Staff training and employee performance: Perspectives of the workplace

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ABSTRACT

Whenever the issue of poor employee performance arises, the question of the provision of staff training takes center stage. Staff training is seen as the principal driving force and central to effective and efficient job performance. The quest to achieve high performance at the workplace has always been derailed by an acute lack of skills. Despite the plethora of studies of staff training and employee performance in different sectors, the literature has not yet explored the relationship between the two variables in the transport sector, particularly in the South African context. However, the relationship between staff training and employee performance has been enigmatical in and apprehended by complexities, mistrust, and misunderstandings. It is through this premise that this paper seeks to evaluate the influence of staff training on employee performance in the transport sector. The study adopted an exploratory research design and tapped into a qualitative research approach. Using the purposive sampling technique, a sample of 15 respondents, comprised of skill development representatives of organizations operating in the transport sector in Durban, were interviewed. Unstructured interviews were used to collect data from the respondents. The key findings revealed that staff training has a positive influence on employee performance in the transport sector. The study plays a pivotal role in extending knowledge in the fields of staff training and employee performance.

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Introduction

Organisations are currently confronted with stiff competition and ever-changing technological advancements within their business environments. For organisations to confront these challenges head-on, they are expected to have well-equipped employees with sufficient relevant training and development (Vinesh, 2021). Huge money is being spent on training by companies as South African government legislation compelling them to do so. However, usually they cannot see value in complying with what they call huddles of completing the Workplaces Skills Plan or Annual Training Report and completing all the forms to apply for grants just to be given 20% of their skills development levies back. Mehale, Govender and Mabaso (2021) indicate that any company’s education, training and development is critical to improve the human capital of the organisation and the country at large. The Department of Higher Education and Training reports on skills demand and supply, and indicates that the South African Labour force consists of 15.8 million employed people and 7.7 million people who are not working and seeking jobs (Khuluvhe, 2023; Stats SA, 2023). Hiregoudar and Patil (2020) emphasise the importance of constantly focusing on employees’ continuous development at the workplace. Most big companies have a separate training department, whilst small and medium companies still have training activities coordinated under the Human Resources department.

In a company, every staff member, as far as training and development are concerned, is viewed as a crucial member who can meet their key strategic business goals and objectives (Younas, Farooq, Khalil-ur-Rehman & Zreen, 2018). This study assists the organisations in making a meaningful contribution to the various structures responsible for laws regulating the implementation of
skills development in general and training and development in particular. Such structures may include the Human Resources Development Council chaired by the Premier of KwaZulu-Natal, eThekwini Maritime Cluster, and Provincial Skills Development Forum. This study provides some insights into lawmakers to take key critical decisions relating to legislation they promulgate in parliament. It gives them more insight into the impact of regulating all the skills development-related legislations. Although there are some previous studies done on staff training, none of them focused on transport sector. Hence, this study is indispensable and ensure that the changes staff training that might have taken place in current times with specific attention given to transport industry are considered. It is against this backdrop that the study sought to evaluate the influence of training on the quality of the job performed by employees in transport sector in the KwaZulu-Natal. The study also sought to explore various methods of training and development that can improve employee performance and productivity in the KwaZulu-Natal transport sector; and to establish the appropriate processes for identifying the correct training needs in the KwaZulu-Natal transport sector.

**Literature Review**

**The concept of employee training**

Karim, Choudhury and Latif (2019) define employee training as programs that provide workers with information, new skills, or professional development opportunities. Laing (2021) views training and development as a planned process to modify attitude, knowledge, skill or behaviour through learning experience to achieve effective performance in an activity or range of activities. The key purpose, in the work situation, is to develop the individuals' abilities and satisfy the organisation's current and future needs. They further indicated that in training and development obtaining or transferring knowledge, skills and abilities (KSA) needed to carry out a specific activity or function is essential. Nassazi (2013) define development is a broad ongoing multi-faceted set of activities (training activities among them) aimed at bringing someone or an organisation up to another threshold of performance, often to perform some job or a new role in the future. Organisations provide employees with development programmes to enhance their capabilities. Employee development is gaining an increasingly critical and strategic position in various organisations in the current business environment (Sheeba & Christopher, 2020). It has become clear and unequivocal that organisations need to invest in continuous employee development to maintain employees' and the organisation's success. The benefits of training and development for organisations and individuals are strategic in nature. Sendawula, Kimuli, Banamuka and Muganga (2018) state that employee training and development has emerged as a major educational enterprise over the past three decades. This increase is associated with a demand in the workplace for employees at all levels to improve performance in their present jobs, acquire skills and knowledge to do new jobs and continue their career progress in a changing world of work.

