What role can a training needs analysis play in organisational change?

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Abstract
Purpose – This research sets out to examine how the process for developing a training needs analysis tool could influence organisational change.

Design/methodology/approach – The organisation that is the subject of this research is a large, complex health system which is in transition from a traditional bureaucratic, hierarchy with a command and control management style to a more participative, people centred approach. A processual, organisation development, action research-based approach to the development of a training needs analysis process was taken in the study so that the changes desired in the organisation could be modelled in the first instance and secondly, in order to learn and understand more about what works and does not in order to continuously develop and progress the change agenda. In order to do this a parallel structure was established through which to progress the process which was tracked in an action research process. In addition, a series of interviews were conducted with top and senior management in order to ascertain their views about the process, its necessity, roles in relation to it, its potential benefits and how to introduce the process across the organisation.

Findings – A number of key points emerged from the research: first, the culture and change issues arising during the development of the learning and development needs analysis process were very significant. Second, the development and piloting of the needs analysis process needed to be approached as a change management process. Third, linking the needs analysis process with existing organisational processes was a key factor in the success of the process and created a strategic dimension. Finally, in a large, complex organisation a balance must be struck between standardisation and customisation of the needs analysis process to allow for the different structures, subcultures and levels of readiness in the organisation.

Originality/value – This research highlighted the significant impact the dynamics of hierarchy and the legacy of a bureaucratic, autocratic system has on the way a system operates and how people react to change and participation.

Keywords Training, Organizational change, Organizational development, Training needs

Paper type Research paper

Introduction
Despite the seemingly universal agreement that a thorough training needs analysis should underpin all training plans and budgets the literature also acknowledges that it does not often take place and is often not done in organisations (Wills, 1998; Bartram and Gibson, 1999; Boydell and Leary, 1996; Garavan et al., 1995). For the purposes of this study the term “training needs analysis” will be used and taken to mean the process of gathering, assessing and analysing data to determine the training needs for
an organisation. Later on in this paper, the term learning and development needs analysis has been adopted, although this term is not generally found in the literature. It was deliberately chosen as part of a strategy, to broaden the focus of training and development in the organisation beyond the traditional training courses.

Within the organisation, there is a predominant tendency to think of training in terms of courses only and this has been reinforced through the role played to date by the training function. Again however, there is little in the literature relating to the conduct of an organisation wide training needs analysis in a large complex organisation, for the purposes of determining the overall and specific area training need, in order to develop appropriate plans, which enable the provision of “the learning opportunities required to achieve the goals of the organisation” (Boydell and Leary, 1996).

Furthermore, there is little if any consideration given to change issues which may arise in introducing a training needs analysis process in an organisation. A number of texts (Boydell and Leary, 1996; Garavan et al., 1995; Reid and Barrington, 1999) mention the sensitivity required and the fact that people can be sensitive about training needs analysis, particularly as it can highlight areas of deficit. Research by Anderson (1994) and Holton et al. (2000) both address training needs analysis in terms of a change process. None of the literature addresses the concept, that conducting a training needs analysis in itself could have any impact or role in overall organisational change. This paper sets out to explore how, in a time of organisational change a training needs analysis process can get people on board with the change and be a change intervention in itself.

Organisational change and learning
According to Snyder and Cummings (1998), organisations’ abilities to change are necessary for survival. This capacity of change is associated with organisational learning since organisations have to be able to learn from past experiences, effectively use “lessons learnt” correct errors and disseminate this knowledge within the organisation if they are to change and adapt themselves to the continuously changing market. Organisational learning means changes in what the organisation knows and how it acts (Forss et al., 1994).

Schein (1999) states that his thinking on change has evolved from a model of planned change to a concept of managed learning. Schein (1999, p. 60) operates from a belief that “all forms of learning and change start with some form of dissatisfaction or frustration generated by data that disconfirm our expectations or hopes”. He points out that we can ignore this information and that to move to action it must be accompanied by a level of anxiety that, for example, if we do not change we will fail in some way. People become defensive in learning or change because we have to admit that something is wrong or not perfect. “Learning anxiety is a fundamental restraining force” and dealing with this is a key to achieving change (Schein, 1999, p. 60).

