

HR TRAINING PROGRAMS – CASE STUDY: WHAT ARE THE PARTICIPANTS' EXPECTATIONS?

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When conducting a training program, training providers should ask themselves this question: What are the participants' expectations? Training providers must correlate their programs with the needs and expectations of participants in order to be successful.

Considering there is a need for the professionalization of human resources management activities, we focused our attention on three key occupations of HR: Human Resources Analyst, Human Resources Inspector and Human Resources Manager. To assess the effectiveness of these trainings we used the following research instruments: focus group, monitoring questionnaire and evaluation questionnaire. Our experience with the training programs organized within the Training and Excellence Centre in Human Resources Management has shown us that participants have a great need for knowledge and personal development.

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Even though it is now universally understood that the acquisition of knowledge is the foundation of the competitive advantage of individuals and organizations in today's economy, the question of how much to invest in workforce education and training has remained an issue for companies.

Employees' knowledge and skills are as important as the companies' financial and material resources. In Romania, training programs are still widely used only by multinational companies, and less by national companies or non-profit organizations.

1. Training programs: evolution and prognosis

Although, Romanian training market has been in an obvious development in the years before the crisis, it is still far from similar markets in the region. In 2008, our national training market has been estimated at around 30 million euro, 30 percent up from 2007. Comparatively, Hungary, having half the population of Romania, has a training market four times bigger than the Romanian one, with a turnover of more than 100 million euro in 2007.

Despite the growth of the last years, the training market recorded significant decline in 2009 due to the world economic crisis. Companies have frozen their professional development budgets and training market lost 40 to 50 percent in 2009⁴⁶¹. However, the first three months of 2010 show an upward trend and experts are confident that training market will recover the loss from the past year.

⁴⁶¹ Iloviceanu Robert, *Ascendis: Piața de training a scăzut cu 50% în 2009*, published on October 5, 2009, http://www.standard.money.ro/articol_107629/ascendis_piata_de_training_a_scazut_cu_50_in_2009.html, consulted on April 10, 2010.

In 2006 the Ministry of Labour Social Solidarity and Family has developed a monographic research of a sample of occupations in the occupational field of Romanian economy, which has sought to highlight the main changes in content and networking of a number of 105 occupations.⁴⁶² Instrument used to conduct scientific monographs had a high complexity, combining semi-structured interview techniques and questionnaire. Respondents to the semi-structured interview or questionnaire (by case) were technologists, department heads / workshop / team, representatives of human resources, technical director, workers, or, generically naming them: key respondents able to provide relevant and comprehensive information about the occupations. One of the major findings of this study is the growing importance of activities in the field "communication", "social sciences" and "management" skills and mastery of languages (including English language emerges with the highest importance) and computer working skills and electronic equipment.

This year, the main interest of companies will be for the sales training sessions. At the same time, experts believe that the demand for employee evaluation programs will increase also, as many companies will access European funds for human resources development⁴⁶³.

Most of the training programs in Romania develop the skills needed for one of the occupations described in the Classification of Occupations in Romania (COR).

2. Classification of Occupations in Romania

The Romanian Classification of Occupations (COR) was first published in 1995, and currently includes 3852 occupations. COR is the identification, ranking and codification system of all occupations that exist in the economy, regardless of their type and place. Using COR codes is mandatory for all central public administration bodies and local businesses, business organizations, trade unions, professional and political foundations, associations, individuals and legal entities.⁴⁶⁴

The review and updating of COR is the responsibility of the Ministry of Labor, Family and Social Protection. However, labor market increasingly leaves behind the COR. Many of the 3852 occupations that currently exist in the COR have no correlation on the labor market, while others newly created to meet the ever changing needs of the market are not included in this list. Although they have the possibility to insert new occupations in the classification, private sector employers prefer to report to the Territorial Inspectorates of Work other functions for employees whose occupations are not included in the COR, in order to respect the law.

Related to Human Resources, there are currently over 40 occupations defined by the COR. These include the following: HR analyst, labor market analyst, employment agent, human resources inspector, HR reviewer, manpower and unemployment expert, labor consultant, HR specialist, human resources manager, professional skills assessor and others. However, HR professionals consider it necessary to update the Romanian Classification of Occupations by placing approximately 10 new occupations which, although long been practiced in our country, are not yet defined by the COR. These new

⁴⁶² Blaga, E., Occupation evolution in 2010 perspective. In F. Chipea, Cioară, I., Hatos, A., Mihai, M., Sas, C. (Ed.), *Culture, development, identity, current prospects. 10 years since the establishment of departments of psychology and sociology at the University of Oradea* (pp. 55-80), 2007, Bucharest: Expert.

