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Value of Training and Development during Recession to Employees: Evidence from Nigeria

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Abstract:

Training and development is an important aspect in organizational studies. The focus of this research is to investigate what value employees place on training and development during recession, particularly their views on the impact of recession on the level of investment. Therefore, in order to maintain the focus of the study, the researcher has taken Adama Beverages Ltd as a case study. The methods of investigation consist of the secondary data comprised of literature review and primary data which cover the case study. The methods aim at drawing out the key issues relevant to the research, and then relating it back to the literature review. The findings conform to the previous studies which state that recession has a potential impact on the level of investment. However, the analysis illustrates a strong reluctance by employers of Adama beverages Ltd to slash on training budgets. As a result, the company struggled to maintain the trainings by selecting the type of training programs and prioritizing the trainings when necessary. Yet, regardless of the employers' efforts to provide adequate training, more than half of the employees are still unsatisfied. The implication of this perception can lead to low morale, low commitment and low productivity. Therefore, the study concludes that employee training and development is something employers increasingly need to maintain during recession. During such times, competition still exists and for any company to sustain a competitive advantage, employees need to be trained and satisfied, in order to respond to change in the challenging environment.

Keywords: Training, development, recession

1. Introduction

The business world has changed. Organizations are faced with the expectation of being responsible of their employees' training and development more than ever, due to change in the marketplace as a result of the temporary fall in the economy. However, the recession is causing much concern about the potential cut backs on training and development budgets (Vemic, 2007). It is often predicted that the level of investment in employees' training and development programs decline during the recession as organizations are trying to save costs. While, on the other hand, the organizational environment is being radically reshaped; employees are expected to have a wide range of skills, abilities and knowledge (Brenner, 2009). Therefore, as the expectations increases, so is the demand for skilled and competent employees to enable businesses maintains its market share and a sustained competitive advantage (Fitzroy and Hulbert, 2005). training and development materialized from ancient cultures, which provides the structured approach to training of the unskilled workers by Master craftsmen. However, with the arrival of the industrial age, training of unskilled workers had a dramatic change in which training and vocational education emerged to replace the traditional approach of learning. The division of labour in the workplace resulted in tasks that require "specific training". Therefore, as the training activities grew more focused and methodical, so is the demand for training methods began to develop during 19th and 20th centuries. The early 20th century marked the emergence of training and development as a profession. This study therefore tends to investigate the value of training and development in the period of recession in the perspectives of the employees.

1.1. Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

- i. Analyze the benefits of training and development during recession.
- ii. The impact of recession on the levels of investment (Budgets) on training and development.

- iii. Reasons why organizations do invest on training and development.
- iv. Reasons why organizations do not invest on training and development.

1.2. Research Questions

The specific research questions underpinning this study are:

- i. Does training and development have benefits during recession?
- ii. Does training of employees during recession help to sustain competitive advantage?
- iii. Do the training budgets affect the organization's profitability during recession?
- iv. What happens when organization slash on training programs?

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Concepts of Training and Development

The first challenge prescribed by the literature is the lack of universal definition of training and development. It is indeed remarkably easy to talk about training and development, but like many other HR complex practices, it is difficult to define the subject in concrete and concise terms. The existence of different meanings by numerous academics makes the state of knowledge difficult to determine, as each research study examines training and development under different perspective (Noe, 2002). Example of some of the names is "learning and development" and "Human resource development". The subject area has observed endless debate by The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development in 1999/2000 regarding its name. Some scholars argue that, the term "Employee Development" is more suited while other academics rejected the name "Human Resource Development". Eventually, CIPD settled upon the name 'Learning and Development (Purcell et.al, 2003). Nevertheless "learning" is seen as an ambiguous and over general. The subject area is still widely known by other names. Some academics argue though training and development has many meaning, the definitions are similar (Guest, 1997) it is as the saying goes an "old wine in a new bottle".