Antonacopoulou (2001) examined the interrelationships between training, learning and change. She found that “managers have come to believe that learning is training and more specifically, that learning is going on courses”. Paradoxically the managers in her study also found that training was a barrier to learning in that the timing, structure and match with learners and provision of opportunity to explore and question was inadequate. Antonacopoulou’s findings indicate that structured training is not always a learning opportunity.
Preskill and Torres (1999, p. 92) explored the role of evaluative enquiry in creating learning organisations and proposed that “traditional forms of evaluation be re-conceptualised as evaluative enquiry for organisational learning”. They propose that evaluative enquiry could be an approach to “understanding, improving and changing organisational life” (Preskill and Torres, 1999, p. 93). They identified a number of processes at the core of evaluative enquiry and these are; asking questions; identifying and challenging values, beliefs and assumptions; reflection; dialogue; collecting, analysing and interpreting data; action planning and; implementation. Through these processes Preskill and Torres (1999) suggest that organisations may progress through single and double loop learning and deutero learning as described by Argyris and Schön (1978). Further, they suggest that evaluation can play a powerful role in organisational learning if integrated into organisational culture. Preskill and Torres (1999) see evaluative enquiry as a process for learning in organisations and as an organisational learning approach to organisational change (Preskill and Torres, 1999). Through this proposed process outlined above people can be encouraged to engage actively in the evaluation process. Through the process many of the elements required to develop a learning culture and subsequently change may be developed, modelled and encouraged. Reflection is critical to organisational learning and an element often perceived as a luxury intoday’s pressure driven workplace, it is also an area that needs to be developed in large organisations that have yet to make the shift from being reactive to proactive.

The concept of the learning organisation as applied to the transformation of the public sector is explored by Finger and Bürgin Brand (1999). They argue that public sector organisations are particularly slow to change and that because of that transformation of the public sector must be conceptualised as a collective learning process:

In our view public sector organisations are not qualitatively different from private sector organisations, but they operate in a more difficult environment, which makes their functioning and their management more complex (Finger and Bürgin Brand, 1999, p. 131). They also find that for historical reasons public sector organisations tend to be more bureaucratic and as such are a challenge to those wishing to introduce learning organisation concepts into management practice. They further note that those writing about learning organisations refer to the private sector only. Finger and Bürgin Brand (1999) see organisational learning as a process which contributes to organisational transformation and suggest that to create a learning organisation, individual and collective learning must be explicitly linked to the strategic objectives of the organisation.

**Methodology**

Schein (1999) cautions that a major conceptual error in change management is to separate diagnosis from intervention and that action research concepts are very important in change management. Scheins’ (1999, p. 64) fundamental assertion that “you cannot understand a system until you try to change it” is founded on the:

... assumption that everything we do with a client system is an intervention and that, unless we intervene, we will not learn what some of the essential dynamics of the system really are.
In suggesting that change is better defined as learning Schein (1999, p. 71) states that “the involvement of the learner is crucial to any kind of planned change or, as we might better conceptualise it – ‘managed learning’

Therefore, an action research approach was selected for this research as it is acknowledged in the literature as a common organisational approach to organisational change. In the research context, action research allows collaborative problem solving with those involved and the generation of new knowledge (Coghlan and Brannick, 2001). It allows the study of a process directly as it unfolds. Gummesson (2000, p. 51) considers that the:

... roles of change agent and senior executive provide the most comprehensive access to strategic and organisational issues...(and that)...participation in the chain of events gives the researcher privileged access that will facilitate both the development of theory and practice.