**The concept of employee performance**

Bakare (2020) refers employee performance to how workers behave in the workplace and how well they perform the job duties obligated to them. It is seen of as an essential component in organisational success (Karim, 2019). The company typically sets performance targets for individual employees and the company in hopes that business offers good value to customers, minimises waste and operates efficiently. Utete (2023) states that organisations are expected to focus on building employees’ positive performance by providing employees with tools and skills to meet new realities and challenges. He further indicated that globalisation, new market demands, innovation and intelligent economy are the main challenges and drivers for companies to maintain and improve employee performance. Williams (2021) indicates that an employee's performance significantly impacts their longevity, upward mobility within an organisation, and future job opportunities with other organisations. Companies use employee performance evaluations as a tool to document an employee's performance over time. Ngema, Rajal and Utete (2022) state that performance is associated with the quantity of output, quality of output, the timelessness of output, presence or attendance on the completed and effectiveness of work completed. Otherwise, where workforce resources development of an organisation is not given the appropriate attention, the implication could be poor organisational performance (Adanlawo, Nkomo and Vezim-Alagaba, 2023).

**Employee training and employee performance**

Siriwardena and Morais (2019) state that effective staff training of an organisation's human resources is associated with both immediate and long-term returns. Training is important for improving performance; it increases individual and organisational competencies. It is also key to unlock potential growth and development opportunities to achieve a competitive edge. Training programmes acquaint employees with advanced technology and help them attain strong competencies and skills for handling the newly introduced technology. Training facilitates updating employee skills and leads to increased wellbeing, commitment and a sense of belonging to the organisation, directly strengthening the firm’s competitiveness. Moreover, they mentioned that training is a significant variable in enhancing organisational productivity. He further mentioned that research has conclusively proved that training is a powerful instrument in the successful attainment of a firm’s goals resulting in high performance and productivity of the firm. Mamy, Shabbir and Hasan (2020) indicate that training and development are more important at present-day oriented, focusing on developing the skill of individual’s current jobs, enhancing those specific skills and abilities to perform their jobs while developing enhancing behaviours immediately, attitudes and improves employee performance in an organisation. indicate that developing the desired knowledge, skills and abilities of the employees to perform well on the job requires effective training programs that may also affect employee motivation and commitment (Utete, Zhou & Ajani, 2022; Mdhlose, 2020). Employees can make or break their
organisational reputation and profitability. Moreover, they are responsible for most activities, affecting client satisfaction, product quality and event.

Utete (2021) states that the failure or success of an organisation rests on the effectiveness of training and development strategies. Therefore, training and development of employees are essential to improved employee performance. In Zimbabwe, most organisations see training and development as necessary to improving employee performance. Ahmed (2020) states that training and development is part of an integrated system in which performance is measured against set criteria. He further stated that the effectiveness of training and development strategies would enable stakeholders to embark on the initiative to improve employee performance through sound training and development strategies. Awan, Habib, Akhtar and Naveed (2020) argue that well-trained employees are key to a business's success. It has been shown that the most successful and productive employees are those who have received extensive training and development. These groups of employees can be described as the “cream of the crop” that often has the strongest stake in an organisation’s future. The right employee training, development and education at the right time provides big payoffs for the organisation in increasing productivity, knowledge, loyalty and contribution.

