during the year and how she/he gained these goals until the end of the period. For instance, what was the quality of the goals which employee was achieved. Heads of the departments should work on this with staff members from the first day of performance appraisal when the system opens to. Heads have to communicate with staff members about the progress. But the staff member also should be interested in succession planning identically. Heads should motivate them. If they cannot motivate and interest workers to succession planning program, then staff member can stay at the same grade in the upcoming year.

Additionally, there are some challenging aspects of succession planning process at WIUT. If employee is interested in growing, they can easily apply for next stage (for higher position). However, as there are external and internal talents which have competition for the same vacant place, they have to be great specialist in the sphere which they want to apply. Because, even if internal candidate is very successful now, the process requires for the performance appraisal results at least for the previous 3 years. Subsequently, if WIUT finds out that this internal talent does not fit the position, then one of the best fitting external talents will win.

6. *What are the other "Talent Development" tools you utilize to improve retention?*

As for Talent Developments tools to improve retention of employees WIUT conducts induction and on-boarding programs tailored to specific position types at WIUT.

- Mentorship program
- Review employee compensation based on performance results
- Offer wellness benefits – gym, yoga lessons, vocal and art clubs.
- Recognition and reward systems (certificates recognizing best contributors, bonuses etc)
- Flexible work arrangements

Furthermore, grade review is very strong tool to retain people. It is best tool not only for the rate they gain, but also the rate of salary plays huge role since it will increase together with grade.

4.2 Training and Development Needs of WIUT

The difference between a worker's present abilities and the skill set most appropriate for their position is known as a skills gap. Organizations must be aware of their current skill gaps in order to develop a workforce that will be effective in the future (Rios et al., 2020). In accordance with WIUT senior managers' responses, there are several skill gaps of employees. Initially, there is a problem on Leadership skills of Heads, which is especially compulsory to train and develop. Since, without leadership skills leaders cannot lead teams properly. Next is a language problem. Each employee has to have excellent English language proficiency and good practice of oral

speech as WIUT is international University. Finally, yet importantly, other vital skills that have to be developed are presentation skills.

5.0 Discussion and Recommendation

University reputation, which is influenced by rankings, plays a significant role in determining where students choose to study. Despite having current excellent brand image, WIUT should continue working on development and keep its high prestige among other foreign universities. Therefore, initial steps start with plans and policies of Human Resources Management, as they add positive and strong contribution in the university development with help of Talent Acquisition, Talent Development and Talent Retention. As abovementioned, there certain "Training and Development" needs at WIUT. Hence, with the aid of primary and secondary research, some recommendations will be for training and development to improve skill gaps of employees.

5.1 Recommendation for skill gap in Leadership

All starts from the top! Even if the organization cannot identify leadership skill gap of heads, employees who work in the team of those leaders can identify it easily. People without leadership skills cannot navigate their employees and productivity of workforce declines dramatically. Moreover, it causes team conflicts, problems with accountability, increases gossip as head with skill gap will have lack of awareness, and power of leading people into right direction (Forbes, 2020). In order to avoid this kind of issues and damages on performance of organization along with employees, WIUT has to train and develop leadership skills of heads.

Development of leadership skill takes several steps (Wee, Scheepers and Tian, 2022):

- Training and development needs analysis
- Create sufficient strategy
- Develop specific strategies and goals for individual leaders
- Implementation of system
- Evaluation of impact of leadership development program

Initially, organization can perform SWOT analysis to find strength and weaknesses of leaders. This can help to bridge the leadership gap between current skills and competencies and future needs (Forbes, 2020). After identifying needs for development, organization can create strategy, which is suitable for all leaders with lack of leadership skill. However, only overall strategy cannot increase the leadership skill of heads, but also organization should work on the specific strategies and goals for each leader individually. Next stage of training and development plan of leadership skill gap is implementation of whole procedure. Implementation also can be challenging for organization because of some reasons. For example, company may need to outsource an expert to provide effective management sessions for heads of departments and it can be done for several times to see the awaited effect. After all, the last step is evaluation of effectiveness of leadership development program so as to be aware of whether the result is positive or not.