Gummesson (2000) considers that the level of pre-understanding and access to the reality of any process balances against concerns around objectivity. The current research is based on the analysis of the development of a needs analysis process in an Irish Health Board and data from a series of semi-structured interviews with top and senior management. The research was designed to address the following questions:

**RQ1.** In a time of organisation change how does the process for developing a training needs analysis tool influence organisational change?

**RQ2.** How can a training needs analysis process help get people on board with the organisational change?

**The organisation**
The subject organisation is a large complex health system, employing in excess of 10,000 employees in a vast range of positions and grades, covering the full spectrum of health services from hospital to community, to mental health, to elderly care. The organisation is in the relatively early stages of transition from a traditional bureaucratic hierarchy with an autocratic command and control management style, to a more participative style of management. At the present time, the organisation is operating in a period of more or less continuous change from internal and external sources, with political pressures, high demands for services and quality from the public and ongoing resource issues.

The key change areas for the organisation at the present time are as follows:

- **Participation.** This includes a move towards a people centred approach to both staff and service users, a participative management style, increased and improved communication and a partnership approach to work and developments.
- **Learning organisation culture.** Shifting from a blame culture to one of learning from mistakes, reflective practice, trying new things, innovation and creativity, risk taking and an action learning/research approach to new projects.
- Encouraging individual responsibility and ownership around learning.
- A strategic approach to HR generally and in the context of this research to learning and development in particular. A shift from a reactive to a proactive
approach and the encouragement and development of the line manager role in relation to people management and development.

- Increased collaboration and co-operation across the organisation. Increased team work and a decrease in fragmentation and competitiveness.

The development of a parallel learning structure

A processual, organisation development, action research-based approach to the development of a training needs analysis process is taken in this study, so that the changes desired in the organisation may be modelled in the first instance, and secondly in order to learn and understand more about what works and does not work in order to continuously develop and progress the change agenda.

To do this, what is termed a parallel learning structure was established through which to progress the process. According to French and Bell (1999, p. 94):

"Parallel learning structures are a mechanism to facilitate innovation in large bureaucratic organisations where the forces of inertia, hierarchical communication patterns and standard ways of addressing problems inhibit learning, innovation and change. In essence parallel structures are a vehicle for learning how to change the system and then leading the change process."

Two distinct services, located in different counties and representing different programme areas of the organisation took part in the study. One was a mental health service with approximately 380 staff and the other a community services programme with approximately 240 staff. Each programme has a wide range of different staff grades, although the diversity of functions would be greater in Community Services. These two sites were self selected following a change initiative, which had taken place previously in the organisation. All staff were invited to put forward change ideas through an ideas questionnaire. In the process that followed, 22 change projects were identified and "undertaking a training needs analysis" which had been put forward by the both sites, was number ten on that list.

As a first step in the process, a parallel learning structure was put in place with the establishment of a steering group. A steering group of 12 was set-up in such a way as to try to represent a cross section or microcosm of the overall organisation. The steering group included two representatives from each site who were selected by them.

The process

Following initial entry and contracting with the two sites and the steering group the process worked through the stages of diagnosis, planning, action and evaluation according to the traditional cyclical action research process (Kolb and Frohman, 1970). The process was tracked over a period from February 2002 to end of January 2003. Throughout the process data coming from various sources was collected. This data consisted of minutes of each meeting, detailed notes of each meeting by a note taker who noted full details of what was discussed, the dynamics and atmosphere in the meeting, a reflection diary, where thoughts and reflections on the process were recorded, analysed and reviewed, notes from all contacts relevant to the process, full records of all group activities and flipchart work, raw data from the focus groups and data coming from evaluation.
The interviews
Following the development of the needs analysis process a series of semi-structured interviews were conducted with top and senior management to ascertain their views about the benefits or affects they would expect to see from the process, the level of participation and role they would like in the process, who they see as having a role, their views regarding implementation and its contribution if any to overall change in the organisation.

A total of 18 top and senior managers were invited to participate in the interviews. The option of face-to-face or telephone interview was offered to enhance the possibility of securing interviews with this group.