Tamba and Riyanto (2020) stress that the company's development and growth require reliable human resources. Efforts to provide these resources can be obtained by improving the quality of human resources. Makhanya, Nzimakwe and Utete (2023) indicate that qualified human resources, according to company needs, can be obtained through employee training and development programmes. Employee training and development is a factor that encourages the achievement of employee competencies to provide the company's best performance. Companies need to identify organisational needs so that companies can implement the types of training and development programs provided to individuals in the organisation. Azam and Kanapathippillai (2020) state a clear connection between training and performance management. Training can help improve performance management in your workplace. Training gives employees a framework of how their job duties and tasks should be completed and, most importantly, what their managers are looking for. It centralises knowledge in the workplace. Shaw (2019) states that companies could reap the rewards of providing training for their employees because well-trained workers help increase productivity and profits. Employee training should improve worker retention rates, customer satisfaction and creativity for new product ideas. Effective training saves labour by reducing time spent on problem-solving and saves money in the long run by producing a better workforce. Zevi-Magigaba and Utete (2023) state that investment in training could improve a company’s financial standing. Poor performance often results when employees do not know exactly what they are supposed to do, how to do their jobs or why they need to work a certain way. Training can help solve these performance problems by explaining the details of the job.

Legislative framework in the implementation of training and development in South Africa

The 1994 democratic government inherited a population with low educational and skill levels and an education and training system that was fragmented, dysfunctional and unequal (Van Hoek, Paul-Dachapalli, Schultz, Maleka and Ragadu, 2020). The first task of the newly elected democratic government was to repeal apartheid legislation and institute legislation that enabled access for all and redress measures for inequalities from the apartheid period. The first few years of the new government had been described as the ‘evolution of ideas’ and articulating a vision through the ‘integrative’ National Qualifications Framework. From 1994 to 2009, the Department of Education (DOE) was responsible (amongst other aspects) for higher and technical vocational education delivered through universities and further education and training (FET) colleges (Kuehn, 2019). The Department of Labour (DOL) is responsible for workplace skills programmes, mainly delivered through the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs). This split in the education, training and workplace skills production created difficulties in delivery, and the education and training levels of the population did not improve much. The education, training and skills system was described as ineffective and inefficient. Therefore, the 2009 government created a single ministerial portfolio of Higher Education and Training. The portfolio shifted the higher and further education and training functions associated with colleges and universities from the Minister of Education to the new Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). As a result, all skills-related functions associated with the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS), the SETAs, the National Skills Authority (NSA), the National Skills Fund (NSF), the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), and the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), were removed from the DOL and linked to DHET (Powell & McGrath, 2019). The Skills Development Framework is guided by the fact that the South African workforce, in this case, all employees within the education training and development sector, need relevant and competitive skills. These are required to develop as individuals, add value to the organisation's performance, and contribute meaningfully to the development of the South African economy. Accordingly, the following policies and legislative frameworks are in place to help ensure that these goals are realised: The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996; Skills Development Act of 1998 (As amended); Employment Equity Act of 1998; Skills Development Levy Act of 1999, Labour Relations Act of 1995, white paper on Post School Education and Training, National Development Plan, QCTO Act, SAQA Act.

Hlongwane (2019) states that the Skills Development Act of 1998 was intended to provide an institutional framework to develop and improve the skills of the South African workforce. The importance of improving the employment prospects of people who were previously disadvantaged by unfair discrimination and redressing those disadvantages through training and education is explicitly stated in this act. This Act also formed the foundation for establishing Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs). Among other functions, the SETAs facilitate development and implementation of RPL policies in all economic sectors. As Education,
Training and Quality Assurance (ETQA) mechanisms, the SETAs are also responsible for ensuring quality RPL outcomes in these sectors. Nkos (2007) in his study state that the passing of the Skills Development Act (No. 97 of 1998) and the Skills Development Levies Act (No. 9 of 1999) provide the need for more skills in South Africa to meet the demands of a changing global world economy. The Skills Development Act has to be implemented by all spheres and sectors of government under the guidance of the relevant Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs). Training of employees inside the workplace and the introduction of learnerships and internships are some of the programmes that have been put in place for skills development in South Africa. In addition, the Labour Market Skills Development Programme, which is a three-year program specifically developed by the Department of Labour to assist in the implementation of the Skills Development Act (No. 97 of 1998), was introduced in 1996, and its programme implementation began in 1999.

