

DrugCureAll – Group 2

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Introduction

DrugCureAll (DCA) is a pharmaceutical company located on the east coast of the United States (U.S.). According to the case study, the main research and development (R&D) areas DCA focuses on includes: diabetes, epilepsy, cancer, arthritis, and AIDS. Thanks to DCAs R&D unit, the quality of their products distinguishes them from the competitors. Although the cost to produce and sell quality products is high, they do provide for patients needing financial assistance. The company is known for recruiting high-performing employees that are top graduates from business and liberal arts programs across the United States. However, some managers are complaining about the performance among the new recruits. The accounting director, Jill Styles, requested the Human Resource (HR) Department to create a training program and call it the New Accounting Analyst Training Program (NAATP). Ellen Ahmad, finance training analyst in HR, was task with conducting a needs assessment of the circumstances surrounding new accounting hires. This report will assess Ellen’s approach to resolving the performance issues by reviewing her outcome of the needs assessment. Also, by using the information provided in the case study, the report will analyze the sources and methods Ellen used to collect data. Furthermore, it will identify the business needs; as well as, analyze gaps in performance due to skills and/or knowledge to determine the root cause that is affecting performance. This report will conclude with evaluating Ellen’s findings and make recommendations for improvements.

Approach to Needs Assessment

The accounting director, Jill Styles, was informed by managers in the accounting department of a gap in performance of new hires. With this, Jill reached out to Pedro Warren, HR

Director, to create a training program for all new accounting hires which she referred to as New Accounting Analyst Training Program (NAATP); and, asked to have the results back by the next quarterly meeting. Thereafter, Pedro approached Ellen Ahmad, Finance Training Analyst, to conduct a needs assessment of the new hire account analysts. According to Barbazette (2006), the reason for needs assessment is to 1) protect the organization's assets; and, 2) make sure all resources provided are for training purposes only (p. 6). The following section reviews the steps taken, as well as any missed steps.

Steps taken

From the information supplied in the case study, Ellen utilizes the three-phase training needs assessment process similar to that discussed by Barbazette (2006). This process begins by gathering information, analyzing it, and then creating a training plan. During this process, it is customary to “. . . [collect] existing information or develop new information” (p. 7). Next, the collected information is then analyzed and interpreted, and finally a plan is formulated to correct the deficiency. This process “. . . can help determine whether training is the appropriate solution to [the] performance deficiency” (p. 6).

Gathering data. The first data gathered is from the organization when Ellen met with Pedro and learned about the strength and weaknesses of new hires from notes he took at the corporate meeting. Next, Ellen interviewed the managers one-on-one and recorded their comments, which resulted in overwhelming support of Jill's observation. Thereafter, Ellen obtained demographic data which focused on the individual hires and their previous training such as that which was received while pursuing their degree, as well as the grades achieved in their coursework and is discussed later in this report.

The data collected to this point has been both formal (interviews, surveys) and informal (verbal conversation). To gather additional information, Ellen has planned to engage all senior accounting analysts to complete a task analysis survey (see Appendix A – task analysis) discussed later in the methods section. Indeed, Ellen was excited by the information that was collected and looked forward to designing and developing the NAATP.

Analyze data and create a training plan. The case study discusses a plan to analyze the data, but no information is given on how this will be completed. Additionally, little information is given on what the training plan will contain to help the new hires succeed. However, Ellen did do a task analysis even though she only went by what she found on the Internet. This can cause the results to be inaccurate due to lack of knowledge in conducting a task analysis.

Missing steps. Ellen gathered information informally through her interviews of accounting managers; and then, formally through record reviews (gathering academic records), job descriptions, New Hire Orientation materials, and finally through the task analysis survey. Although there are many steps Ellen could have taken, the following four steps are examples that could have produced better results.

First, Ellen should have *observed* the newly hired accountants as they worked to see how tasks are completed; in doing so, she could have asked questions for an in-depth understanding of the different tasks. By observing others, it can serve as a valuable and versatile method for “... obtaining both qualitative as well as quantitative feedback regarding skill/knowledge deficiencies and, in particular, training needs” (McClelland, 1994, p. 7). However, Swanson (2007) points out that the longer one observes others, the more information can be obtained (p. 115). In addition, Swanson (2007) also suggests when observing others that sensitivity and being unobtrusive are

crucial; and if able, be part of the process in order to observe any errors made or problems that may exist (p. 115) which can be corrected in a training program.