Of the respondents, 16 responded to the request and of that number a total of 13 were interviewed, 12 face-to-face and one by telephone as the individual had been called to another site. Those interviewed included the CEO, regional managers, directors of functions and general managers. Each interview lasted approximately an hour and was recorded in note.

Results
The main result of the process was that through adopting an action research approach to the development of the process researchers were able to learn about the organisation, the enablers and blockers to change and what needs to be built into future interventions. The process was quite different for the two sites and there were different outcomes for each. This is particularly interesting as the organisation is in transition as outlined earlier and this transition was reflected in the two sites. As a result of going through this process, a tool was developed for identifying learning and development needs that reflects organisational thinking and needs. Insights have also been gained which will be built into future developments in the area of learning and development in the organisation.

The development of the training needs analysis tool through the parallel structure and the evaluative inquiry approach to the evaluation of the process modelled reflective practice for the organisation and provides an opportunity for it to look at itself through reflecting it back to itself. It also modelled and addressed the key organisational change issues of participation, strategic focus, learning organisation culture and collaboration.

The results will be reported in the format of a case study. The case study will be reported chronologically and divided into the stages of the cycle of planned change. The results of the interviews will be reported separately.

Entry and contracting
This stage of the cycle was about starting the work with the two pilot sites and contracting what the work was to be about. This took place between December 2001 and February 2002.

Meeting with site A
Initially it was hard for this group to focus on training needs analysis as they were distracted with general issues around training. There was a strong element of dependency also in that everything was about what others should do, whereas a large number of the
issues were within their remit to control and change. With facilitation the group engaged with the task and the eventual outcome of the meeting was very productive.

Meeting with site B
It was difficult to engage with this site from the start. Many unsuccessful attempts were made to engage with the manager and the situation was resolved when we met at an organisational event. The manager decided to route the process through his training and development group who dealt with these issues as line managers did not have the time to take on board training. Several attempts were made to engage this group and were cancelled but eventually four members were met. This group had been planning to go their own route around training needs analysis and were investigating companies to do the work. Issues around authority and identity arose here.

Diagnosis
The diagnostic process really started with the establishment of the steering group and exploration of the area with them. The first meeting of the steering group took place in February 2002. A number of key discussions and decisions took place at the initial meeting, many of which would resurface throughout the process.

- Discussion took place on the importance of focussing on the “process” rather than the “task” and it was stressed that the aim of the group should be on the “how” rather that the “what” of identifying and analysing training needs.

- It was acknowledged that ownership of training is a key element in its success in terms of decision making. To make any analysis process successful it was deemed essential to have management buy-in at all levels.

- The group explored the principles of a learning organisation and also explored what was working and not working in the organisation in relation to learning and development. In order words, an attempt to find a shared vision for the group.

- Wider organisational issues and their implications for the organisation developing as a learning organisation, and for the development of the process were considered and discussed. These issues included fragmentation, urgency, dependency, leadership, identity, power, competence, inclusion and exclusion.

- The next step identified was to carry out consultations with the two pilot sites to discover what was working well, not working well and improvements needed and to feed this information into the process.

There was a high level of energy, enthusiasm and engagement and energy at this first meeting. However, focussing on process rather than task was difficult for some. There was a strong valence to make quick decisions and assumptions and jump straight into the task. This may be summed up in a quote from one participant towards the end of the day “oh yeah, that’s task again, need to focus on the process”.

Consultations with pilot sites
At the consultations people were divided into small groups, each of which was facilitated. The facilitators role was to keep groups focussed and prevent them straying from the specific areas they were to address and to encourage and facilitate participation from all.
Planning
The planning stage of the project covered a number of elements.