In the field of Human Resource Management, Training and development is concerned with organizational activities aimed at improving employees' performance (Fleetwood and Hesketh, 2006). "Training" refers to as the acquisition of more skills and knowledge relevant to employees' job. While the term, "Development" refers to the growth of an individual's capabilities within the field of employment (Mullins, 2010). However, the latter has a broader focus on learning which relates to a career rather than the job itself. 'Development' places more emphasis on employees' potentials to acquire capabilities (Armstrong, 2003). To avoid the confusion of different definitions, this research study gives an operational definition as conceptualized by some studies.

Therefore, some researchers define training and development as the ability of an organization to develop knowledge and skills to both present and future job (Guest 1997, Owoyemi et.al. 2011, and Armstrong 2003); training also refers to as a content-based activity that involves an instructor, which aims at changing individual attitude (Mullins, 2010). While other researchers see training as beneficial motivator (Puffer and Weintrop, 1991). From an employer's point of view, training adds to human capital and promotes employee commitment. However, most behavioral learning theorists agree that there is no general view as to what increases employees' commitment to organizations (Boxall and Macky, 2009).

Drawing on from the numerous definitions, we can conclude that 'Training and development' is a planned effort to facilitate employees' learning of job-related competences by a company. The main goal of implementing training is for employees to improve and master skill, knowledge and behaviors and to apply what they have learned to company's daily activities (Whitfield, 2000). Nonetheless, due to rapid change in the marketplace, some organizations are pushed to review their policies on training. Such organizations introduce a continues investment in their employees (Guest, 1997), which, as Owoyemi et.al (2011) state that it requires time, financial and human resources given to the growing demand of companies to boost productivity, retain talent and stay in-touch with technology. For that reason, for companies to sustain a competitive advantage over its competitors during recession, its training program has to be challenging and involve more than just the basic skills. It should include a broader view as a way to create intellectual capital. This intellectual capital includes the basic skills (i.e. skills needed to perform the task), the advanced skills (i.e. the use of technology in sharing information), and understanding of customer's needs (Pfeffer, 1994).

Recently, some experts (such as Gerald Harzl, Rob Prinzo, etc..) in HRM Today state that the scarcities of talent in today's labour market have caused organizations to look at talent management and employee development in a new and different way. They predicted that as the challenges and responsibilities have shifted, jobs will require the extensive use of knowledge in the near future. Employees will be required not only to understand the goods and services, but also to share knowledge and to creatively use this knowledge to serve customers or modify the product (Vemic, 2007).

3. Theoretical Perspective of Training and Development

3.1. "Human Capital Theory"

Undoubtedly, human capital theory is one of the foremost theoretical foundations to account for the human resources. The theory illustrates the benefits of investing on training and development to increasing an individual's human capital. The benefits are not only restricted to individuals alone, but could also increase employers' human resource pool and potential productivity (Becker, 1993). However, if countries such as the developing countries, for example, Nigeria have sufficiently skilled labour available, employers do not require investing more in their employees' training programs (Owoyemi et.al, 2011).

However, the theory suggests that when individual acquire knowledge and skills in different disciplines, they become flexible and can be transferred between positions to respond to rising and falling demand in the market. Nevertheless, the latter is most applicable to

positions requiring a little or no amount of training. For example, retail trade, which is based on zero competence, this is because the time needed to invest in increasing employees' human capital needs supplement their job experience and productivity (Polyhart and Molterno, 2011). As an employee cannot devote lengthy years of time just to get experience and advanced education. Similarly, employers cannot afford to train their employees in many disciplines (such as advanced knowledge and skill) without compromising corporate productivity (Becker, 1993). Therefore, it requires both employers and employees to evaluate the pros and cons of "general training" and "specific training" based on individual requirement and organizational goals. For example, a company must consider that when training employee for "general skill" the employee can apply the knowledge to another company. Conversely, employees must consider that people have the same skills, and competition for corresponding jobs could be intense (Roffe, 1999).