Second, Ellen missed utilizing the *performance analysis tool* which is a nine-cell matrix that Barbazette (2006) mentioned as a way for improving performance; and, is based on three barriers to performing: physical, emotional, and intellectual that occur on three levels: personal, environmental, and informational [see Appendix B – barriers] (p. 23). According to Barbazette (2006), the importance of a performance analysis “. . . is to identify the cause of deficient performance so appropriate corrective action can occur” (p. 17). For example, Ellen could have used the Can-Can't/Will-Won't performance analysis which would have identified any deficiency whether it was lack of skill, resources, time; or, unwilling attitude (p. 19).

Third, Ellen should have considered the *Performance Diagnosis Matrix* which outlines the Performance Levels and Performance Variables to identify where the deficiency lies (Swanson, 2007, p. 65). To illustrate, the performance level can be broken down into four levels. The first of four levels is the *organization level* which is defined by Rummler and Brache as “emphasiz[ing] the organizations relationship with its market and the basic ‘skeleton’ of the major functions that comprise the organization” (as cited by Swanson, 2007, p. 62). Second level, the *process level* focuses on processes to be accomplished. Third, the *team level* focusing on how groups of people can work together. And lastly, the *individual level* which focuses on the each employee and their ability to complete their assigned tasks. In order to assist in the analysis of the data, the *performance variable* needs to be taken into consideration. These variables are divided into five categories: mission/goal, system design, capacity, motivation, and expertise. The definition for these variables differ based upon the aforementioned levels (Swanson, 2007, p. 98). [see Appendix C – performance diagnosis matrix].

Fourth step, and one of importance, was doing a *feasibility analysis* to determine the cost of the training program which according to Barbazette (2006) is weighing the cost of training against benefits [see Appendix D – cost/benefit analysis] (p. 62). Surely, Jill will want to know the cost v. benefit of introducing a new training program. Specifically, those direct costs to develop a training program and indirect costs which relate to overhead (p. 62). According to Malmi (1999) this type information is important for the “. . . decision-maker, and a system producing (the) information (which requires) decisions or actions. . . “ by those making the decisions (p. 650). An example by Malmi (1999) mentions that when the benefits outweigh the costs the new system should be adopted (p. 650).

Another key point is the *return on investment*, which will determine whether or not the NAATP is economically feasible. According to Morgan and Schiemann (1999), “high performing companies (like DCA) tend to be better at people management and measurement than other organizations” (p. 47). However, as the case study suggested, there are performance gaps with the new hires, and that can reduce profits for any high-performing company. The following section reviews the methods used by Ellen and whether or not the data collection was effective.

Sources/Methods Used to Collect Information

In review of the methods Ellen used for the accounting analyst position, included face-to-face interviews, review of organizational records, a task analysis survey, and task analysis matrix. The following touches briefly on each method used to collect information.

Interviews. Ellen first started by asking Pedro what Jill stated about the new accounting hires’ strengths and weaknesses. While this is an ideal method to obtain information, Ellen may have been better informed on wants vs. needs if she interviewed Jill who is the expert on this

subject matter. Reason being, Pedro could have easily misunderstood or missed an important piece of information Jill might have shared with him.

Next, Ellen interviewed a few of the accounting managers and supervisors one-on-one and recorded their comments. This method, even though can be time consuming, is a great way to gather information and discover what Swanson (2007) suggests at the organizational, process, team, and/or individual job levels (p. 65). Interviewing the managers and supervisors helped Ellen realize that everyone in the department does feel the same way Jill feels about the issues with the new accounting hires.

Organizational records. Ellen contacted the recruiter for accounting to collect the past five years of demographic data on all new accounting hires. According to the case study, retrieving the demographic data was obtained on new hires' to include: major, university attended, GPA, and number of courses taken in accounting and computer. This is an effective method because it allows Ellen to analyze the organizational records to see where performance gaps are present (Swanson, 2007). However, after reviewing the records, Ellen found that the new hires' majors had a broad range of accounting and computer courses which explains some of the complaints made by the managers and supervisors. While many of these new hires may be very intelligent, the demographic data shows that some do not have the knowledge or expertise to fulfill an accounting analyst role. In addition, Ellen also asked the recruiter for an accounting analyst job description which according to Swanson (2007) is one of three tools used in documenting workplace expertise (p. 129). For example, the job description, will help Ellen "define the boundaries of a job" (p. 129).