- Determining which approach to take. Initially a range of approaches used in other agencies and outlined in the literature were under consideration. Early on however, it came to the attention of the group that the national government organisation responsible for the improvement and development of management in the health services had commissioned the development of a learning and development needs identification toolkit. This toolkit covered identification of learning and development needs at corporate, service, department/unit and individual levels. Overall the consensus was that the toolkit seemed to fit conceptually with what the group was hoping to achieve.

- Determining the supports needed. One of the key messages to be communicated to line managers was that the toolkit aimed at identifying needs not to remedying them. Site A went ahead with its meeting and during the meeting decided that the key was to tie the process in with the service planning[1] process in their area. Site B decided to pursue matters alone and indicated that the process as outlined would not suit them.

- Planning the pilots. During this stage plans were constructed for both sites. It was also decided to do a service level SWOT analysis.

A lot of issues arose for the steering group at its second meeting. There was significant resistance during the meeting in various forms. Dependency was one of the first in the form of avoidance of the work and focus on a list of organisational “shoulds” that were preventing our work or would make it pointless. Some group members were stuck on their own agendas and there was a lot of fragmentation of effort. There were also fight/flight reactions “we are not doing that stuff” “we did SWOT 5 years ago . . . that would be going backwards”. There were also authority issues in that representatives from one site said they could not do anything without their manager or chair of their local group. Following that meeting similar fight/flight, identity, fragmentation, authority and dependency issues arose in contacts with site B around the process and related matters. At the following steering group meeting the researcher reflected on what had happened at the last meeting and named the issues. Discussion took place about how the group was mirroring the wider organisation and what needed to be built into the process to reduce these issues. There was almost a sense of relief in the group that the issues had been raised, silence initially then comments “I am glad you said that as I was confused” “need to stick to the process, got caught on side issues”. Distractions occurred during this next meeting but the group regulated itself and brought itself back on track. Some dependency and fragmentation issues arose.

Action
A number of wider organisational issues arose as we entered this phase. A pattern had emerged of fight/flight, fragmentation, authority, identity and dependency issues with site B in particular and also in the steering group. One of the representatives from site B resigned from the group because they had moved jobs. Much effort went into trying to get a replacement for this person. The continuing organisational crisis was a significant factor as all energies were diverted to addressing the situation. The mood in
the organisation was negative and the level of control from head quarters had increased significantly.

Engagement had become a major issue and was unpicked a bit further. A number of possible reasons were considered in relation to site B; fear of loss of control, fear the T&D group work would no longer be perceived as valuable, fear of redundancy if line managers take of role more fully re training, fear of more work. It was decided that it would be important to try to involve this site more in the design of how the process would work and an intervention was planned for the next meeting.

At the next meeting reflection took place in the group around what was going on in the wider organisation and with the sites. The current organisational difficulties were acknowledged but there was strong commitment to proceed with the groups work and that it may be more important than ever to have a learning and development needs analysis process. Organisational issues arising were urgency (a sudden rush to roll out the process immediately without completing the pilots) and fragmentation (during the early part of the meeting a lot of other issues were thrown on the table). Problem solving around how the process would work and the pathway for the needs analysis proved very difficult and the group struggled with this. However, a shift occurred in the group and it became more process focussed and organisational issues were not used as a barrier, there was a good sense of energy and engagement.

**Evaluation – findings from the evaluation questionnaire**

The findings from the two main sites indicated a difference in experience of the process at the two sites. There were differences in the actual processes, sequence of events and structures at the two sites. Overall, members from site A viewed the experience and process more positively than those from site B. The findings that were common to both sites are outlined below. The overall findings were as follows:

- The link to the service planning process was positive and productive.
- The use of a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis process was helpful.
- Staff involvement and team approach was positive.
- *Prioritisation*. Helped to develop a plan linked to service priorities and to prioritise the training needed.
- Sites identified local resources and sources for training.
- The process was thought provoking.
- A personal development planning process needs to be in place also.
- Ensured emphasis and focus on learning and development.

