

Chapter case study ABC Publishers plc

Background

ABC Publisher plc is a publisher of educational literature. The market is very competitive and continuing growth depends on the success of its 15 Sales Staff, organised into two teams to cover the UK.

Training and development for staff is accommodated through a formal scheme covering all personnel. The development of each employee is formulated through discussions with immediate superiors. The content of discussions is recorded and nominations for training are then forwarded to the HR manager who will liaise between departments and the HRD department.

Programme X

Programme X was a course on general sales and marketing skills aimed at all sales staff. The course, constructed by trainers after consultation with the personnel manager and the sales team managers, involved 13 days 'off-the-job' training in two blocks: Part 1 – 10 days; and Part 3 – 3 days. Part 2 of the programme involved the production of a work-based project worked on over three months between Parts 1 and 3 of the programme. Projects were presented in Part 3 of the programme. The project involved the selection of an activity within each participant's sales area which provided an opportunity of improved sales or enhanced customer service.

Topics covered in Part 1 included:

- Finance in ABC;
- Effective sales management;
- Customer management;
- Presenting skills;
- Negotiating skills.

There were various attempts to evaluate the programme but the main purpose was to obtain information to enable the programme to be improved. HRD staff were also required to report to the HR Manager on the success of the programme. Prior to Part 1, a briefing session was held at the HRD Centre for all participants. The content of the course was outlined and pre-course reading distributed. The sales team managers were encouraged to conduct their own briefing although no record or check was made on this. Recent interviews with participants suggested that such briefing sessions were rare.

At the end of Parts 1 and 3, participants were offered the opportunity to express reactions to the programme through qualitative comments on each topic covered and the completion of ratings scales on the performance of HRD staff and overall value of the programme.

The projects were meant to be selected in consultation with sales team managers and findings were then presented to other participants on the course in Part 3 of the programme. Feedback was provided at the end of the presentation and in written form by HRD Staff. Interviews with participants, however, suggested that the implementation of proposals made in projects was haphazard. At the end of Part 3, the participants returned to work and many felt that while the programme had been useful, there had been little impact on their performance.

Questions

1. Comment on this organization's approach to the training and development of sales staff.
2. Why did the programme have little impact on the performance of the staff?
3. What would be your suggestions for improving the impact of HRD activities in this organization? Consider the role and responsibilities of:
 - a. Senior managers
 - b. Sales team managers
 - c. HR manager and HRD staff
 - d. Sales staff.