Task analysis matrix. In Ellen's research about needs assessment, she came across a training website that mention how to do a task/job analysis. The task analysis matrix (see

Appendix C – task analysis matrix) is another tool used to document workplace expertise because it “details the expertise required to perform each task” (p. 129). Ellen used the job description to incorporate in to the task analysis since the “. . . process to analyze either a job or a task is the same” (Barbazette, 2006, p. 84).

Ellen decided to give a *task analysis survey* to senior accounting analysts and use the data to include in a task analyses matrix which will detail their expertise to use in the NAATP. According to the case study, the tasks will be rated as follows: moderately-highly difficult, frequently used, and of moderate-high importance. Furthermore, Ellen believes the task analyses matrix will help her determine which tasks are critical for the new accounting analyst training program. Although it is not stated in the case study, the job description may have been focused more on prerequisites in performing the tasks, rather than “. . . “the full scope of the work that the job holder actually does” (Swanson, 2007, p. 136). This may be a reason many of the new hires believed they were qualified.

Lastly, Ellen also asked the recruiter for copies of information presented in the New Hire Orientation in terms of organization charts and departmental goals/mission statements. She finds that there is little of this type information provided in the orientation which may be part of the reason for a gap in performance. Moreover, the culture of an organization is just as important; and therefore, goals/mission statement need to be conveyed to new hires so they know the expectations of the organization.

Determining the effectiveness of sources/methods.

Extended research. In review of the above mentioned methods used, Ellen could have delve deeper into researching additional methods to be sure the outcome will produce the right training program. For example, the case study does not mention she used a task inventory which

is one of the three tools Swanson (2007) suggested when documenting workplace expertise because a job or work process is more evident (p. 129) when analyzing a job.

Additional interviews. Another area Ellen could have expanded on was to interview those accounting analysts who have been in the position for a few months and performing the duties and responsibilities of the position since they have the greatest insight to their own strengths and weaknesses. By interviewing these employees, it may have produced data revealing how well the organization supports new employees to ensure success. Swanson (2007) mentions, “Pit a good performer against a bad system and the system will almost always win” (p. 64). Per the data collected from the recruiter, it revealed the new employees came from top notch schools with high GPA’s. However, there was disconnect revealed from education to application of knowledge on the job which might well be a result of the organization’s lack of supporting an effective transition.

Although this case study does not say how many senior accounting analysts were interviewed, by having a well-rounded number of participants would prove more beneficial when needing feedback. Reason being, titles may be the same but that does not necessarily mean each analyst does the same task. Overall, Ellen did make progress in obtaining information, but there was still improvement to be made in order to receive more accurate information and get to the root of the problem. The next section highlights some areas that Ellen could have done differently in conducting the needs assessment; as well as, making some recommendations to be considered when developing a training program.

Group Suggestions for Conducting a Needs Assessment

Ellen’s experience. Ellen’s assignment to develop a NAATP describes the tasks that are often delegated to employees, even though their experience may not be conducive to the

challenge. According to the case study, Ellen worked in the purchasing department for 15 months prior to moving to accounting where she worked for 14 months as a training analyst.

Nonetheless, the case study does not elaborate on Ellen's credentials in her training support role; in that, she may have had training in a previous job. A point overlooked by both Pedro and Jill, was to consult a training and development professional outside of the organization which would have aided in the success of identifying the performance gap of the new accounting analysts.

Utilizing resources. The sources and methods that Ellen used to collect information for the needs assessment are consistent with nominal attempts to analyze training to improve performance; however, as Barbazette (2006) mentioned, "Any assessment (that) involves gathering information (will) help make appropriate decisions" (p. 39); with that said, Ellen would have benefitted from doing a bit more research on the different types of interview styles and researched more on conducting a needs assessment. Although the attempt to gather information through the use of interviews was a good effort, it lacked the substance needed to establish a successful training program that targets the gaps in performance.

Interviews. In review of the case study, Ellen focused only on the managers and supervisors when conducting her interviews; as a result, the outcome of this led to the managers and supervisors being "on board with Jill's observations of the new hires." In this case, two things could pose a problem: 1) Managers and supervisors will not go against, their boss' observation; and, 2) by reaching beyond to regional managers and supervisors can offer different perspectives on the tasks-at-hand. It is important to have manager buy-in when looking to ". . . gather information, analyze information, and create a training plan" (Barbazette, 2006, p. 11); reason being, limited information will not reveal the true root cause of the performance issues or gaps.

