

Training Practices and Employee Performance at Alutkot Savings and Credit Co-operative Society in Oyam District, Uganda

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Abstract

This article analyses the role of training practices on employee performance in Alutkot Savings and Credit Co-operative Society (SACCO) in Oyam district, Uganda. The article also analyses the loopholes in training programmes of the Society. The problem of concern is that despite the heavy investments in training, with the aim of improving staff performance, the benefits from training are not commensurate with the resource-input and stakeholder expectations. Alutkot SACCO still faces some performance challenges that have continued to affect client satisfaction and retention. Hence, revenues as well as profits margins have been lower than expected. Using interviews and document analysis methods, the authors established that while training has majorly been beneficial to the success of Alutkot SACCO, the way the training is managed has, over time, come to be riddled with loopholes. Otherwise, training practices (training planning, implementation and evaluation) still have positive effects on employee performance which have been incremental every year for the eight years (2009-2016) under study, but a lot is sometimes lost in the wrong choice of trainees; less committed trainers; and long distances to the training venues. Therefore, the authors recommend that employee training should continue to be emphasized as those loopholes get plugged in a bid to promote both employee and organizational performance.

Key words: Training planning, training implementation, training evaluation, employee performance

Introduction

Training in cooperative societies is mainly aimed at improving employee and organizational performance. To improve performance, Alutkot Savings and Credit Co-operative Society (SACCO) trains staff. In this article, we analyse training practices in terms of training planning, training implementation, and training evaluation. Meanwhile, employee performance is analysed from the perspective of mobilized customers, and customer retention. This analysis is on Alutkot SACCO, a microfinance institution based in Oyam district in Northern Uganda.

Microfinance, which was first introduced by Muhammad Yunus in Bangladesh in the 1970s, refers to the small and low-interest loans to poor people aimed at improving their livelihoods (Kabuga, 2005). Microfinance in form of microloans was provided through non-profit making humanitarian organizations such as Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) which focused on empowering the poor especially at household level. In Uganda, in the last ten years or so, there has been renewed government interest in the revival, establishment and development of the cooperative movement as evidenced by the institution a Microfinance Support Centre

through which to channel the financial and other government support to, especially, the Savings and Credit Cooperative Organizations (SACCOs) (Mugenyi, 2010). Alutkot SACCO is one such institution that operates under the principles of cooperative organizations.

Alutkot SACCO started operations in 1998 with 34 shareholders, and was affiliated to a Growers' Cooperative Society in the same area. Later on in 1999, Uganda Cooperative Alliance (UCA) carried out capacity building in the institution, and in 2001 the institution was registered as a Limited Company. It later registered as a SACCO in 2003 with support from Uganda Cooperative Alliance Ltd (UCA), starting with 46 members. The SACCO encourages and offers employee development opportunities to its core management staff both on private and organizational arrangement to enable them learn better skills and work more efficiently and effectively (Alutkot SACCO 2011 AGM Minutes). Alutkot SACCO Annual Financial Report 2012 indicates that through planned activities, employees have attained knowledge and skills through different training programmes to serve the clients better. The SACCO provides training opportunities to its employees to promote their development with the hope of improving performance. The key performance goals of the SACCO are: increased revenues, customer retention, and improved financial management and record keeping (Alutkot Annual Report, 2012). However, even with collaborative training, Alutkot SACCO still faces performance challenges, specifically relating to effectiveness and efficiency in service delivery.

The problem

Alutkot SACCO with support from GIZ and Uganda Co-operative Alliance (UCA) has over the years attempted to build the capacity of staff through training with the view to enhance knowledge, skills, commitment and attitude. Indeed, as a result of training, Alutkot SACCO has realized some improvement in employee performance (Alutkot SACCO Annual Report, 2012). Specifically, staff at Alutkot have been able to plan, implement and evaluate their work which has led to some improvement in their overall performance in terms of customers mobilized, records kept and customers retained.

