

Training Needs Analysis implementation: dilemmas and paradoxes

B. Fairman

ASEAN Institute of Applied Learning, Jakarta, Indonesia

A. Voak

Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia

U. Sujatmaka

ASEAN Institute of Applied Learning, Jakarta, Indonesia

ABSTRACT:

Whilst we acknowledge that many organisations across Asia use Training Needs Assessments (TNAs), also known as Training Needs Analysis, to determine their human resource development requirements in conjunction with training schemes in their workforce, it is observed that this activity occurs with mixed results. It will be argued in this paper that these TNAs, which are conducted in a diverse array of organisational environments in Indonesia, are often employed to further individual rather than institutional goals. In this article, TNAs are examined for their innate potential for making contributions to an organisation in order to provide sound directions for training interventions in Indonesia.

Keywords: Training Needs Assessments; Human Capability Development; Human Resource Development; Organisational Change; Workforce Development; Training Needs Analysis.

1 INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on the challenges and benefits of undertaking an applied learning approach to human resource development, with an emphasis placed on the practical issues faced by Australian, as well as local educational developers, when deploying training needs analysis (TNA) tools and methodologies in an Indonesian context. The Australian and Indonesian authors' experiences in analysing workforce development needs for both the Indonesian government and private sectors, will largely shape the discussion. The aim of this analysis is to explore the relevance of detailed training needs assessment in aiding workforce development in Indonesia, and to uncover any unforeseen cultural biases or issues that could potentially emerge. In this latter respect, TNA tools are often developed in an Australian or Western influenced context, and we must ensure that hidden cultural biases do not hinder the application of these otherwise important instruments.

As an entrée to this discussion, the paper will focus upon an examination of an appropriate starting point for conducting and designing a training needs analysis in an Indonesian training context. It will consider the underlying requirements, which determine the most relevant TNA tools and methods which might apply in circumstances appropriate for Government agencies (local and national) and Industry sectors. Whilst these requirements may vary according to the targeted audiences, the similarities and differences in these targeted audiences will help to shape the approach employed, and to avoid any unintended cultural biases which may tend to arise. This paper also reports the results of four TNA pilot investigations which have previously been conducted for Indonesian government instrumentalities. These are TNA approaches for a National Government Body, both District and Provisional governments; a number of local government agencies; and for industry engagements with school curricula. These case studies reveal some of the practical difficulties in articulating client needs across government entities in Indonesia, and they explore, in some depth, the relevance of detailed training needs assessments for the workforce and their subsequent impact upon human resource development needs.

2 TRAINING NEEDS ASSESSMENT

TNA, or Training Needs Analysis as it sometimes called, are deployed to determine if training is the best intervention to a workplace problem or change program (Cekada, 2010). When deployed well, the organisation gathers valuable information and data which assists human resources departments in

verifying the most appropriate solution for any the deficiencies in their performance (Cekada, 2010). Leigh et al. (2000) further argued that the proliferation of training needs assessment models, combined with conflicting usage of the terminology, has created the belief, in the popular lexicon, that the term can mean almost anything. Thus, we need to specify, more precisely, what is encapsulated within a TNA. Kaufman (1992) and (1998) describe needs assessment as a formalised process in which recognised gaps between current and desired results are identified, then prioritised as to their importance through a cost benefit analysis, and then ultimately selecting the most important areas for elimination or reduction. Hence, TNAs have a strategic role to play within an organisation, as they can provide clear guidelines as to gaps that need to be remedied (Ferreira and Abbad, 2013), and therefore provision a better understanding of existing and future workforce requirements (Armstrong, 2006). It is a dynamic process, which serves as a valuable enabler for vocational education practitioners when framing discussions and modifications regarding human resources interventions. When deployed effectively, TNA can play a valuable role in directing resources to areas of greatest organisational priority and, ultimately, improving worker productivity and community values (Lawler and Sillitoe, 2013). Further, Salas and Cannon-Bowers (2001) (2001) emphasised while there is wide agreement on the value of TNA within the training process, this phase largely remains as an art rather than as a science.