**Key findings from interviews with senior management**

Once the pilot was complete interviews were conducted with senior management to ascertain their views on the process and where they saw it fitting overall. All interviewees said that changes to the current system of training needs analysis are needed. All indicated that there is no formalised approach, the situation is *ad hoc* and reactionary and that training is not necessarily linked to service or organisational needs. With regard to the benefits or affects of the new system for the organisation a
A number of core themes emerged. There was a general agreement that staff would be more empowered and as a result would be more able to cope with organisational changes, better skilled, able to provide a better service and have an increased sense of self worth and confidence. Responsibility was highlighted on two levels. The first being taking responsibility for one's own development and to take time to reflect on development needs. The second to take more responsibility around decisions and that a system would make for better decisions around use of learning and development monies and greater transparency and fairness.

In contrast to the views about increased transparency and fairness was a view that the system might highlight inequities in the current system and upset the equilibrium or balance of power in some areas. In addition there could be resistance from groups that had done well under the previous arrangements and might fear that their circumstances might change.

The more corporate approach was seen to have smaller groups be part of a wider organisational process and also to help harness resources and needs thus increasing value for money through wiser use of funds. In contrast, there was also anxiety around the potential demand for resources as a result of the process and increased pressure to deliver. The issue of increased staff demands was contrasted in some quarters with beliefs that training is a threat or sign of weakness and needing to shift culture and thinking around this.

In relation to introducing the process to the organisation a number of key issues emerged. More support, buy in and endorsement by the senior management team and all levels of management was highlighted. A strong communication strategy to bring people on board, and sell the benefits to the organisation at large was also identified. The broader education of line managers was seen as key, to include not only education around the system but also to help them to let go of control and empower people to make their own decisions around development. The linking of the process to service planning and with national and corporate strategy was also seen as essential. Other areas highlighted for the successful implementation of the process were learning from previous experience and processes, putting in place plans and structures to support it, agreeing budgets, managing expectations, being prepared to give it time and reinforcing the new system by weighting in favour of needs identified through the system so that the old way does not continue to be effective.

The following quotes give a flavour of the other impacts on organisational change discussed by the interviewees:

If we get a culture of willingness to train does it not say they are willing to change. The start of a change process, willingness to change, no matter how small would be the start of a process would it not?

In broad terms, create a huge change, shift in culture, enable the organisation to achieve its organisational goals. If people get involved in training, start to gel across the service – impact on other thinking. If you change thinking you change behaviour.

Chipping away at the entrenched culture. Create commitment to organisational goals, local first – difficulty with HQ – big, bad brother. Commitment to HQ more aligned through this as people begin to see the connection between their own development and organisation development and strategy.
The following table illustrates the linkages between the data generated/gathered during the action research process and interviews and the organisational change areas identified at the outset. This table shows some of the potential influences of the learning and development needs analysis process on these change issues (which were presented above) and how the process may bring people on board (Table I).

**Discussion and conclusions**

It is very clear from the process outlined above that organisational culture and change issues had a very large role to play in the development of a needs analysis process for the organisation. The development of a needs analysis process was a struggle and in the end the determination of the specific methodologies to use was the easiest part of the whole process. By far the most difficult element was dealing with and understanding the cultural and change issues arising. This finding agrees with the bulk of the training needs analysis literature which focuses on methodology and gives only passing reference to culture or change issues (Boydell and Leary, 1996; McClelland, 1993; Leat and Lovell, 1997; Schneier et al., 1988).

Taking an action research approach to the development of the learning and development needs analysis process helped to highlight the significant impact the dynamics of hierarchy and the legacy of an autocratic, bureaucratic system has on the way a system operates and how people react to change and to participation in particular (Neumann, 1989). The legacy of years of a blame culture and dependency were very evident throughout the process. While people identified changes needed, sometimes it was easier to decide that it was the anonymous organisations problem or for “management” to address rather than take steps to look for solutions. Similarly, the work of Alderfer (1980) proved useful in identifying that some of the issues arising during the process may be related to an under-bounded training system and a more underbounded site. In a hierarchical organisation it is difficult at first to think of underbounded systems, however the organisation is, as noted earlier, in transition and different conditions pertain in different parts. As Alderfer (1980) notes most OD interventions are designed for overbounded systems and quite different interventions are required for underbounded ones. Similarly by modelling and highlighting these issues the organisation may learn more about itself and the process of bringing people on board with change may be enhanced by understanding some of the dynamics better.