However, despite the heavy investment in training from 2009 to 2016, Alutkot SACCO continues to face some performance challenges. According to the Alutkot Financial Report of 2016, customer care is low and this has continued to affect client satisfaction and retention. Revenues and profit margins have dwindled. Alutkot employees' capacity to increase revenue is apparently insufficient; and records management by the staff is still poor thereby affecting overall performance of the SACCO staff and the organization as well. Therefore, this article attempts to examine the training processes and how they affect employee performance in Alutkot SACCO. Specifically, this article attempts to answer three questions:

- i. What is the role of training planning on the employee performance in Alutkot SACCO?
- ii. How does employee training implementation influence employee performance in Alutkot SACCO?
- iii. What is the role of employee training evaluation on employee performance in Alutkot SACCO?

- iv. What loopholes exist in the training interventions at Alutkot SACCO that militate against the achievement of training objectives?

Understanding employee performance

Employee performance refers to the pattern of access of outputs from employee production process per unit output (Scott, 2006). Employee performance is the outcome of the employee effort in an organization. According to Maingi (2014), performance refers to the accomplishment of something or mere working effectiveness. In an organization, performance is realized at the levels of organization, processes, and individuals and the interrelationships among these variables define the vantage points of the organization.

Performance management continuously provides a focal point for consideration of the key performance and training issues. The five primary performance management elements of agreement, measurement, feedback, positive reinforcement and dialogue can be put to good use through performance review meetings. The review should be rooted in the reality of the individual's performance. Armstrong (2013) argues that the true role of employee performance management is to look forward to what needs to be done by the employees to achieve the purpose of the job, to meet new challenges, to make even better use of their knowledge, skills and abilities, to develop their capabilities by establishing a self-managed training agenda, and to reach agreements on any areas where performance needs to be improved and how that improvement should take place.

The criteria for reviewing performance should focus on achievements in relation to objectives of the organization such as revenue generation, appropriate record keeping and customer retention. There should also be a balance between the level of knowledge and skills possessed and applied (competences); behaviour on the job as it affects performance; the degree to which behaviour upholds the core values of the organization; and day-to-day effectiveness (Nduhukire & Rutamuhebwa, 2005). In this article, we limit employee performance only to revenue generation, record keeping and customer retention at Alutkot SACCO.

The concept of employee training

Training refers to a planned intervention aimed at enhancing the elements of individual job performance (Chiaburu & Tekleab, 2005). Employee training refers to bridging the gap between the current performance and the standard desired performance by coaching and mentoring, and participation. Training enables employees to actively be a part of the job and produce better performance, hence improving organizational performance. Employee training also refers to the use of systematic and planned instruction activities to promote learning (Cole, 2002). Training has a complementary role to play in accelerating learning (Reynolds, cited in Armstrong, 2009). Hence, training is all about improving knowledge, skills and attitude that are necessary for the achievement of organizational goals.

Training develops employees but also helps organizations, through human resources, to gain competitive advantage. Thus, firms plan for training programmes targeting employees to enhance their abilities and competences at the workplace (Jie & Roger, 2005). Training

not only develops the capabilities of the employees but sharpens their thinking ability and creativity in order to take better decisions in time and in a more productive manner (DeCenzo, Robbins & Verhulst, 2013). Besides, it also enables employees to deal with customers in an effective manner and respond to their complaints in timely manner (Hollenbeck, Derue & Guzzo, 2004). In effect, training develops self-efficacy and results in superior performance on job (Svenja, 2007), by replacing the traditional weak practices by efficient and effective work-related practices (Kathiravan, Devadason & Zakkeer, 2006). As already indicated, in this article we discuss employee training in terms of training planning, training implementation, and training evaluation.

Training planning and employee performance

Training planning can start with setting training objectives guided by the training needs in place. As Armstrong (2016) advises, an organization should be clear about what training programme or event is required to achieve her training objectives and outcomes. The objectives are set to satisfy established training needs and to provide the basis for planning content and evaluating results. Objectives are both a criterion behaviour (the performance standards or changes in behaviour on the job to be achieved if the training process is to be regarded as successful) and terminal behaviour (what actually happens following the training event).

In addition, the content of the programme or event can be governed by whatever those attending need to know or are able to do as set out in the training objectives. The content of a training programme should be related to the work contexts of the participants. Ideally, their work should be made a central feature of the subject matter. Every opportunity should be taken to embed training at work (Cole, 2002; Armstrong, 2009). The focus on work context enhances the relevance for training and minimises wastage of resources.