3.2. "Social Exchange Theory"

Literature reviews on strategic human resource management (HRM) considers HRM practices to influence employees' outcomes through social exchange (Ostoff et al., 2000, Collins and Smith, 2006). According to Blau (1964), social exchange involves unspecified obligations, for example, when an individual does another a favour, the expectation of some future repayment in the form of support or assistance exists. Employees tend to adopt a social exchange relationship at work, with a pattern of reciprocity determining the perceived balance in exchanges over time. As a result, if this norm of reciprocity is satisfied within the workplace, a more trusting and loyal relationship between the employer and employee will evolve. Therefore, through the HRM practices, organizations can illustrate favourable treatment towards its employees, while the employees on the other hand respond reciprocally with a positive attitude towards the organization (Blau, 1964).

Thus, the author proposes that the perceived training as a benefit by employees will increase the level of commitment towards the organization. Employees respond to training with a favourable attitude when they perceive that the management's intention is based on a genuine concern for their needs. Therefore, for employees, the need to develop a set of transferable skills through training can be crucial in their motivation, as well as a valuable benefit that is offered by their employers. This is because the training provides them with the opportunity to enhance their chances of gaining employment in both the internal and external labour market (Ostoff et al., 2000). However, drawing from the findings, despite the fact that the norm of reciprocity maybe widely accepted, but the degree to which employers and employees perceive the principle varies considerably (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005).

4. The Impact of Recession on the Level of Investment on Training and Development

The whole world suffers from economic downturn, but whether the world is in recession or not, or in the verge of recession, is a subject much debated. However, one thing is certain; businesses are cutting back in their budgets and reluctant to spend, and so are their employees. Arguably, for most organizations that attempt to pull back on discretionary spending, typically one of the first items to be cut back is the budgets on training and development programs. It is often predicted that companies plan to cut training and development budgets over 10% in response to recession (Noe, 2010). However, MacDuffie and Kochan (1995) argue that, in such economic times, organizations are presented with opportunities, as training helps in identifying the activities that are critical in supporting the business strategy. And those activities that are mandated by law (such as sexual harassment and safety training).

Nevertheless, the need for training and development during recession varies according to the company's needs. Even though, some companies cut down on training budgets, still they sponsor programs that are essential to weather the recession and prepare for economic recovery (Owens, 2006). For example, companies like Estee lauder and Philips emphasis on continuing leadership development programs to manage change in a turbulent business condition. So far, the benefits of training and development are only of interest to employers if measured in cost-benefits terms. For instance, employers believe that there should be a link between training, performance and profitability (Kraiger et.al, 2004). Berge (2008) claims that training has no natural value and the value can only be determined by performance gains and opportunities it can help create in a given environment. Thus, training should be accountable like other investments in order for it to be considered as an investment.

Still, the conflicts of evaluating training costs, especially the pressure to reduce training spend during recession tend to lead organizations into treating training costs as an operating cost. As a result, employers neglect the training programs entirely (Kraiger et.al, 2004). Armstrong (2005) found out that the performance of companies who neglect training suffers by creating both the short and long run organizational problems. Longenecker and Fink (2005) claim that about 33% of the managers out of 278 operating in 16 different businesses confirmed reluctance to invest on training thus created problems more expensive than training cost. However, the general view of managers regarding the study state that when the organizations are serious to improve and want to respond to the change in the economy, the employers make it a priority, thereby resulting to tidy things. But there are always hurdles to training in short periods which eventually leads to problems.

5. Materials and Methods

A survey research method was adopted for the study. In order to maintain the focus of the study, the researcher has taken Adama Beverages Ltd as the case study. The study focused on employees of Adama Beverages. A total of 100 questionnaires were dispatched to the company. The research uses quantitative approach in gathering information which relies on structured data collection instruments and on random sampling that fits different experiences into predetermined response. As a result of using primary data to obtain information, this research study uses questionnaires to gather primary data from both employers and employees of Adama Beverages Ltd to identify issues relevant to the research. The same set of questionnaires was dispatched among employers and employees to assess what value they place on training and development during the recession. The questions were well structured so that respondents could be able to answer easily and to aid easy analysis. Some of the questions are direct, while some are open-ended

which require participants to answer in their own words to draw in-depth responses, as opposed to limited reactions. The set of questions are limited so that participants could complete the questionnaire in less than twenty minutes or so. The data obtained for the study was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as tables and simple percentage. Out of the 100 questionnaires distributed, 65 copies were returned appropriately and correctly filled.