By the same token, the case study does not mention what questions were asked in the interview with managers and supervisors. In order to distinguish a want (take a course for sake of taking) from a need (in order to improve a skill), it would have been useful to include open or closed-ended type questions. According to Barbazette (2006), an example of open-ended questions start with “‘what,’ ‘why,’ or ‘how’” (p. 59).

Strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, Ellen’s efforts to conduct a strengths and weakness assessment also could have been improved through performing a SWOT analysis (strength, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats). Reason being, this type analysis allows for businesses to “. . . identify the strengths and weaknesses of an (organization) and the opportunities and threats in the environment” (Dyson, 2002, p. 632) which may reflect on poor performance. As in the case study, the new accounting hires are not learning their positions as quickly as the preferred by management. Although Ellen asked Pedro what Jill referred to as strengths and weaknesses of the new accounting hires; without tangible evidence to measure against, the notes provided by Jill are merely assumptions. However, it is recommended that data from performance assessments/reviews be used as a measure against all new accounting analysts. In doing so, it would provide a clearer picture of the strengths and weaknesses of the new employees when developing a new training program that attempts to close the performance gap.

The case study revealed Ellen’s lack of knowledge in conducting a needs assessment; so she consulted a website, even though she was unsure of the author. Although the Internet is a good resource, Ellen relied on single source rather than validate the information against other resources. According to Georgetown University Library, “Unlike similar information found in newspapers or television broadcasts, information available on the Internet is not regulated for quality or accuracy; therefore, it is particularly important for the individual Internet user to

evaluate the resource or information” (para. 1). Consulting written work may have been a better attempt at a needs assessment. While Ellen’s efforts are applaudable, she could have used a variety of resources to assist her in accurately and effectively analyzing the needs of the new accounting analysts in making a successful transition from the academic to professional field.

Conclusion

While Ellen’s efforts in data collection and needs assessment in the development of a NAATP provide an adequate base, further analysis reveals that the process employed could be improved upon. Although Ellen’s initial approach to the needs assessment was not incorrect, there were other opportunities she could have capitalized on; for example, a skill hierarchy that Barbazette (2006) mentioned, “determines the sequence of learning the skills. . .” which new hires can benefit from because “. . . (it) identifies prerequisites to learning to do the new task” (p. 90). Nevertheless, Ellen did employ a variety of sources and methods in attempting to collect tangible data for analysis of the new accounting analysts’ performance.

In final thoughts, Ellen felt she succeeded in obtaining a lot of information in a short amount of time to design and develop the NAATP. However, Ellen is not considering that Jill, and other top management, may find training is not needed; and instead, they simply need to redesign the job description and recruit finance majors from top business schools. After all, as mentioned by Swanson (2007), job descriptions should “. . . diligently (seek) to define what people actually do in their jobs” (p. 141).

References

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Appendix A

Table 1. Training Task Analysis

Accounting Analyst (Essential job tasks)	Importance of task	Frequency of task	Difficulty of Task
Reconciles accounts			
Makes accounting entries to the “Balance-It” general ledger system			
Creates business memos/reports, distributing them to relevant personnel			
Presents quarterly accounting updates to Chief Accounting Officer (CAO)			
Analyzes business proposals for potential profitability, using Excel			

Note: *Importance*: 1 = unimportant; 5 = important; *Frequency*: 1 = infrequent; 5 = frequent; *Difficulty*: 1 = easy; 5 = difficult. Adapted from DrugCureAll group case study.

