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Cross Training Employees – A Conceptual Review

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this paper is to present the need for cross training in modern age organisations and the tradeoffs between efficiency and flexibility in production processes. Need for cross-training in the context of several workplace factors including absenteeism, turnover etc are discussed. The potential benefits and few of the disadvantages of this type of training in the workplace associated with cross-training have been examined briefly.

KEYWORDS: Cross training, Employee training, Training benefits, Need for training

I. INTRODUCTION

Cross-training means changing the way the employer thinks and training employees to learn a variety of job functions within his domain. Traditional way of treating employees in any organisation is to have specific individual job descriptions for each employee. Cross training changes this concept and makes the employees multi skilled.

There will be several functional divisions in all big organizations where employees of that particular division performing their roles according to their profiles. But, there has to be coordination between different divisions for the overall functioning of the organization. And, so, the employees need to know something of everything and everything of something. The need then arises for cross-training which is training employees on the skills and responsibilities owned by other segments within an organization in order to enhance the organizational effectiveness. This brings the need to hire a person with multiple skill-sets. Allowing employees to learn different processes that each department does is a great way to improve the service they can give to organisation and the level of understanding and support that they can give to each other. It can really bring the team together.

The more tangible benefit is the improved flexibility that a company will experience. There are times when the workload in few sections will be high and less in some other sections. That means less help in one area and additional help in another. With cross-trained employees you can better meet these fluctuations in demand as well as avoid problems when an employee is out of the office.

Cross training enables the staff to be backups for other staff so that managers have more flexible work force and a ready supply of trained workers. When rotation due to cross training occurs at longer intervals, it has been thought as a practice of progressive human resource development or a means of enhancing the value of work experience for career development.

II. OBJECTIVES OF CROSS TRAINING

This article provides the information on following topics

- Explaining the necessity to train across departments
- Defining the steps to implement cross training in an organisation
- Advantages and disadvantages of cross training.

**III. LITERATURE REVIEW:**

BurakBüke, Ozgur M. Araz and John W. Fowler(2016) in their article 'Cross-Training with Imperfect Training Schemes' mentioned that, Cross-training is one of the most efficient ways of achieving flexibility in manufacturing and service systems for increasing responsiveness to demand variability.

Marjory Pilley (2010): A good cross-training program is not a haphazard assumption of duties that occurs in crisis. It is a well-planned strategy. And, there are many good reasons to do it right and make it part of an overall employee development program:

David A. Nembhard (2007): In today's ultra-competitive global business environment, it is becoming increasingly important for companies to reduce spending while simultaneously improving their efficiency and productivity. To achieve this goal, many organizations are opting to implement cross training programs in order to maximize the potential of their existing workforce, thus avoiding the need to outsource.

S R Agnihotri, , A K Mishra and , D E Simmons (2003):When job types are heterogeneous in a multi-server service system, pooling servers to reduce system delay requires cross-training. Managers should balance a reduction in customer waiting time with high service costs and possibly reduced server efficiency due to cross-training. In a field service system with two job types and a fixed number of servers, the determination of the mix of dedicated and cross-trained servers is a critical managerial decision.

IV. NEED FOR CROSS TRAINING

Few of the reasons that explain the need for cross training are discussed below

- **Single Points of Failure** – when a task is assigned to an individual specialized in a particular area there is a chance of single point of failure. If only one person knows how to support a given technology and they need to go on vacation, decide to retire, meet with an unfortunate and untimely accident or any other similar scenario, then the company is at risk.
- **Lack of a Team Atmosphere** – If there is no cooperation between team members, entire output of the team, will get affected.
- **Rotation of job** - Practicing job role rotations within an organization on a scheduled basis will help in bringing out the inefficiencies and corruption.
- **Handling leave:** When employees go on mandatory vacations, the tasks assigned to that particular employee will get stopped.
- **Lack of Variety** - Often, employees move out when they feel that their job is not challenging. By allowing employees to become comfortable in their areas of expertise, we increase the likelihood that employees will reach a point where the job presents no new challenges.