While it is difficult to attribute specific influence, particularly in the context of the many competing factors, there is no doubt that engaging in the development of a needs analysis process through an action research approach provided many insights into how to effect change in the organisation and the organisational dynamics that affect change. This learning will be applied to the implementation of this needs analysis process and is also available to others in the organisation. Reid and Barrington (1999) state that training is an important facilitator of organisational change, perhaps involving them in the development of the needs analysis process is a further facilitator of change as they learn to identify and deal specifically with the change issues arising rather than being the passive recipients of a fait accompli. Schein (1999, p. 64) asserts that “you cannot understand a system until you try to change it”. Had the process not been conducted in this manner, and for example, been owned by the learning and development function and imposed, no insights would have been gained around why it might have worked better at one site than another. The approach also helped to signal the shift in the learning and development role from that of training administration to a
Participation
Stakeholders were involved from the start, focus groups were held and feedback was provided.

Space for all in the process, senior managers see a role for all, staff asked for in consultation, evaluation indicated staff were involved.
System facilitates team-based decision-making re L&D priorities.

Clear connection between what staff requested in the consultation process and what the process enables.
Senior management – smaller groups now part of wider organisational process.

Need for engagement of all acknowledged in steering group and by senior managers.
Senior management quotes re modelling how we want to do business in a participative way.

Building on and reinforcing the participative process started recently with service planning.

Collaboration and cooperation
The coordinated, collaborative approach built into the end of the process re planning delivery following needs identification models collaboration.
Development of above element and pathway for the process by the steering group despite the struggle.

Evaluation process, steering group and interviewees see process as encouraging team work. Team approach seen as positive.
Process encouraged the acknowledgement and harnessing of internal skills and resources in learning and development.

Through harnessing all needs and seeing as a whole greater value for money can be achieved and reduced duplication – as noted in interviews.
Interviewee discussed ability to coordinate with other organisations once our needs known.
The steering group modelled working across silos despite resistance at times to collaboration from parts of the system.

Learning organisation
Process set in the context of learning organisation.

Process modelled action research/learning process and dissemination of evaluation report in action research cycle format further models and reinforces.

Evaluative inquiry approach involved steering group in learning and further modelled.

People were exposed to a different way of working and to a reflection process and building on learning.

Reported as “thought provoking” in the evaluation data. Senior managers commented that it would make people think, encourage reflection.

Recognition by steering group and senior managers of the time required, as opposed to urgency.

Steering group and interviewees seeing learning and development needs analysis process as a change process.

Requests for personal development planning from sites and senior managers.

Table I.
Linkages between the development of the learning and development needs analysis process and organisational change.

<table>
<thead>
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<tr>
<td>Steering group learning that this was bigger than just a service issue but a complex organisation wide issue.</td>
<td>People were exposed to a different way of working and to a reflection process and building on learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steering group noting the fact that different parts of the organisation operate differently.</td>
<td>Reported as “thought provoking” in the evaluation data. Senior managers commented that it would make people think, encourage reflection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewees seeing the process as helping people see the link between individual needs and organisational goals.</td>
<td>Recognition by steering group and senior managers of the time required, as opposed to urgency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linkages identified in interviews to national and organisational strategy, OD and service developments.</td>
<td>Steering group and interviewees seeing learning and development needs analysis process as a change process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The need for senior management involvement and endorsement and the linking of the process to new developments.</td>
<td>Requests for personal development planning from sites and senior managers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line manager role acknowledged.</td>
<td>Process and the way it was conducted helped shift from concept of training administration function to corporate learning and development function.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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more HRD role and reinforce what Anderson (1994) describes as the shift to a more “facilitator of change” role. The linkage between the learning and development function and OD further underscored this shift (Grieves and Redman, 1999). It was interesting to note, however, the resistance to this linkage and shift from various parts of the organisation. Perhaps the reaction is an indication of the influence on change in the area of collaboration that the process had. For some, collaboration is a threat.