Training planning also demands that the location and facilities required, the budget and who delivers the programme be decided ahead of time. The facilities can be determined by the planned training methods, and their availability will influence the location. At this stage, it is also necessary to programme and prepare a financial budget. The programme could be delivered by the organization's own training staff or outsourced in whole or in part from outside training providers. Line managers may take part as long as they are reasonably proficient as instructors, trainers or coaches (Armstrong, 2009). Therefore, planning becomes essential so as to minimise last-minute weaknesses.

Besides, training planning encompasses preparing information on the programme or event. As Buckley and Caple (2003) state, the information will indicate the objectives, content and methods as a guide to nominating managers and potential participants. Information further clarifies the expectation from the programme and allows the stakeholders to participate in training when fully aware of what they are going into.

A training plan is a document that communicates to management and stakeholders details of the proposed training programme. An approved training plan authorizes the project team to expend resources for the development, implementation, and execution of the proposed training programme. The document outlines critical information regarding the training programme's

objectives, schedule, strategies for designing and developing curricula and supporting training materials, methods for implementation, campaigns for continuous improvement, and helps to ensure that stakeholders are properly trained for their specific job function. As Bhatti and Kaur (2009) note, the training plan outlines information pertaining to: training requirements, training strategy, training schedule, training resources, training environment, and training materials.

Training planning is one component of a much broader knowledge transfer process. Transferring knowledge is necessary to facilitate the transition of the project's product from the project stage into operations and its integration into the client's environment. Effective training planning is a practice that is executed throughout the project's life cycle. Identification and gathering of training requirements should begin early during the design phase with the initial identification of business, technical, user, and maintenance procedures (Taylor, Russ-Eft & Taylor, 2009). In effect, training planning is the initial stage in the training cycle followed by implementation.

Training Implementation and Employee Performance

Training implementation refers to the act of carrying out the various activities involved in the promotion of learning of the trainees. In the view of Ahamed and Bakar (2003), training implementation involves identification and sourcing of training materials, locating the training venue, setting the sitting arrangement, making a training time table, allocating the different topics to the different facilitators, selection of the most appropriate method of presentation, and taking care of the welfare of the people involved in the training. Following the above steps almost guarantees the organization to achieve enhanced participation, setting an appropriate training environment, improving the uptake of the participants of the training, all resulting into a more effective training programme and hence enhancing the performance of the staff.

According to Armstrong (2009), delivery of the training should not present too many problems if the planning and preparation for the programme or event have been carried out systematically. However, a flexible approach is desirable because all training events vary from one another according to the characteristics of the learners whose learning needs and reactions will vary. 'Fine-tuning' is necessary throughout a programme. In addition, as Cooper (1997) states, in most cases a well-designed training programme can be linked to improvement in business result and that return on investment in training programmes is very high.

Kampton (1997) argues that the approaches to implementing training fall broadly into two categories, namely: on-the-job training and off-the-job training. On-the-job training includes: job special project, coaching, mentoring, staff induction, recruitment tasks, deputing, networking and counter-parting. Training can also be off-the-job training which is usually conducted in a company school or arranged with technical schools, universities, or professional agencies.

Training Evaluation and Employee Performance

Training Evaluation refers to the assessment of the effectiveness of a training programme in producing the outcome specified when the activity was planned and to indicate where improvements or changes are required to make the training event or programme more effective (Cole, 2002). As Armstrong (2009) asserts, training evaluation can be modelled as a chain of

impact from the planning of training to meeting the organizational or individual training needs to the training that takes place in the training event; from training to changed behaviour; and from changed behaviour to impact on others and the organization as a whole.

It is at the planning stage that the basis upon which each category of training programme or event is to be evaluated. The primary purpose of evaluation is to determine the effectiveness of the training programme and to make improvement where necessary. Evaluation helps in future planning of other training programmes to be conducted. As Armstrong (2009) observes, it is important to evaluate a training programme in order to assess its effectiveness in producing the learning objectives and outcomes drawn at the planning stage of the programme and to indicate where improvement or changes are required to make the programme even more effective. As DeCenzo *et al* (2013) assert, it is insufficient to merely assume that any employee training in an organization is achieving the intended objectives. Evaluation processes therefore help to assess the effectiveness of a training programme and establish its worth. The credibility of an employee training programme is enhanced when it is proven that the organization has benefited tangibly from it.