5.2 Recommendation for Lack of English language usage

The next skill gap of WIUT employees is English language usage. As English is not native language, employees do not use it much and instead they utilize Russian or Uzbek languages. As a result, the level of English language skills may go down, especially, speaking skills. However, according to the survey data gathered from 5,373 employers of 38 countries, English language skills are vital for more than 95% of employers of non-native English-speaking countries

(Cambridge English and QS, 2016). At the same time, WIUT also needs and prefers employees with high English language proficiencies since it is international organization. Once WIUT hired employee with good level of English skills, then it lies on the university's activities to keep this skill in the same level or to develop it. As Lloyd (2019) stated that global businesses which are not investing on English skills of their workforce facing challenges in productivity, missing out high returns and talent development opportunities.

5.2.1 Workplace Only English Rule

In order to fill the language skill gap, initially organization should offer employees "Workplace English Speaking" policy. Consequently, all employees will have a chance to practice English speaking about eight hours every day. However, organization cannot establish strict rule for only English-speaking atmosphere at work, for the reason that it can be estimated as national origin discrimination. On the other hand, organization must address language barriers and the inclusiveness of other languages while defining precisely when English should be the only language used for business purposes and everyone's safety (Moran and Mujtaba, 2018). For example, if there is many English-speaking staff members, WIUT also can establish English only rule to outline business needs and safety of all employees.

5.2.2 English proficiency test

Moreover, WIUT should create language proficiency testing program to analyze employee English language skills of such as reading, writing, speaking and listening. In this way, the university can meet the budget allotted for training and development, while determining the language skills requiring more improvement.

Developing language skills is one of the most crucial types of training programs that can help to raise awareness, lessen bias, and improve communication of all parties. It can also help employees who interact with coworkers from different cultures and who speak languages other than English with better behavioral skills. Making teams of people who do not typically work together and have different strengths, weaknesses, and backgrounds will help everyone learn and contribute more on organizational development rather than people who work individually. It will encourage the inclusion of value-added skills that may be provided by those with less fluency of the language without disregarding them for their limited English skills (Moran and Mujtaba, 2018). By relying on these aspects, WIUT also may not worry much about language problem, while establishing great and productive workplace to work with overall helpful training programs.

5.3 Recommendation for Presentation skill gap

All the characteristics employees need to design and execute a compelling presentation are referred to as presentation abilities. Delivering briefings and reports to coworkers, leading training sessions, delivering information to clients, and doing a variety of other jobs requiring public speaking may all be requested by your potential employment (Barrett, Liu and Wang, 2020). In order to develop presentation skills, WIUT should support trainings of lecturers who have skill gap in presentation. Senior lecturers can navigate lecturers to take online "Presentation skills development" training courses. Then, they can give tasks to less experienced lecturers for presentation in front of other colleagues. Consequently, colleagues can give honest, transparent and fair feedback about speaker's weaknesses and strength. According to Day, Saab and Admiraal (2021) vital skills for presentation are:

- confidence and clear voice
- engagement with audience

- keeping eye contact
- natural gesture
- positive body language and facial expressions
- avoiding distraction
- good preparation
- effective starting and ending
- good time management
- effective use of visual materials
- good verbal and non-verbal communication
- usage of audience friendly language
- standing in the right angle (e.g. Standing slightly to the side of audience)

During presentation, it can be easy to identify presentation skill needs of lecturer, which gives a chance them to practice and develop certain gaps in presentation skills. For example, if a lecturer is not good at time management or non-verbal communication, after some preparation, senior lecturers can make another presentation and see whether they could develop their skills further. By improving all abovementioned presentation skills, organization can be sure that those employees can deliver better quality presentations and seminars for students. This increases self-esteem and confidence of lecturers and assists them to retain in the organization.

6.0 Conclusion

By developing all abovementioned skills gaps, WIUT can be sure that those employees can improve university's performance. Businesses in the United States spend more than $80 billion annually on employee trainings, and global spending on training and development has surged by 400% over the past decade (Statista Research Department, 2022). However, how well people are trained and developed is more important than how much money an organization spends on trainings. Hence, organizing effective trainings based on determinant of employee skill gaps is crucial for overall success of trainings of all businesses and organizations, regardless of size. Organizations may guarantee that their workers have the essential skills and knowledge to fulfill their job tasks successfully by concentrating on talent development based on assessing employee skill gaps. Additionally, efficient training raises employee productivity and satisfaction, improves team morale, and increases organization's return on investment (ROI). It's crucial to assess what's working, what is not, why, and how to keep getting better as a business while investing significant resources in organizational training programs (Davi and Shaik, 2020).

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