Research and Methodology

The study employed exploratory research design and a qualitative research approach. The qualitative research approach enables the study to explore the phenomenon from the respondent’s perspective regarding the relationship between staff training and employee performance. The study aimed to explore the experience of companies in the transport sector after employees have been trained and developed. It sought to establish if the employees could perform better after receiving training. Unstructured interviews were used as a research instrument to determine if staff training had an influence on the performance of an employee. The intention of using unstructured interview questions was to enable the researcher to follow-up or probe further where there was a need. Furthermore, the reason for using this method was to ensure that the researcher could ask questions and do follow-ups when the respondents made a point that needed clarity. Participants in this study were Skills Development Facilitators and Human Resource Development practitioners in the transport sector. This study focused on the population of Human Resources Managers and Skills Development Facilitators to gauge if training and development indeed influences employee performance in the KwaZulu-Natal transport sector. The target population from which the sample was drawn was hundred and thirty (130) drawn mainly from the province of KwaZulu-Natal.

The target population constitutes the Human Resource or Training or Human Resource Development personnel from different companies operating in the transport sector in KwaZulu-Natal. The target population did not focus on a specific subsector of transport but across all sub-sectors such as Maritime, Aerospace, Road Freight, Freight Handling, Road passengers, Taxis, and Rail. Based on purposive sampling, the sample size drawn from the population was fifteen (15), and interviews were conducted with the identified respondents. The nature of the questions in the interview schedule was designed such that there were able to give a researcher a description of what respondents have experienced after employees have come back from training to measure the impact of staff training effectively. To ensure the instrument’s trustworthiness, the researcher piloted a study with a sample of 5 employees at his workplace. This was very imperative for the convenience of the study to ensure that questions were not ambiguous and confusing. The researcher distributed the interview schedule prior to the interview session via email for them to acquaint themselves with the questions. Respondents were given at least a week to read the interview questions and familiarise themselves with them.

Results and Discussion

In terms of the influence of training and development on the performance of employees, the results indicate that employees do perform well after being trained in a workplace, and that training plays an integral role in an employee’s performance. Participant number 2 was quoted verbatim said, “Employees are much more confident after training has happened. The staff is well conversant with what they are doing. Most of the training is highly regulated as the transport is an international company and must adhere to strict regulatory training programmes. Employees’ productivity level also increases.” This means that the provision of training and development at the workplace increases performance at the workplace. The view was seconded by respondent number 3 and the response was quoted verbatim, “Employees become skilled after training. This creates promotion opportunities as they now have gained new skills and knowledge. After training employees need less supervision as they can operate on their own and deliver on their work. Overall, there is massive improvement in terms of their individual performance.” The results indicate that training and development has positive influence on employee performance. These findings are in line with Bayraktaroglu and Cickusic (2014) who carried out a study on training in Bosnia and Herzegovina and found that on-the-job training improves productivity at the workplace. In addition, the findings align with the works of Mdhlso (2020) who found that human capital differentiates a great company from a good one. This is evident that after training, there is a great expectation that an employee will have his performance increased and with that comes improved productivity and, ultimately, increased profitability.