There is need to develop concepts and tools for monitoring and evaluating employee training programmes in terms of their impact, result and values or return on investment. Actually, Kirkpatrick (cited by Armstrong, 2016) provides a model used by most professional trainers to evaluate training and the model is summarized in four levels: a) *Reaction*, here evaluation looks at how those who participated in the training have reacted to it. It is a measure of immediate customer satisfaction and gives feedback on the quality of training given. b) *Learning* is about finding out how much knowledge was acquired, what skills were developed and what attitudes have improved. c) *Behaviour* is the level that evaluates the extent to which behaviour has changed as required after people who have attended the programme return to their jobs. d) *Result*; evaluates the discernible impact on business performance; that is to say, determining the extent to which the fundamental objectives of the programme have been achieved before and after measure.

Training evaluation is an important step that an organization can undertake to demonstrate its accountability, improve its performance, increase its abilities for obtaining funds or future planning, and fulfil the organizational objectives. By communicating the results of the evaluation, an organization can inform its staff, board of directors, service users, funders, the public, or other stakeholders about the benefits and effectiveness of the organization's training programmes (Armstrong, 2009). Although there are many benefits in conducting training evaluation, it will be a waste of the organization's resources if the evaluation results are not used. The purpose of evaluations is to provide information for actions such as decision-making, strategic planning, reporting, or training programme modification. Training evaluation helps to understand the progress, success, and effectiveness of a training programme.

Research methodology

A case study research design was adopted because the authors aimed at getting insights into Alutkot SACCO functioning. Alutkot SACCO served as a case. The research approach used was qualitative. Qualitative research approach was used because, it promotes, “greater understanding of the way things are and why they are the way they are” (Amin, 2005, p.25).

The study population were the staff and board members of Alutkot SACCO, both at their main branch in Loro and the Aboke branch. The staff were: three managers, four credit officers, two cashiers, one cleaner, one guard, four trainers plus board members. Alutkot SACCO, being a member-based organization has a leadership structure which has the Annual General Meeting (members) comprising the supreme body and authority, followed by democratically-elected board members who supervise the top management and then, lastly, the general staff.

From a study population of 31 members, a sample of 18 was selected using both simple random and purposive sampling techniques. As Berg (2008) suggests, purposive sampling aims at ensuring that the researcher finds and engages resourceful respondents to enrich the study. In this study, the top leaders sampled were selected because of their experience in the management of Alutkot SACCO.

The authors conducted interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and document review to collect data. In addition, face-to-face interviews were carried out using interview guides with staff members, managers, and board members, between the 5th and 27th October 2015. As for the board members, FGDs were used to gather data. Regarding document reviews, the authors reviewed relevant pamphlets, magazines, especially one for Uganda Cooperative Alliance (UCA), minutes of meetings, and reports particularly about Alutkot SACCO. In the documents, the authors were able to find, among other things, information about the staff trainings conducted, the progress in the performance of Alutkot SACCO as well as some of the challenges faced and successes achieved by the SACCO. The information was transcribed, sorted and classified. The analysis was done manually and responses were summarized in a narrative form of presentation of the major findings of the study. The technique for data analysis was content analysis.

Presentation and analysis of results

The findings by the authors are presented based on themes that were developed alongside the objectives of the study. Focusing on Alutkot SACCO, the findings are broken down into three themes, namely: effect of training planning on employee performance; relationship between training implementation and employee performance; and, lastly, effect of training evaluation on employee performance.

Effects of training planning on employee performance in Alutkot SACCO

A synthesis of the responses from staff members, managers, board members, and partners show that despite the varying perceptions and understanding, most of the participants acknowledge that Alutkot SACCO trainings are conducted periodically and such trainings are planned. The majority (seven out of nine) of the board members in their FGDs affirmed that there is effective training in the SACCO, adding that such training is well planned. On the other hand, three out of eight of the staff members interviewed revealed that the process for planning the trainings

especially the selection staff members to attend the training and involvement of staff members in the planning process is not transparent. Such unclear selection processes have sometimes led to wrong choices of trainees, thereby affecting the SACCO performance levels.