⁴⁶³ Mihai, Cristina, *Ce training-uri se vor vinde anul acesta în România?*, published on January 22, 2010, <http://www.dailybusiness.ro/stiri-carriere/ce-training-uri-se-vor-vinde-anul-acesta-in-romania-37255>, consulted on April 10, 2010.

⁴⁶⁴ www.mmuncii.ro, consulted on April 10, 2010.

occupations relate to niche and specialist positions, such as: specialists in recruitment, training, organizational development, compensation and benefits, and human resources consultants.⁴⁶⁵

Each of the occupations listed in the COR must comply with an occupational standard. The Occupational Standard (SO) is the document that specifies the units of competence and quality outcomes associated with the activities contained in an occupation. Based on the occupational standard that is nationally acknowledged, training programs are developed.

3. HR training programs

Training programs ensure the acquisition of new skills or the development of skills already acquired, and they can be: start programs, qualification programs, requalification programs, and specialization training programs. The responsibility for organizing training programs rests with training providers. The training providers' authorization activity is coordinated by the National Council for Adult Training (CNFPA). Record of training providers is included in the National Register of Authorized Providers

In Bihor County there are over one hundred occupations for which training programs are conducted, of which only five are human resources occupations. These are:

- Human resources analyst;
- Safety inspector;
- Human resources inspector;
- Human resources manager;
- Health and work safety specialist.

For these five HR occupations there are 14 authorized training providers in Bihor County.

Considering there is a need for the professionalization of human resources management activities conducted at county and national level, we focused our attention on three key occupations of HR: Human Resources Analyst, Human Resources Inspector and Human Resources Manager.

For the Human Resources Analyst occupation there are currently two authorized training providers in Bihor, while national wide their number is 21. For the occupations of HR Inspector and HR Manager, in Bihor County they are 9 authorized training providers, 4 of them organize training programs for HR Manager occupation. Nationally, there are over 420 such suppliers, of which 112 are for Human Resources Manager.⁴⁶⁶

3.1. HR training programs – Case study

In order to induce an attitude and mindset change among employees involved in human resources activities, our institution has accessed European funding for the organization of three training courses for these three occupations.

The title of the project was *Training and Excellence Centre in Human Resources Management*, and it was implemented between December 2, 2008 and November 30, 2009. The project was financed through PHARE 2006 Economic and Social Cohesion - Human Resources Development, under the program *Promoting lifelong learning and retraining for employment qualification*, contract number PHARE 2006/018-147. 04.02.02.01.605.

The Human Resources Analyst, Human Resources Inspector and Human Resources Manager training courses were conducted during 2009 at the Training and Excellence Centre in Human Resources Management (CFP - MRU).

⁴⁶⁵ Enache Ștefania, *Specialiștii în resurse umane cer o nouă clasificare a ocupațiilor*, Săptămâna Financiară, http://www.sfin.ro/articol_18516/specialistii_in_resurse_umane_cer_o_noua_clasificare_a_ocupatiilor.html, published on December 18, 2009, consulted on April 10, 2010.

⁴⁶⁶ Registrul Național al Furnizorilor Autorizați, www.cnfpa.ro, consulted on April 11, 2010.

3.1.1. Case study - methodology

To assess the effectiveness of these trainings we used the following research instruments: *focus group, monitoring questionnaire and evaluation questionnaire*. All the 61 trainees attended the training evaluation process and the instruments were designed to determine participants' perception of training effectiveness.

Monitoring questionnaire was designed to identify the usability of the information and skills learned during these training. For this purpose a methodology was developed that took up two research tools: questionnaire and focus group. Questionnaires were applied three times for each training program, at different time intervals, in order to capture the evolution of behavior and changes in work activities; the focus group was organized at the end of each training program.

Evaluation questionnaires were applied to participants at the end of each training program and referred to the following aspects: satisfaction with the training assessment of issues related to the training elements, evaluation of each training lecturers. The last part of the questionnaire had three open questions: to point out three positive and three negative aspects related to the training, to point out three issues they would like to change in the organization of the training attended.

