Needs Assessment as a Panacea to Quality Education in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The assessment of learning outcomes and productivity of any organization is a major indication of success or failure, certainly in the eye of funding bodies, the quality of any educational programme is based on the access, relevance to needs and expectations, quality of programme offered, learning outcomes, impact and cost effectiveness. Needs assessment is a means of attaining a quality education. High application rates may indicate that needs are being met, but do not necessarily indicate potential demand. Broad and varied programmes generally meet the needs of more students and workers than narrowly focused programmes.

Introduction

Generally, it is difficult to determine the appropriate methods and instruction for evaluating a programme. The task is complicated by many specific evaluation issues that may require attention, by the numerous methods that could be used to gather and examine information given the resources and time available and by the need to ensure that all relevant issues are examined.

Verdwn and Clark (1996) have distinguished six important general aspects of programmes to be evaluated. Access, relevancy to needs and expectations, quality of programme offered, learning outcomes, impact, and cost effectiveness.

The most critical aspect of programme is its relevancy to needs and expectations. Obviously, if needs are ignored, not much of educational value can be achieved. Social, personal and professional needs must be identified through methods of need assessment such as market research. High application rules may indicate that needs are being met, but do not necessarily indicate potential demand. Broad and varied programmes generally meet the needs of most students than narrowly focused programmes.

Why design and conduct a Needs assessment? We need to consider the benefits of any Human Resources Development (HRD) which are based on:

(i)   What learning will be accomplished?

(ii)   What changes in behaviour and performance are expected?

(iii)   What are the expected economic costs and benefits of any projected solution?

Concept of Needs Assessment

Assessment is the process of organizing measurement data into interpretable forms of a number of variables (Adesokan, 2009).

Needs assessment is a systematic exploration of the way things are and the way they should be. These "things" are usually associated with organizational and/or individual performance (Robert and Mitchell, 1995).

It is a process for determining and addressing needs, or "group" between current conditions and desired condition, often used for improvement projects in education/training, organizations, or communities in the context of community

improvement, it is known as community needs analysis (Gupta, Sleezer &Russ-eff, 2007).

It also involves identifying materials problems/deficits/weakness and advantages/opportunities/strengths, and evaluating possible solutions that take those qualities into consideration. It is also a tool for programme planning.

Why Needs Assessment in Programme Planning?

The following points are identified for needs assessment programme planning:

(i)   The capacity of treatment services in the community in relation to the prevalence and incidence of the community;

(ii)   The appropriate mix of services required to respond to the diverse needs associated with community disorders;

(iii)   The co-ordination of services within a system of care in order to facilitate entry into the system, smooth transition across specific components and appropriate follow-up; and

(iv)   Needs assessment makes wise investments in training and other possible interventions.

Communities' needs assessment involves assessing the needs that people have in order to live in:

(i)   an ecologically sustainable environment;

(ii)   a community that maintains and develops viable social capita;

(iii)   a way that meets their own economic and financial requirements; and

(iv)   a manner that permits political participation in decision that affects them.

Techniques for Assessing Needs

In order to get a true picture about the needs of an organization and individuals, make use of multiple methods of Needs assessment. Don't take some mangers word for what is needed. There are several bases of needs assessment techniques that are pointed out by Robert and Mitchell (1995) such as:

(i)   Direct observation

(ii)   Questionnaire

(iii)   Consultation with person in key position, and with specific knowledge

(iv)   Review of relevant literature

(v)   Interviews

(vi)   Focus groups

(vii)   Test

(viii)   Records and report studies

(ix)   Work samples.

It is better to use a combination of some of these, as appropriate.

Steps for Conduction of a Need Assessment

(i)   Perform a "Gap" analysis;

(ii)   Identify priorities and importance;

(iii)   Identify causes of performance problem and/or opportunities; and

(iv)   Identify possible solutions and growth opportunities

Perform A "Gap" Analysis

The difference of the "Gap" between the current and the necessary will identify our needs, purpose and objectives. Perform A "Gap" analysis is to check the actual performance of our organization and our people against existing standards, or to set new standards. This can be approach in two ways:

(i)   The current state of skill, knowledge and abilities of our current and/or future employees must be determined.

(ii)   We must identify the desired or necessary conditions for organizational and personal success.

Perform A "Gap" Analysis can best be explained by providing solutions to the following question.

(i)   Are there problems in the organization which might be solved by training?

(ii)   Are there problems which do not currently exist but are foreseen due to changes?

(iii)   Could we gain a competitive edge by taking advantage of new technologies, training programmes, consultant's suppliers, etc.

Identify Priorities and Importance

The needs for training and development, career development, organization development and/or other interventions must be examined in view of their importance to our organizational goals, realities, and constraints. During this process, we must identify the cost-effectiveness, legal mandates, executive pressure, population, and customers. The following questions must provide solution to: how does the cost of the problem compare to the cost of implementation?

- Are there laws requiring a solution?
- Does top management expect a solution?
- How many people or key people involved?

Identify Causes of Performance Problems and/or Opportunities

A specific problem areas and opportunities in our organization must be identified. We must know what our performance requirements are, if appropriate solutions are to applied. Two questions are commonly asked for every identified need:

- Are our people doing their job effectively?
- Do they know how to do their job?

Identify Possible Solutions and Growth Opportunities

Some training and/or other interventions might be called for if sufficient importance is attached to moving our people and their performance into new directions if they perform effectively on their jobs; but if they are not effective on their jobs, training may be the solution.

Conclusion

The term "needs assessment" has become strongly associated with education and instructional design. However, the same basic process is used to determine customer needs and wants for products and service. It is clear that there is no one cut and dried method for conducting needs assessment, there is no best approach to evaluation to select, design and approach that are suitable to the purposes of evaluation and the necessary data required for needs assessment. Needs assessment involves identifying

material possible solution that takes those qualities into consideration, the outcome of the assessment will generate and communicate necessary recommendation for training and development, organization of career development, and/or other interventions.

Recommendation

Educational experts and employers should make use of needs assessment to ascertain the quality of any educational programmes. To get a true picture of any programme, the evaluators and researchers should not rely on one method. They should combine several techniques together (direct observation, questionnaire, interview, test, records and report studies, etc.).

Educational experts and managers of any company, industries films, etc. should carry out needs assessment instead of taking some manager's word for what is needed.

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