All the managers interviewed indicated that Alutkot SACCO had over the previous five years benefited from training programmes. However, one board member revealed that while the SACCO leadership knew the importance of training and had the willingness to invest in training, the limitation had always been scarce finances. For instance, one of the managers said, “training is very costly, that’s why we only do it once or twice a year even if we would have desired to conduct it more times” (SM 01). This suggests that Alutkot SACCO recognizes the importance of employee training but has limited finances as one of the major constraining factors to training.

It was established that Alutkot SACCO puts a lot of efforts in the planning of their training programmes. Stakeholders hold training planning meetings for the good of the organisation. For instance, a board member reported:

As a savings and credit society we have emphasized planning prior to all the work we do. This has been especially important when it comes to training. In our annual planning sessions, we endeavour to anticipate, cost and identify resources for training to be done effectively. Performance of Alutkot SACCO staff has greatly improved over the years and this is, partly, attributed to planning and trainings done, and as a result we have seen our membership steadily grow and our revenues increase too (BM 02).

Therefore, improved staff performance in Alutkot SACCO is evidently one of the effects of the proper planning of the training programmes. Planning has also enabled the SACCO to grow. As further noted by a participant: “performance of staff has greatly improved and this is reflected in the over 40 per cent increase of revenues generated on annual basis, as well as better record keeping and 52 per cent increase of membership by mid-2015” (GM04). Actually, it was reported that by 2016, the clients had increased beyond the 52 per cent figure of 2015.

On the kinds of trainings that have been conducted for the Alutkot SACCO employees, most of the participants indicated that the most dominant trainings have been on the subject of finance management. Other training programmes mentioned by the research participants were: project planning and management, leadership and interpersonal skills development, and entrepreneurship. These different programmes benefited the Alutkot stakeholders in different ways. For instance, a participant reported, “the training on leadership and interpersonal skills just fascinated me and never left me the same again in terms of my capacity to associate with people and speak in public...” (SM02). Such a revelation suggests that this particular staff member and probably many others are now able to speak better in public and this is could be one of the reasons for the 52 per cent increase in the number of client indicated in the previous paragraph.

It was, however, established that while there was capacity building for stakeholders, the approach used sometimes was not very effective. Some respondents argued that the dominant mode of training involved attending seminars, retreats, and workshops which were also attended by other people who were not part of Alutkot SACCO. The big numbers made it somewhat harder to learn effectively. This again reveals the selection of who should attend frustrated the

efficacy of training programmes. Nevertheless, for trainings that were conducted within the premises of the SACCO, learning was more effective since participants would always be few.

On whether training has had an influence on employee performance, the majority of the participants said that for each of the past five years, the SACCO had realized improved employee performance as was also revealed by the annual report for 2013. Specifically, most of the board members noted that annual targets over the years had increased every passing year. According to the annual report for 2014, the SACCO was able to achieve about 89 per cent of its targets. This achievement was attributed to the better skills that the SACCO employees attained especially from the periodic trainings on project planning and management as well as record keeping, customer care, and financial analysis. All the staff members spoken to agreed that they felt more confident to perform their duties whenever they had been trained. Most of these members had spent more than five years in the organization indicated that they understood the technicality of their job requirements, and were more confident to execute their tasks than before the trainings were conducted on given thematic areas.

Further, the study established that there was improved teamwork among the SACCO team leadership especially in line with planning, implementation, and reporting. The majority of staff members said that, due to the trainings they attended especially on group dynamics, leadership, and team player-ship, they became better at relating with work colleagues especially towards accomplishing tasks. For instance, a community trainer said:

I was a very shy person when I first joined this SACCO. I struggled to conduct meetings with stakeholders, especially clients. But when I started attending capacity building meetings organized by Alutkot SACCO especially on public speaking and presentation my self-confidence increased drastically. I am now more confident as a team leader than before the training. My performance has tremendously improved; this is reflected in the fact that I achieve my work targets more frequently and better than before (CT 03).