3 TNA AND ITS IMPACT ON HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Winfred et al. (2003) contend that needs assessment can more clearly be identified as a three-step process consisting of organisational, task and person analysis. However, the process is often hindered because organisations often have a different human resource development philosophy or agenda to those deploying the TNA. Because organisations are understandably different, no group of organizational needs can be culturally the same, and therefore often deploy significantly different career structures. Indeed, there are different techniques and development processes, together with parallel language used that can potentially have an important impact on data collection within the TNA process (Al-Khayyat, 1998). As a result, organisations need to carefully think about the changes they are both willing and financially able to make, with the needs assessment findings treated as essentially a means to an end rather than an end in themselves (Li, 2000). The needs assessment process is further complicated by the pedagogical approach (Delahaye, 1992) in what is commonly called a 'supply-led approach'. This approach is largely trainer-driven, with their authority to act vesting them with the power of personal interest (Thompson, 1994). Chiu et al. (1999) suggest that because trainers are largely responsible for conducting TNAs and, moreover, determining its potential scope, this can often lead to preferred taxonomy frameworks compiled by the trainer, with participants reduced to merely indicating whether there is a felt need for training for each classified item on the list.

Noe and Schmitt (1986) believe that when deploying such interventions, one must be cognisant of task constraints and also to be particularly attuned to supervisors who provide little or no developmental support. Dierdorff and Surface (2007) therefore contend that task-focused analyses can provide a key role in directly providing the appropriate information to determine the content of a specific training program. Yet, even with perfect analysis, design and enthusiastic trainees, positive change cannot be affected without organisational support Eisenberger et al., (1990). Without such backing, any resultant training will occasion deployment failure because of lack of manifestation of the assumptions, values and beliefs of various key stakeholders within the organisation (Bunch, 2007). Reed and Vocala (2006) articulated this belief when they clearly enunciated that the conduct of the TNA process is comparatively easy when compared to the difficulties faced when dealing with the underpinning issues that require clarity and better understanding of not only the organisational culture but also underlying reasoning behind the change.

Of particular concern is that there are incongruities between the three pillars of human resource development, namely; (i) Industry Needs, (ii) Training and Education programs and (iii) Certification and Accreditation protocols (Figure 1). These are problematic issues because, from an Indonesian perspective, these areas involve a number of unresolved understandings related to the purposes and practice of instituting this sort of analysis. The following questions inevitably arise: what are the issues of implementing TNAs under these Decrees? What do these Decrees actually state, in summary form? How are the TNAs intended to be conducted? What are the current tensions which appear?

This discussion aims to illuminate the uncertainties which might arise in investigating a Human Resource Development initiative based on these three pillars and the potential concerns around developing trustworthy and valuable Indonesian organisations. Importantly, it must be stated that we are asserting that it is only at the intersection of these three pillars (ie. where mutual and effective engagement with each pillar is recognised), where meaningful engagement can occur as represented diagrammatically in Figure 1.

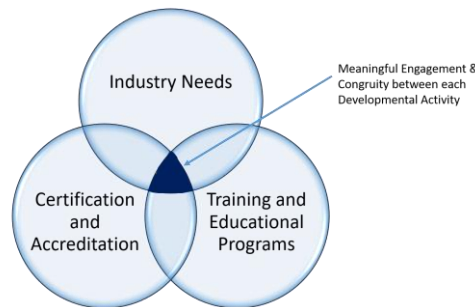


Figure 1. Three Pillars of Human Resource Development

At the centre of the intersection of The Three Pillars, which represents congruity between each developmental activity, we find the desirable position for Human Resource Development outcomes. However it is a common occurrence within training and education institutions in Indonesia, that they develop their curricula without formally consulting industries (Abdullah, 2014). This lack of essential consultation, has an immediate impact upon graduates as they cannot be immediately absorbed into the workforce and cannot work directly in their chosen profession, because they are not adequately prepared for industry requirements and urgent workforce needs (Curtain, 2009). A possible consequence of this lack of industry engagement is that these graduates require further ‘vocational skills’ development, either through gaining industry experience in a parallel field, or returning to formal vocational skills development or training (Analoui, 1993).