The results of this study also indicate that training and development play a fundamental role in a business's thriving and making more sales and profitability. The findings are in line with Srirekha and Rao (2017) who found that training and development leads to improved profitability and produces more positive attitudes toward profit orientation. A study by Tanveer (2015) found out that the provision of job knowledge and skills at all levels of the organisation improves the workforce's morale and helps the employees identify with organisational goals. The results are in accord with the works of Salah (2016) who found that training and development are beneficial not just for the organisation itself but also to the individual employees. Vinesh (2021) carried out a study on training and development and found that employees become motivated after training as they know what they are doing and enjoy it. Employees who are happy in an organisation tend to stay longer, reducing staff turnover. However, Bayraktaroglu and Cickusic

Nevertheless, the response from only one respondent in this study suggested that training and development were merely done for compliance purposes and do not contribute to the employees performing better after undergoing training. The response was quoted verbatim, “majority of employees after being trained, they do not produce the expected results. Many companies do training because for compliance purposes and for BBBEE scorecard points. Sometimes with younger generation of employees who are still immature attend training programmes without a purpose and training ends up not assisting them whereas the older generations understand the main purpose of training and they tend to take it seriously.” The response is in contradiction with Zheng, Zhu, Zhao and Zhang (2015) who carried a study on training and development and found that skills obtained from training improves performance.

In relation to various methods of training and development that can improve employee performance and productivity, the results of this study strongly indicated that a combination of various methods may work better rather than one single method. Off-the-job and on-the-job training came out strongly as preferred methods that employers can utilise to train employees. Some respondents indicated that mentoring employees is also the best training method. Statement from one of the respondents was quoted verbatim, “On the job training is the best method especially because the employee does not need to be away from work. He will learn how to do the job whilst doing the job. There are more methods but on the job training in this organisation is the most effective method. This method is utilised especially for the unskilled and semi – skilled employees.” Another respondent’s statement was quoted, “The practical method of delivering training is the best in this organisation depending on the type of training they are doing. If its training that require more knowledge, then classroom set up can work better but if it’s a practical job then learners can learn better through doing the job practically.” Statement from another respondent was quoted verbatim, “Classroom training, teamwork, for example, training together as a team, reading material, coaching and mentoring are some of the best training methods that can work better to improve employee performance.” The results are consistent with research by Rodriguez and Walters (2017) who found that mentoring and apprenticeship are effective methods that improve work productivity. The results also align with Okechukwu (2017) who studied training and development and found that staff training is critical when company wants to groom people for promotion and growth. A study carried out by Truitt (2011) on staff training found that classroom training is critical to improve theoretical knowledge of the workplace aspects. Nevertheless, Rodriguez and Walters (2017), Okechukwu (2017) and Truitt (2011) did not explicitly investigate staff training in the context of South African transport sector. Hence, the current study extends the knowledge of staff training and employee performance.

In terms of processes for identifying the correct training needs, the results of this study revealed that employers must conduct a skills gap or training needs analysis to correctly identify the exact training needs of employees so that they do not address incorrect training needs. Statement from the respondent was quoted verbatim, “Company must conduct skills gap analysis to ensure that correct training needs are identified. Brainstorming sessions with employees can also work. This will assist both employee and employer to avoid skills mismatch where employees will be trained in wrong programmes.” Another respondent’s statement was quoted, “Companies must conduct skills gap to determine exact training needs. In some cases, companies advertise training programmes for employees to apply for them. Its best when the employees show interest rather than being forced to do training.” The results are also in line with the works of Aba and Enyioko (2017) who found training needs analysis is crucial step when contemplating of carrying out staff training. The findings align with the works of Ackah (2014) who investigated staff training in Ghana and found that training needs remove wastes of resources. However, Aba and Enyioko (2017) and Ackah (2014) did not specifically investigate staff training in the context of South African transport sector. Hence, the current study extends the knowledge of staff training.

Conclusion

Since the influence of staff training on employee performance was established, the key objective of this study was accomplished. The study established that there is a clear link between employee performance and staff training. Overall, staff training improves quality of job performed by an employee. Therefore, the study concluded that staff training positively influences the improve job performance. The study also revealed that both on-the-job training and off-the-job training are crucial in improving employee performance. In addition, the study indicated that identifying training needs is essential to address poor performance areas at the workplace. Therefore, the organisations should provide both on-the-job training and off-the-job training to their employees. However, the main limitation of this study is that it focused KwaZulu-Natal province only. Hence, the results may not be generalised to the other eight remaining provinces. Therefore, this paper has advocated for future studies to investigate staff training and employee performance in other provinces.

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