Therefore, evident from all indications that the staff trainings have made the employees better performers than before. Research findings from the interviews and from the documentary review established that, to a great extent, training planning and actual training in Alutkot SACCO have positively influenced employee performance. Indeed, the positive influence had been incremental every year for the four years. Particularly, the positive influence from training planning and training had been realized among employees of the organization since these were at the centre of organizational performance.

On resource mobilization, the research established that the board had become more open-minded than before on the issues of resource mobilization. Initially, the board thought all training funds had to come from external sources, especially from NGOs, and so they were only relying entirely on development partners for this function. Nonetheless, after training on resource mobilization and other aspects, they realized that they could do quite a lot by themselves too. In fact, as noted by one of the board members:

Initially, all our training activities were initiated, funded and conducted by our partners because we thought resource meant only money, not until we received training on resource mobilization and understood properly what “resource” really is, how to source for it. Now we

can very successfully plan, raise funds and hire resource persons or sometimes even facilitate our own trainings internally (BM 01).

This suggests that since the staff of the organization can now organize and fund their trainings locally, they can have more customized and relevant trainings for their staff as and when deemed fit without having to wait for it from other people and organizations. This appears to have contributed to the current improvement in the employees' performance and, consequently, achievement of the organizational goals as seen in their annual report of 2014.

Training implementation and employee performance at Alutkot SACCO

In order to understand the views of the respondents on training implementation, and to gauge the relationship it has with employee performance in Alutkot SACCO, participants' views, opinions, and perceptions were sought through interviews. The responses were based on the key issues of the methods and approaches used during training implementation.

It was revealed by one of the board members (and this was confirmed from the strategic documents) that Alutkot SACCO's methodology of training implementation is based on principles of strategic management; and that the SACCO's training priorities are set during strategic planning. As revealed by another board member:

We usually have our strategic planning meetings at the beginning of every year...where we come up with what kind of trainings needed by our staff after carrying out a training needs assessment, when to schedule it, where it should be carried out from, who are the possible facilitators, resources needed and the technology to be used (BM08).

Board members, managers, and staff members are involved in defining the training needs of the SACCO staff. These training needs are based on an assessment of all staff members, managers, implementing staff, field support teams, board members, and some of the key partners of the SACCO.

It was established that the location of training contributed to low uptake of training programmes and the attendant benefits of such training. At Alutkot SACCO headquarters there is a training venue for the various training programmes and meetings for both staff and members. The membership as well as employees are scattered all over Oyam district and so this centrally located venue at the SACCO headquarters is far from where some members and staff live. Hence, when a training programme ends late at such a venue, some members have to travel late in the nights to reach their respective homes. Others have to depart early before end of sessions because of distance. For instance, a participant said: "It was difficult for me to finish all the presentations in each day because I stay very far from here, so I would have to leave a bit early". So, the trainings done at headquarters are sometimes inconvenient due to long distance. On the other hand, when the training programmes were shifted near to where the people reside, attendance and interest increased. For instance, one of the research participants reported: "When GIZ was training us, the trainings were not as tiring as those conducted by the SACCO because GIZ was conducting the trainings from parish to parish" (BM09). Today, the long distances have affected the uptake of the training and hence the role of training implementation on employee performance has been negatively affected.

Some respondents indicated that while training work plans were well designed, the actual implementation had, oftentimes, been different from plans. They revealed that implementation of training plans sometimes had not been done on time; not attended by some of the people that had been selected prior to the training; and the trainers were not as experienced as expected during planning. For example, a participant said:

I was selected to attend training on leadership and group dynamics skills. When the training was about to start I was told by my supervisor that I would not go to the training, another staff member was going for the training instead. In some cases, where I attended training, they did not take as long as had been planned. This affected the learning process since the facilitators rushed through the training programme simply to get topics covered but less bothered whether participants understood what was being delivered (SM04).

These revelations do not only cast doubt on the transparency in the criteria for participant selection by the leadership of the SACCO, but also portray signs of poor planning. Moreover, the limitations manifested by facilitators in completing the training programmes as expected denied the participants some knowledge and skill required for work implementation.

Apparently, a wide range of training topics had helped both managers and staff members to get exposed to varying skills that made them multi-skilled persons. For instance, one participant remarked, "I started working in Alutkot SACCO as a cashier but after these trainings I learnt to do the work of a Loans Officer and now I am a Loans Officer and also I do community training without any problem" (ST05). Such a testimony suggests that staff training programmes are really building the staff capacity to be more diverse and prepare them for more responsibilities than before, which can further have the effect of cutting costs of having to hire extra personnel.