6. Data Analysis

6.1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1 show that the number of male respondents (60%) exceeds that of the female respondents (40%) with the total of 39 and 26 respectively. Drawing from the above figure, the dominated gender among the respondents is male. About 13.6% of the respondents were 18 – 25years old, which indicates that most of the respondents are already considered as young adults. 32.3% of the respondents were between the ages of 26 – 33years old, while about 30.8% were between the ranges of 34 – 41years. On the other hand, 15.4% of the respondents were between 42 – 49years, and only 7.7% were 50 and above. The noticeable diversity of the maturity of respondents reflects several implications in the research findings, as the difference in the respondents' level of maturity has a potential impact on their responses.

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	39	60
	Female	26	40
	Total	65	100
Age	18-25 years	9	13.6
	26-33 years	21	32.3
	34-41 years	20	30.8
	42-49 years	10	15.4
	50 and above	5	7.7
	Total	65	100

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the respondents
Source: Field Survey, 2016

7. Analysis of Questionnaire Items

	Variable	Frequency	Percent
Length of work	1-6 months	15	23.07
	7-12 months	19	29.23
	1-3 years	26	40
	4 years and above	5	7.7
	Total	65	100
Level of investment	Yes	17	26.15
	No	5	7.7
	Can't Say	43	66.15
	Total	65	100
Training Session	Yes	57	87.7
	No	5	7.7
	Can't Say	3	4.6
	Total	65	100
If Yes?	Very Effective	18	32
	Averagely	32	56
	Not so effective	7	12
	Total	57	100
If No?	The training is not my choice	3	60
	The training program undervalues my skills	0	0
	I already know how to do my job	0	0
	Can't Say	1	20
	Other	1	20
	Total	5	100
Type of training	On –the-Job Training	37	56.9
	Off-the-Job Training	0	0
	On-Line Training	12	18.5
	Job Specific Training	16	24.6
	Total	65	100

Preferred Training	On –the-Job Training	23	35.4
	Off-the-Job Training	15	23.1
	On-Line Training	22	33.8
	Job Specific Training	5	7.7
	Total	65	100
Are you satisfied with the training	Yes	21	32.3
	No	14	21.5
	Can't Say	26	40
	Others	4	6.2
	Total	65	100
Impact of Recession on Training	Yes	23	35.3
	No	5	7.7
	Can't Say	37	56.9
	Total	65	100

Table 2: Analysis of the Questionnaire items
Source: Field Survey, 2016

7.1. For How Long Have You Been Working with the Organization?

The analysis indicates that among the completed and returned questionnaires, about 23% (1 -6months) of the respondents just started work at the organization. 29% of the respondents worked for 7 – 12months, 40% worked for 1 – 3years and only 8% worked for 4 - 5years. Therefore, the analysis shows that 40% (1 – 3years) and 8% (4 – 5years) of the respondents are rightly positioned to give valid information as regarding the organization's level of investment over the years.

7.2. Is The Organization Investing Adequately on Your Training Programs, Especially During Financial Difficulties?

The analysis above shows that 26.15% of employees believe that the company is adequately investing in their training and development programs and 7.7% of them believes otherwise, as they do not see the company investing heavily on them. While about 66.15% of the employees are unwilling to disclose the information, which makes it difficult for the researcher to draw a precise statement regarding whether or not the company is adequately investing on training programs. Perhaps this may be due to fear of losing their jobs, thus, makes it one of the limitations the researcher encounters.

7.3. Have You Gone Through Any Training Session Since You Joined the Company?

When asked if they have attended any training session, 88% of the respondents completed YES and 7.7% answered NO. While about 4% completed can't remember. The analysis above indicates a commitment and belief of the large majority of the employees to the value of training and development.