The questionnaires were input in a database and processed in SPSS program.

3.1.2. Case study results

Overall, satisfaction of participants in the three trainings is held high, students declaring themselves satisfied with the most valued aspects. Of the 61 participants, 27 representing 44% said they were very satisfied with the training attended, and 48% said they were satisfied. A 5% of participants said that they are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the training attended, while 2 participants, representing 3% of the total, said they were dissatisfied.



Exhibit 1. Participants' level of satisfaction

Some *conclusions* of our case study, based on the results of monitoring research are:

- These trainings were an opportunity for each student for personal development; improve knowledge and obtaining a diploma.
- They have appreciate unanimously the fact that people with extensive practical experience were involved as lecturers
- Students would like a greater involvement of practitioners in HR for all training topics, and several examples of HR practice and conducting workshops.

- Discussions were open, face to face that encouraged dialogue and exchange of experience. Participants appreciated this kind of interaction that encouraged discussion, claiming that they had learned from the example of others.
- Participants of the Human Resources Manager training, unlike participants in the training of human resources analyst and human resources inspector, had no objections with regard to the mixed groups A and B (A-for those who work in human resources departments and B-for those who are not working in human resources departments).
- For most indicators their value grew up, which means an increase of responsibilities of staff working in human resources involved in the human resources analyst, inspector and human resources manager.
- In most cases, consequent to enrollment in the trainings, our participants have increased the responsibilities and the frequency of activities related to HR at the workplace.
- Increase the percentage of those who during the training:
 - Have received responsibilities without changing the job description.

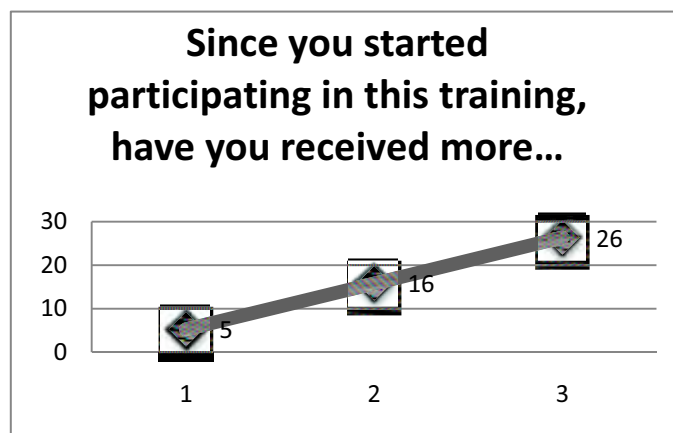


Exhibit 2. Have received more responsibilities without changing the job description.

- Have planned their specific activities of human resources area.
- Have used a database of personnel records using computer.
- Have prepared and managed the accounting documents of staff.
- Have prepared retirement documents.
- According to monitoring questionnaire responses decreases the number of those who: organized training program for personnel worked in interdisciplinary teams, represent human resources department. These decreases can be explained by the fact that those activities are activities that have a lower frequency within a year in the HR department.

4. Conclusions:

Although in recent years we have seen a growing training market, Romania still has a long way in order to reach other countries. The year 2009 represented a decrease in training market, but the first trimester of 2010 shows a slight recovery as companies take into account employee training as a solution for overcoming crisis.

The number of training providers and authorized training programs has grown in the last years, but so did the expectations of participants and companies. Training providers must correlate their programs with the needs and expectations of participants in order to be successful. At the same time, they need to take into account the demands of companies.

When conducting a training program, training providers should ask themselves this question: What are the participants' expectations? Our experience with the training programs organized within the Training and Excellence Centre in Human Resources Management has shown us that participants have a great need for knowledge and personal development. Participants want to learn practical things, as well as to understand how HRM systems and methods are operating. At the same time, participants expressed their desire to know and understand the real problems that practitioners have experienced. The training programs organized revealed that participants believe that a hundred hours are not sufficient to understand HRM strategies; they would like if more hours were assigned for the courses. Participation in workshops, solving exercises and a greater emphasis on legislation are also among the requirements of training participants. As for our purpose to induce an attitude and mindset change among employees involved in human resources activities, we believe that a shift in the mindset has been made, but efforts are needed still to inoculate in their thinking a non-discriminatory and ethical attitude.

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