4 CURRENT TNA PRACTICES AND THEIR IMPACTS

The authors of this paper envisage that a successful training and/or education program should be initially evaluated in order to ensure that the material and learning opportunities relate to the intended work environment, and that any change in requirement or miscuing of presentation, can be quickly identified and rectified. Such an interactive program might profitably start with the identification of any gaps in graduate outcomes through a focused Performance/Training Needs Analysis (TNA) (Moore and Morton, 2017). These TNAs will be conducted by the school or higher education institutions involved, working together with target industries in order to determine what competencies are required by industries in order to make graduates immediately employable. Based on the results of this analysis, which is often referred to as the ‘competency gap’, the course and its curriculum will consequently be specifically designed to enable students and trainees, together with their teachers, to engage in a learning process in order to gain the appropriate competencies required by the target industries (Paryono, 2017).

We assert here that the quality of TNA implementation, particularly in an overseas context, depends upon three interrelated aspects of practice and context coming together in a formal and integrated way. These interrelated aspects include: (i) respect for the current national and local regulations, (ii) enhancing the quality of existing human resources, (iii) maintaining and increasing the quality of the network between schools and higher education and training institutes (Snepvangers et al., 2018), which sustains the education and training dialogue with the industries that the program is intending to serve. In the current context of increasing global interaction and competition, industries should be regarded as the main clients of the vocational schools and higher education institutes, because, in the wider Indonesian context, most of the graduates will ultimately be seeking employment in area which are experiencing growing production demands. For a number of historical reasons, this ‘mind set’ of primacy of ‘industry engagement’ is rare within the Indonesian education sector. It is noted here that there are some strongly competing outcome concerns which make this ‘work-ready’ mind set difficult to maintain for vocational training providers and higher education institutes (Biech, 2005). Of particular relevance to this discussion is the existence of current Indonesian Government regulations known as Government Decree No 31, (2006) on National Vocational Training System¹ and also the LAN

¹ https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_lang=en&p_isn=91460 Accessed 15/09/2019

Chairman Decision No 3, (2013)². Both of these crucial documents clearly state the importance of conducting TNA as an integral part of the Human Resource Development system. However, as implied earlier, the realisation and implementation of the requirements of these regulations is still far from the intended outcomes (Sayuti, 2016). To help to contextualise and highlight the extent of this problem, the examination of four case study examples of TNA implementation in an Indonesian context are platformed. The selection of material spans the range of training situations from the perspective of industry concerns, local government implications, national government requirements and donor-funded bilateral program intentions.

5 INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT

5.1 Vocational School

A more thorough and detailed examination of the implementation of TNAs is illustrated here through a case study of a regional higher vocational school. This case study illustrates how there was a ‘conflict of interest’ between industry support for vocational training and the intent of local government’s accreditation requirements, which resulted in a dilemma for the management of this vocational school. In this case study, the car producer, which was located near the vocational school, approached the SMK indicating their willingness to contribute physical and human resources to assist the vocational school develop a stronger vocational program. These resources included; foci for content of their learning programs, relevant curriculum and training material, and offers of loans of machinery required for workplace practice. In addition, there was an invitation to use their company’s workplace for internship and ‘work placements’, with the clear intention of making the school students ‘work-competent’ so that they could be immediately employed in the industry.

This detailed and intimate engagement with an ‘industry’ sector is a common feature of many developed and developing countries, and is clearly a sensible and generally recommended approach to developing vocationally-ready students. However, in Indonesia, SMKs are required to deliver curricula that have been determined by the local government, since the consequence of not delivering the ‘locally endorsed’ curricula is that the school would lose their accreditation due to ‘non-compliance.’ This is part of the structure of the regulatory frameworks that are currently applied in Indonesia (Abdullah, 2014). This example illustrates that schools have to make difficult choices in terms of curriculum implementation, either to support the regulated framework and continue as an accredited school, or engage in a curriculum that meets industry expectations and as a consequence become ‘non-accredited’, which has significant financial implications.