Appendix B

Table 2. Barriers Impacting Appropriate Performance

	Physical	Emotional	Intellectual
	Capacity	Motives	Skill/Knowledge
Personal	<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of strength <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of dexterity <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of stamina <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of attentiveness <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of concentration <input type="checkbox"/> Inability to learn new tasks	<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of internalized reward system <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of personal goals <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of initiative <input type="checkbox"/> Personal values inconsistent with mission	<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of basic skills <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of specific task-related skills <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of knowledge of policy/procedures <input type="checkbox"/> Lacks understanding of supportive knowledge
	Resources	Incentives	Procedures or Methods
Environment	<input type="checkbox"/> Inadequate personnel <input type="checkbox"/> Inadequate raw materials <input type="checkbox"/> Inadequate supplies <input type="checkbox"/> Inadequate equipment <input type="checkbox"/> Inadequate space <input type="checkbox"/> Inadequate support services <input type="checkbox"/> Inadequate energy	<input type="checkbox"/> Good performance is not positively reinforced <input type="checkbox"/> Poor performance is positively reinforced <input type="checkbox"/> Poor performance is not linked to negative consequences	<input type="checkbox"/> Dated materials <input type="checkbox"/> Unreasonable deadlines <input type="checkbox"/> Unclear chain of command <input type="checkbox"/> Unclear reporting structure <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of access to decision process <input type="checkbox"/> Work not oriented to performers <input type="checkbox"/> Extensive paperwork/red tape
	Task Expectations	Mission	Information Flow
Information	<input type="checkbox"/> Inconsistent task requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Conflicting time demands <input type="checkbox"/> Inadequate task assignment <input type="checkbox"/> Unnecessarily complex tasks <input type="checkbox"/> Duplicative task assignments <input type="checkbox"/> Infrequently used tasks	<input type="checkbox"/> No policy <input type="checkbox"/> Conflicting policies <input type="checkbox"/> Changing policies <input type="checkbox"/> Conflicting assignments <input type="checkbox"/> Task goals inconsistent with organization's mission	<input type="checkbox"/> Changing information <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of information <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of accurate data <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of timely data <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of complete data <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of feedback <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of monitoring

Note. Adapted from Barbazette, J. (2006). *Training needs assessment: Methods, tools, and techniques*. San Francisco, CA: Pfeiffer.

Appendix C

Table 3. Performance Diagnosis Matrix

Performance variables	Performance Levels			
	Organization Level	Process Level	Team Level	Individual Level
Mission/ Goal	Does the organization mission/ goal fit the reality of the economic, political, and cultural forces?	Does the process goals enable the organization to meet the organization and individual missions/goals?	Do the team goals provide congruence with the process and individual goals?	Are the professional and personal mission/goals of the individuals congruent with the organizations?
System Design	Does the organization system provide structure and policies supporting the desired performance?	Are processes designed in such a way to work as a system?	Does the team dynamics function in such a way to facilitate collaboration and performance?	Does the individual clear obstacles that impede his or her job performance?
Capacity	Does the organization have the leadership, capital, and infrastructure to achieve its mission/goals?	Does the process have the capacity to perform (quantity, quality, and timeliness)?	Does the team have the combined capacity effectively and efficiently meet the performance goals?	Does the individual have the mental, physical, and emotional capacity to perform?
Motivation	Do the policies, culture, and reward systems support the desired performance?	Does the process provide the information and human factors required to maintain it?	Does the team function in a respectful and supportive manner?	Does the individual want to perform no matter what?
Expertise	Does the organization establish and maintain selection and training policies and resources?	Does the process of developing expertise meet the changing demands of changing processes?	Does the team have the team process expertise to perform?	Does the individual have the knowledge and expertise to perform?

Note. Adapted from Swanson, R.A. (2007). *Analysis for improving performance: Tools for diagnosing Organizations and documenting workplace expertise. (2nd ed.)*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

Appendix D

Table 4. Template for Cost/Benefit Analysis

Training Program: _____
 Target Population: _____
 Business Need/Objective: _____
 Total Participant Learning Hour (PLH) = duration x number
 of participants: _____

Cost/Investment		Benefit as Cost Reduction
Direct Costs		Performance indicator** before
Course design	_____	training times number of
Instructor	_____	personnel = current cost
AV materials production	_____	Performance indicator after
Travel/overnight: Instructor	_____	training times number of
Travel: Participants	_____	personnel = new cost
Transparenci <u>e</u> s	_____	Current cost less new
Meals, refreshments	_____	cost = benefit of training
Total Direct Costs	_____	
		Benefits as Revenue Increase
Indirect Costs	_____	Level of revenue generated by
		target population before training
Subtotal: Total direct and		subtracted from level of revenue
indirect costs	_____	generated by target population
Participant Compensation	_____	after training = revenue increase
		(benefit of training)
Total Cost	_____	
PLH costs (Total costs ÷ PLH) =	_____	

Program cost per participant = total cost ÷ number of participants) = _____

Benefit ÷ Total Costs = Net Savings
Return on Investment = Benefits ÷ Costs

 **What costs are associated with poor performance? What is the indicator of current cost of performance?

Note: Adapted from Barbazette, J. (2006). *Training needs assessment: Methods, tools, and techniques*. San Francisco, CA: Pfeiffer.