

Training Needs Assessment (TNA)¹

A training need exists when there is a gap between what is required of a person to perform their work competently and what they actual know.

A “training needs assessment”, or “training needs analysis”, is the method of determining if a training need exists and if it does, what training is required to fill the gap.

The results of training needs analysis will highlight the subject matter needed to be covered during the training course. The knowledge and skills gained during the training will increase abilities and allow participants to perform their jobs at an acceptable level. The needs assessment can be quite simple and obvious. For example, when a new information system is introduced, it is assumed that no one has the knowledge to operate it – and the training need is noted. However if the organization was switching systems, the need may not be so obvious. By conducting training needs analysis you can target the group that needs to be trained as well as hone in on exactly what training is required.

The purpose of conducting a needs assessment is to prevent a quick fix approach to business problems. A TNA done correctly will ensure the solution addresses the real issues and effectively focuses the appropriate resources, time and effort toward targeted solutions.

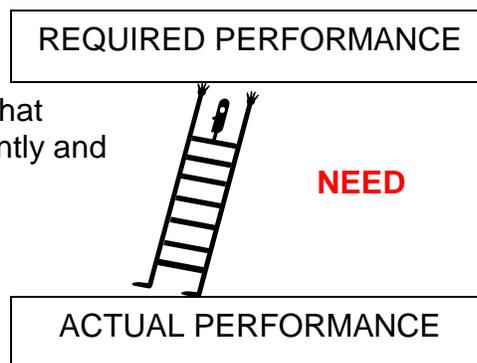
There is quite a bit of literature written on the topic. This paper presents only some major points.

The reasons for doing training needs assessment

- To determine whether training is needed
- To determine causes of poor performance
- To determine content and scope of training
- To determine desired training outcomes
- To provide a basis of measurement
- To gain management support

The Needs Assessment Process

The assessment can be as detailed and involved as needed. Factors to consider when considering the level of detail are time, money, number of people involved, criticalness of skill, anticipated return on investment?, resources available, etc.



A comparison of some of the factors between in-depth and a mini assessment follows.

	In-depth	Mini
Type of Information	Quantitative	Qualitative
Methods	Multi-tiered approach Surveys Observation Interviews Focus groups Document reviews	Interviews Focus groups
Scope	Widespread organizational involvement Broad ranging objectives	Fewer people involved Short term focus
Length	Several months to a year	Few days to a week
Cost	Expensive	Inexpensive
Focus	Linked or defined outputs	Immediate, quick results
Exposure/Visibility	High profile and risk	Lower risk

Determine whom to assess

Again this depends on the goal and depth of the analysis. Categories of people can include:

Senior management	Human resource personnel
Target population	Vendors
Target population managers	Clients
Direct reports (those who report to target population)	Competitors
Co-workers and peers	Industry experts or observers

Steps in the Needs Assessment Process

Step One: Identify Problem Needs

- Determine organizational context
- Perform gap analysis
- Set objectives

Step Two: Determine Design of Needs Analysis

- Establish method selection criteria
- Assess advantages and disadvantages for methods

Step Three: Collect Data

- Conduct interviews
- Administer questionnaires and surveys
- Review documents
- Observe people at work

Step Four: Analyze Data

- Conduct qualitative analysis
or Conduct Quantitative Analysis?
- Determine solutions/recommendations

Step Five: Provide Feedback

- Write report and make oral presentation
- Determine next step – Training needed?

Step Six: Develop Action Plan

Once this formal needs assessment process is completed the information is used as the basis for training design, development and evaluation. However you must continue to assess the attitudes, knowledge and skill level of participants prior to each session. Different audiences may have different needs. This can be done both through a basic questionnaire sent just prior to a specific training event and also during the welcome time of each session.

1. Excerpts from:

Basic Training For Trainers, A handbook for new trainers; Second Edition – Gary Kroehnert, McGraw-Hill Book Company Sydney, 1995.

The Trainers Handbook, Karen Lawson, Jossey-Bass Pfeiffer San Francisco; 1998.