5.2 Local Government Banking Sector

In another illustration, a Local Government Bank decided that, in order to gain information about training needs, their Human Resource Development Department would distribute questionnaires to individual staff asking them to comment on “What they think, and feel they are lacking in terms of competence” and “What training they may require to close this self-perceived gap?” This certainly seemed to be a reasonable proposition to put to their employees, at least on the surface. However, we discovered that this was a standard questionnaire that was previously designed and developed, and is implemented without any apparent change, each year. It is not developed with regard to measuring or linking responses of this TNA to an individual’s performance targets or work requirements. As a result of this standardised approach, there is no useful link between the TNA conducted at this worksite and the organisational goals relevant to the organisation’s vision and mission. Because there was no evident consequential link between the responses to the TNA conducted with all employees at all levels in the organisation and their identified and real performance indicators, we felt something was missing. Our observation and reflection on this process suggested that it needed a transparent ‘link’, which would have allowed an evidential determination of what training intervention³ would be required for various individual’s development³ within the organisation.

² Source, Decree of Lembaga Administrasi Negara (LAN) No 10, 2010 on Development of Civil Servants Chapter Two-Needs Analysis and Planning Development

³ This case illustration was based on the discussions with a highly placed bank official in Jakarta.

5.2 A Government Agency

In another case study which was conducted within a government agency, on the completion of a round of training, the resident internal auditor of the agency inquired whether this particular training was based on a 'proper' TNA. The officer responsible for the training stated that training programs were based on the observations and findings during his visits to several local governments, but there was no evidence of these outcomes in the form of a TNA report. As a consequence of the unsatisfactory nature of this situation, a more formal approach to conducting TNAs is now being implemented. In this new approach, the TNAs are developed to cover: the development of a work standard; the development of a training program; and the development of organisational specific TNA questionnaires. These TNA planning and implementation sessions were conducted to identify gaps in competency in each local government, and used these findings as the basis for designing appropriate training programs.

5.3 Donor funded TNA implementation in a bi-lateral program

The Indonesia-Australia Specialised Training Project III (IASTPIII), conducted a rapid TNA to determine 'what' the implementing agencies of the Indonesian Government required from the Australian Government's IASTP III in respect of their training needs. The national priorities of the Government of Indonesia were deemed to be the guide for determining the training needs across the provincial focus areas named above. The consequent TNA determined that, throughout the consultation process of local provincial and district agencies, a total of 63 new training requests were identified that met the Government of Indonesia's national priorities. As a result, a number of recommendations were made regarding the training needs and the role of donors, particularly the Australian government, and their engagement with training provisions. The purpose of the TNA was to provide guidance and direction on human resource training and development needs, and describe the importance of taking into account the local needs of provincial and district agencies. However, it was noted that this local input failed considerably in the IASTP context (Scott, 2007), and it was specifically commented that considerably more input from local agencies and 'on the ground' institutes could have created a more targeted and specialised Indonesia training programs.

In attempting to accurately determine what training would be required in a specific area, we suggest that this would ultimately hinge on who was asked for their opinion. It was observed by some respondents in this review, that certain parts of Indonesia seemed to gain greater international attention, and this was particularly noted by AusAID's interest in Nusa Tenggara Tengah. One respondent mentioned the case of Papua, noting that Papua had up to 27 programs with many of them duplicated and repeated by a number of countries (Fairman, 2017). This comment illustrates that expectations of responding to the TNA has little to do with actual evaluation outcomes. In the Indonesian context, there are often different organisational 'arms' conducting the TNA, and the results of a TNA might be influenced by the organisational structure involved.

6 CLOSING REMARKS

It is now recognised that University graduates cannot find relevant work due to their lack of focused skills required by industries. In the workplace, such as a bank, other state-owned or private organisations, or many public institutions, have thus wasted time, money and other resources in conducting training programs which have nothing to do with improving competency in order to bridge the organisation performance gap. There are some important common threads which have emerged from each of the TNA case study examples, and which need to be addressed if TNA practice is to be more carefully shaped to local requirements. These commonalities included: organisational plans were not matched to human resource development needs; there were limited connections between TNA outcomes and future training interventions; and the purpose of carrying out the TNAs can be slightly different for specific circumstances. It is clear from the descriptions above, that the purpose and conduct of the various TNAs within each case study are essentially different. It is important that the conduct of the TNAs is approached from an unbiased perspective and carried out to meet the organisational training requirements rather than meeting an individual's training expectations or requirements. Whilst this comment is not directed particularly at an Indonesian context, we note that similar problems with TNAs conducted internationally can evidence similar outcomes unless care is taken with the analysis process. If this care is not taken, TNAs risk becoming mere formalities in a 'self-justifying' system.

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