The linkage of the needs analysis process to the service planning process in the organisation and the conduct of the two in tandem was one of the key success factors emerging from this process. This represents a major change for this organisation which has no history of a strategic approach to training or systematically linking it directly to the business of the organisation. As noted in Holton et al. (2000) study also, there was not a performance-based culture in the public services. As one of the interviewees said “health is not into performance related anything”. This situation is changing overall, and this particular process may be a first step, from a learning and development point of view, to relate learning and development activities explicitly to the performance required of the organisation. In addition this process is one more step in moving training from a reactive to a proactive process and in modelling a proactive approach for the organisation. In this way the development of the process may be said to have influenced organisational change in terms of taking a strategic approach to training and has helped get people on board with this change.

The fact that the process developed encourages and in fact requires widespread participation and reinforces the participation already developed in the service planning process is an influencer of change in the area of participation. By encouraging people to become involved in such processes more staff are exposed to different ways of working and team approaches. Neumann (1989) described structural reasons, which included HR management, why people do not participate in organisational change. This process represents one HR process designed specifically to encourage participation.

The challenges involved in implementing a large-scale learning and development needs analysis process are immense and this study has served to underscore this. Even without the challenges the organisation is currently facing, which are a threat to the very learning and development function, the task of dealing with the size, complexity and subcultures of the organisation is very challenging. With the exception of the Holton et al. (2000) study there is little in the training needs analysis literature to offer advice and this still remains an area requiring further research.

This was a small-scale case study and one must be cautious about claims made as a result. This research was conducted in one organisation and in just two of its many sites. Furthermore, the study has focussed on the initial stages of developing the needs analysis process. Future research looking at a number of organisations and tracking the process and dynamics over a longer period of time would help yield greater insights to the change processes occurring and issues arising. In addition, it would be interesting to include both public and private sector organisations in future research. Determining causal relationships between specific events and change is difficult. Further research is required into the change aspects of training needs analysis and how it might better reflect the fuller HRD role of the training area. The literature points out that training needs analysis is often not undertaken in organisations (Wills, 1998). Training needs analysis is described in the literature as part of the training process but in terms of other organisational activities it is not explicitly linked (Reid and

What role can a training needs analysis play?
Barrington, 1999; Boydell and Leary, 1996). Perhaps further research around methods or approaches which might integrate the training needs analysis process more fully with other organisational systems may be useful in encouraging organisations to see training needs analysis more favourably.

The key learning points arising from this research may be summarised as follows:

- The culture and change issues arising during the development of the learning and development needs analysis process were very significant.
- The development and piloting of the needs analysis process needed to be approached as a change management process.
- Linking the needs analysis process with existing organisational processes was a key factor in the success of the process. The specific link with the service planning process directly links learning and development to the business of the organisation and creates a strategic dimension.
- In a large, complex organisation a balance must be struck between standardisation and customisation of the needs analysis process to allow for the different structures, subcultures and levels of readiness in the organisation.

Note
1. Service planning was introduced into the Irish Health services with the Health Amendment Act (No. 3) (1996). A service plan is a high level document produced by the Health Boards, which outlines the range of services to be provided within the allocated resources as notified for the year to which the plan relates. It is a contract between the Department of Health and Children and the Health Board and is the link between the Board’s strategic and operational plans. In the last 18 months Boards have been directed to adopt a more consultative approach bringing all staff into the process of developing the plan.

References


Further reading

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What role can a training needs analysis play?

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