Cross-training makes the employees to expand the knowledge area and introduce new challenges, leading to more variety in the day to day work life and gives the advantage of providing a fresh perspective to old problems.

V. STEPS TO IMPLEMENT CROSS TRAINING

Any cross training program to be done in a right way at right time to get the benefits. A poorly planned program may result in wasting of time, money and creates adverse effects.

The following steps to be followed to define a right training program.

- Identify the tasks performed for various jobs and designate the tasks that can be performed by other people with a little training.
- Identify who is interested in participating in the program.
- Identify who has the competencies to perform the tasks designated as cross-trainable
- Identify the staff who will be capable and shows interest to perform the cross-training tasks.
- Find out which team member's job can be shared with other team members.
- Develop a training process, either theoretical or on job based on the nature of job.
- Reduce workload during training and while tasks are being performed to avoid the additional stress on the employees.



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- Trained employees may need time to learn and practice skills. Don't assume an employee will pick up the new process and retain it forever.
- Recognize and reward employees who have attained new skills and willing to take additional responsibilities.
- Explain the reason for cross-training and the benefits to the employees to remove any question of both the person being trained and the person whose job is being cross-trained.
- Prepare a checklist to assess the training

VI. ADVANTAGES OF CROSS TRAINING

- Cross training helps employees acquire new skills instead of spending money to recruit candidates from the outside. Changing employee roles and assigning them the duties of their co-employees is always less costlier than conducting an external recruitment campaign
- Improving team performance through cross-training sustains the team's production levels even when employee absence threatens performance levels.
- Employers who cross-train their employees rarely have to worry that a particular job won't get done because an employee is out sick, on a leave of absence or taking a vacation
- If you have someone that quits without warning, you will have someone that can do their job. You also have someone that can train the other person that comes in if need be.
- Employees who are trained in other fields can come in handy when a role is vacated. Sometimes such employees can also eliminate the need of hiring a temporary employee.
- It also increases team bonding. Employees will be aware of others' work and will know exactly their role and contribution in the overall goal of the company. Employees may come up with the most beneficial business ideas if they have a better understanding of the whole business processes.
- Training employees in different areas will significantly help employees to learn different skills. Also, they will acquire a wider knowledge and will be able to help to plan and fulfil company's requirements.
- It allows employees a break from their usual work and keeps their work challenging.
- When a company to be downsized, cross trained people will be helpful as they already know some of the responsibilities of the other job.

VII. DISADVANTAGES

There is an assumption that cross-trained employees may become unfocused or will be burdened with overwork as they need to complete their core responsibilities along with those extra tasks they are trained for.

- Companies need to employ time and resources to provide cross training to the employees.
- Employees may get dissatisfied with their work as they end up calculating their productivity without considering those extra tasks.
- Establishing cross training takes dedication, time and a lot of effort. Depending on the size of the organization, there may be many different areas of business that will need coverage. Ensuring multiple members of the organization are adequately trained takes a significant amount of investment.
- If an external or internal person is needed to conduct training, this will involve either time or money. The fact that people will need to be pulled away from their regular jobs in order to learn new ones will temporarily cost productivity.
- Confidence of an employee may get affected if his responsibilities have been assigned to some other employees. It could be even worse when those responsibilities are given to someone who just learned the skills but not experienced in those tasks.



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- Unhealthy competition can create major conflicts within a company. If employees feel as if their jobs are being threatened, they might go to unethical extremes to make sure they keep their position.
- By cross-training employees, you lose specialized knowledge. Cross-training teaches employees a little bit about a lot of things. It spreads their understanding and capabilities over a wide range of skills and tasks.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Cross training will improve the confidence level in employees; their communication skills will be improved. They will learn multiple skills related to their field of work. This in turn will make them to show gratitude towards the company, hence the employee attrition rate will come down. This is a major benefit to the employer, as they need not spend on new employee recruitment and train them frequently. Apart from these benefits, absenteeism of employees can be easily manageable as many employees know the skills of other employees.

Hence the method of cross training is to be implemented in all the organisations wherever diverse business functions are happening and wherever the employee retention is required. This is mutual benefit to both employee and employer both financially and career wise.

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