

Aspiration

New Directions in HR Management



Tanzania Breweries Limited



Accelerating Skills Acquisition in Africa A Tanzanian Case Study

We live in a continent of challenge and opportunity and foremost on the agenda for HRD professionals is the challenge of people and development. And speed is of the essence here, specifically increasing the speed of skills acquisition or to put it another way reducing lead time for learning. We may know what has to be learned, technical and management content is more accessible than ever but do we have the implementation capability? Are we able to put structures in place in our organisations that increase the pace of learning? And are we utilising our secret weapon, the huge hunger of people on this continent to learn? The realisation that the acquisition of skills is the key to an improved life style and a better economy is top of mind for the majority of Africans.

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Our case study setting is a typical scenario. A large South African beverage manufacturing company enters a joint venture agreement with a Tanzanian company. There is considerable capital investment in technology to improve manufacturing processes. But the pressure is on to skill up local Tanzanian technical and management staff to be able to run operations with minimal and probably in time no ex pat guidance. So how do you implement a process to transfer skills and how do you ensure that it happens as quickly as possible

The Strategy

Clearly the training centred paradigm of the past will not work in this environment. The expense of setting up training programmes is very high with expertise having to be flown in. Flying people out to South Africa would be even more costly. Any strategy we use would have to bring learning into the workplace rather than take people off the job to get trained. To do this we would have to engage existing managers both local and ex pat as resources for on the job training.

The New Model for Learning

What is worse that not knowing how to do your job? Not knowing that you don't know. When we started out on this project we needed a structure around which to build skills profiles and bring them into the workplace and make them accessible to learners. In South Africa the NQF had been launched and the concept of a unit standard as a structure to define competence had been introduced. We decided to use the same unit standard structure for our project in Tanzania. Unit standards provide an efficient means to convey to learners what the required skills are and to what standard they are to be performed. They are also outcome based in that they focus on what people must be able to do. What we did was to construct unit standards for each of the key functions of the business and then assemble these into competence profiles or guides for the job. This is similar to way that unit standards are assembled for a qualification or

learnership in South Africa. But we added what I believe it a very important additional element. For every outcome we constructed learning objectives that matched the required assessment criteria. These learning objectives describe what the learner should be able to know or do. In other words we added the assessment checklists.

Example

Assessment Criteriia Criteria for determining competence	Learning Objective What the Learner must Know or do to meet criteria
Packing machine operated as per standard operating procedures and all quality and safety standards adhered to .	Demonstrate how to start up the packing machine. What quality and safety precautions need to be adhered to and what is the risk of non adherence?

These learning objectives that have triple purpose in the process. They inform the learner of what they have to be able to say and do about a process (they now know what they are supposed to know), they give the manager who conducts the assessment of competence the questions to ask learner and thirdly the completion or sign off of each question provides a short interval measurement system to track the progress of assessment. This third element is critical to driving the process because it is on the sign off of these learning objectives that targets are determined and progress is measured on a monthly basis.

Internet Technology

Trying to manage a large volume of information like this would be impossible without technology. A database management system was essential. But we had a problem initially in that the systems infrastructure at the client was inadequate for the effective management of this database. In addition to this the cost of maintaining an on site system would be very high if we had to send a technical programmer to Dar es Salaam each time there was a problem.

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We were able to overcome the problem by implementing an Internet based management system. This had a number of advantages. Firstly since it was hosted in South Africa all maintenance could be done here. The content could be readily changed and updated without incurring travelling costs and thirdly the company did not have to invest in expensive hardware and software to get the programme operational across a wider area. Internet connectivity was relatively inexpensive to set up and we were able to get the system to three plants in different parts of the country at very good response times. There were however problems with connectivity at times but because there are Internet Cafés in every major town in Africa, the managers could simply go to an internet café and continue working there.

Maintenance turnaround times are very quick, in some cases less than an hour and maintenance is at a very low cost. On one occasion an additional report was urgently needed by the client. A phone call to the programmer and one hour later the report had been loaded on the programme in South Africa and was available to the client company in Tanzania over the Internet.

Managing the process

Executive and management review is essential for the effective implementation of a programme of this nature. Our strategy to engage management was two fold. Firstly we trained all key managers in assessment and put them through an orientation that highlighted the fact that they themselves were

responsible for the development of their people. Secondly our technology solution provided a measurement system which allowed for progress targets to be set and monthly measurements to be monitored. Unless there is a measurement system management focus will fall away. We wanted the technology solution on the desk of the manager so that the capture of results and the monitoring of management reports was simply a click away.

The process has contributed significantly in a number of areas. In particular there has been a marked improvement in the consistency of operating efficiencies as well as improved quality, reduced waste and better capacity utilisation. The programme continues to receive focus and we emphasise that this is not a one off exercise but rather a continuous skills upgrade programme. The process is now in its third year and the skills profiles do require regular injections of new skills and knowledge. We also recommend a bi-annual qualitative review of the process that to ensure that it does not become a numbers game. There is no doubt that the organisation is finding huge benefits emerging from the focused approach to skills acquisition.

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