7.4. If Yes, How Effective Has It Been So Far on Your Job Role/Position?

This is only for those who answered "YES" to the previous question and about 57of respondents answered "Yes". Therefore, the table indicates that 32% of the answer obtained from the respondents are satisfied about the training program, 56% completed averagely and only about 12% of the respondent completed not so effective. As a result, the researcher believes that since majority of employees are satisfied with the training program; therefore, it could be argued that the organization supports training programs aimed at developing employees' skills.

7.5. If No, Why Did You Not Attend Any Training Session?

The respondents who answered "NO" to Question 4, and only 5 of the respondents answered "NO". As a result, the table above shows that 60% of respondents completed that training is not their choice, 0% completed that it undervalues their skills, 0% of the respondent completed that they already know how to perform their job. 20% completed can't say and 20% completed "Other". The analysis indicates that the five (5) employees that completed "NO" are not satisfied with the current training program. Consequently, the implication of the latter can lead to low morale and productivity. Moreover, there is also the tendency that employees may change employers.

7.6. What Type of Training Programs Was Rendered to You So Far?

When asked about the types of training rendered by the employees, 57% of the respondents completed on-the-job training, 0% on off-the-job training, 18% completed on-line training and about 25% completed job-specific training. The analysis shows that the organization does not invest in off-the job training as it is seen as luxury and costly. Therefore, the company invests more on-the-job training, which is more cost-effective and beneficial to both the employer and employee, as it relates to the given job. Even though, technology has made things easier, the analysis shows that the use of technology to deliver training in the company is low. Perhaps, the organization is reluctant or lacks the knowledge of using technology to deliver training.

7.7. Among All of the Above Listed Types of Training, Which Kind of Training Would You Prefer?

When asked what training program the employees 35% completed on-the-job training, 23% completed off-the-job training, 34% completed on-line training, and only about 8% completed job specific training. The analysis shows that every employee has his/her preferred training program. Some valued training that relates to their job, others prefer the training that takes them away from the work environment to a more relaxed environment. Moreover, some of the respondent's value on-line training because it is much easier and time effective (i.e. the training could be anywhere and anytime).

7.8. Are You Satisfied And Motivated with the Current Training Programs?

Table 2 shows that about 32% of the respondents are contented with the current training programs, 22% completed "NO", and 40% of the respondents are adamant and unwilling to respond. Only about 6% of the respondents have other reasons besides the given options. The "Others" state that there is communication gap between them and their employers, as they are often not aware of what trainings is available to them and its benefits. Moreover, the "Others" propose that it would be pleasant if the company would ask for their opinion before implementing training programs, as every individual has different preferences.

7.9. Do You Believe the Recession Has Led a Reduction in Investment in Training or Not?

When asked if the recession has an impact on training budgets, 35% of the respondents answered 'YES', 8% completed 'NO' and about 57% of the respondents completed can't say. Therefore, the analysis indicates that the employees that answered "YES" perceived a decline in the investment of training programs, perhaps because the company has prioritized the trainings only when necessary or to particular skills. While about 57% of the respondents, who are unwilling to respond are assumed to be afraid of losing their jobs because organizations consider revealing such information as a big offence because it is regarded as a company's "Top Secret" or "Confidential".

8. Conclusion

Drawing on from the survey conducted on the employees, the analysis shows that only about 26. 15% believes that the company is adequately investing in their training and development programs during the recession. The analysis indicates that more than half of the majority of the respondents were unwilling to give precise answer. This implies that the majority of Adama Beverages Ltd employees are unsure about whether the company is adequately investing in them. Similarly, the research work conforms to the theory of motivation by Herzberg (1969), which maintains that employees gain intrinsic job satisfaction when their employers invest in their development. The effect of engaging the workforce in training and development can be seen as having two-fold advantages, which are: the employees learn important skills and knowledge to be able to perform their job effectively at a higher level, and the employees at the same time become more committed and engaged to their organization.

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