Role of training evaluation on employee performance in Alutkot SACCO

A review of the 2014 and 2015 annual reports of Alutkot SACCO revealed that there was an independent monitoring, learning, and evaluation unit. The unit had been influential in guiding the training process at the SACCO right from design to implementation and evaluation. This unit has been the source of over 90 per cent of information used in the subsequent training planning and evaluation, as noted:

Being the monitoring, learning and evaluation team chairperson of the Alutkot SACCO has so far been my most challenging and ironically interesting post I have ever held in the organization. The organization depends on us to determine the kind of training needed by our staff, the trainees, the resource persons and others (BM06).

By implication, the monitoring and evaluation process occupies a pivotal role in the training programmes in Alutkot SACCO. At the end of every training implementation cycle, there had been up to 15% increase in the number of clients within weeks and this was evidence of improvement in the way trainings are planned and implemented. The managers revealed that, indeed, over the years, training plans have consistently been reviewed by the monitoring and evaluation unit. It was also established that during the actual training sessions, the monitoring

team closely followed up, made observations, and recommended to the implementing teams regarding what needed to be changed and how that could be done.

Responses from all the managers revealed that due to timely observations and sharing of lessons from previous implementations as produced by the monitoring and evaluation unit had over the years guided in improving not only the manner in which trainings were conducted but how to support trained staff members to put into practice what they had learned. The findings further affirmed that due to periodic training evaluation, Alutkot SACCO was able to deliver most relevant trainings effectively and efficiently at reduced costs in the subsequent training programmes. Hence, there had been better efficiency of the training programmes due to lessons learnt from the previous training programmes, as noted by a board member:

When we started training programmes they were totally sponsored by other development partners and the training costs were so high. But, we realized that for our SACCO to survive we needed more trainings than could be offered by the development partners. We [also] realized from our evaluation reports that we could do certain things differently and cut training costs and that's what we did and started funding our own trainings locally (BM08).

This data reveals that the managers appreciated the increasing need for training in Alutkot SACCO and thereby invested in the programmes. Actually, by reducing on donor dependency in training, Alutkot SACCO made training programmes more sustainable, albeit at a high cost.

Participants in the FGD acknowledged that Alutkot SACCO had conducted end-of-year evaluations on an annual basis. The findings, conclusions, and recommendations in annual evaluations had been the basis for annual planning, specifically planning for training in the SACCO. The FGD participants revealed that without the training planning, training implementation, and training evaluation in Alutkot SACCO for the previous four years, the SACCO would not have registered the 40% increase in revenues and general improvement in performance. The managers also reported that Alutkot SACCO had benefited from employee training in terms of achieving set targets; for instance, in the financial year 2014 Alutkot SACCO achieved 87 per cent of its set targets.

In general, from the findings of the research, it can be said that employee training in Alutkot SACCO has had a role to play in influencing the employee performance and subsequently the performance of the SACCO itself. However, the potential benefits of training have not been fully exploited due to sometimes wrong trainees being sent for training; training programmes taking place in distant places causing some limited concentration among members; and limited commitment by some trainers who chose to rush through the programmes.

Discussion

Effect of training planning on employee performance in Alutkot SACCO

The findings of the study revealed that training planning influences employee performance of Alutkot SACCO. This finding is consistent with earlier research, for example by Conpet (1997) who attests that a well-designed training programme can be linked to improvement in business results and that return on investment in training programmes can be very high. Similarly,

Gordon (1992) asserts that recognition of the importance of training is in resonance with the relative success of organizations where investment in employee development is considerably emphasized. Besides, as Beardwell and Claydon (2007) hold, technological developments and organizational change can gradually lead some employers to the realization that success relies on the skills and abilities of their employees; thus the need for considerable and continuous investment in employee training and development. Alutkot SACCO has, through training programmes, been able to progressively improve skills and attitudes of her teams, which in turn have led to increased customers and customer retention.

In line with Alutkot's approach, Blume, Baldwin and Huang (2010) note that for training planning, organizations should create a plan have it approved by management and executive stakeholders; and align training programmes to learning objectives to achieve overarching training goals. Some of the activities during training include: analysing training needs; designing training programmes; developing training courses or curricula and supporting materials; implementing the training programme; evaluating training results; and improving training programmes based on outputs from course evaluations. This description of training planning and the entire training cycle relates to what Alutkot SACCO is doing although not as systematic as they describe it.

Training implementation and employee performance in Alutkot SACCO

The findings of the study indicated that training implementation has a relationship with employee performance in Alutkot SACCO. The findings further indicate that training implementation influences employee performance in Alutkot SACCO. This finding is, in part, based on the existing short-term, long-term, internal, and external approaches to capacity building in Alutkot SACCO. Similarly, Muhammad (2011) indicates that just as organizations have capacity priorities, even employees are more concerned about their own productivity and are increasingly aware of the accelerated obsolescence of knowledge and skills in their turbulent environment. Similarly, owing to training, Alutkot SACCO has been able to realize progress in terms of increased interest in work and increased teamwork leading to improved performance.

Effect of training evaluation on employee performance in Alutkot SACCO

The study established that training evaluation affects employee performance in Alutkot SACCO. The findings further showed that training evaluation significantly affects employee performance in the SACCO. However, as DeCenzo *et al.* (2013) caution, it is not wise to merely assume that any employee training in an organization is effective. While evaluating training, it is important to collect substantive data on whether the training is achieving its goals, if it is correcting deficiencies in knowledge, skills and attitude, then subsequent trainings are designed based on informed decisions.

On the other hand, as Singh and Mohanty's (2012) arguments reveal, when training and development professionals design, implement, and evaluate their programmes, they create a positive influence on the performance of teams and realization of set targets. To this end, in this article, the authors argue that management teams need to evaluate training programmes in order to improve employee performance and the way training programmes are managed.

Conclusion

The authors conclude that training planning has a positive role on employee performance in a SACCO. Improvements in training planning, for instance, by equipping trainers and those to be trained with all the materials they need can have a positive effect on the increase in numbers of customers and customer retention in a SACCO. If leaders in Alutkot SACCO improve on training planning by bringing training opportunities closer to the beneficiaries such as at parish level, the benefits of training will improve.

Training implementation has great influence on employee performance in a SACCO. Hence, improvements in training implementation, specifically cost, quality and time management can have a positive role on employee performance in a SACCO. If management of a SACCO improves training implementation, for example by ensuring up to date and relevant content is delivered at the right time by the right people, by ensuring that training is administered to the right persons who are professionally nominated; and imploring the trainers to pay full attention to their programmes and utilise all contact hours as timetabled, then training outcomes can improve. Such improvements are most likely to increase employee performance in a SACCO.

The findings suggest that training evaluation at Alutkot SACCO enabled timely observations and sharing of lessons from previous implementations. Such lessons or information over the years guided not only how to support trained staff members to put into practice what they had learned but also acted as a basis for subsequent trainings in Alutkot SACCO. Hence, training evaluation improves the efficiency and effectiveness of subsequent trainings in an organization through providing lessons learnt.

Recommendations

Leaders in Alutkot SACCO should prioritize staff training and should ensure proper training planning especially in terms of: timing and scheduling of the training, resource mobilization, trainee selection procedure, sourcing of resource persons, training venue selection, training materials identification, and mode of presentation. All these issues should be considered prior to the training itself in order to improve on the effectiveness and efficiency of the training and hence improve service delivery by the SACCO.

The Board members and managers in Alutkot SACCO should team up with credible training institutions in order to access the best trainers on the market. Such trainers are able to deliver the trainings in the most appropriate manner and using the most appropriate mode of presentation, with appropriate instructional resources for more effective and efficient results. Further, Alutkot SACCO should recruit more competent and properly qualified staff members who can eventually train others internally when need arises at less cost. Senior management employees should ensure proper supervision of the training processes to ensure value for money.

Leaders of Alutkot SACCO should invest in awareness raising among their stakeholders for easy engagements with them. Besides, they should continue to investigate the impact of any training that may have been conducted so that the subsequent trainings are made more effective and efficient and improve organizational performance.

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