

Evaluating a Retail Management Operations Training Program

by Christin Lundberg, Jennifer Elderman, and Leslie Harper

Tales from the Field, a monthly column, consists of reports of evidence-based performance improvement practice and advice, presented by graduate students, alumni, and faculty of Boise State University's Instructional and Performance Technology department.

The Client

Best Tool (name changed for anonymity) is a retailer that has been in business since 1981, but until mid-2008, there had never been a formal operations training program for new managers. The Learning & Development (L&D) Department developed and launched the Retail Management Development (RMD) Program company-wide in June 2008. The program's main goal was to provide managers with operations knowledge and skills needed to perform their jobs effectively and efficiently.

The Training Program

After learning of issues surrounding operations consistency in the retail stores, the L&D Department conducted a needs assessment to determine if a new-hire training program was needed. Stakeholders fully supported that a new-hire operations training program be developed and implemented for new retail managers. However, the issue of existing managers was also a topic of discussion with stakeholders. Because the company had gone so many years without having an operations training program, stakeholders felt it was necessary that existing managers also complete the RMD Program. Stakeholders believed that if both new and existing managers completed the RMD Program successfully, Best Tool would see:

- An increase in operations compliance
- An increase in manager confidence and competence levels surrounding operations-related functions
- A decrease in manager turnover

The Evaluation

In the spring of 2010, a team of graduate students at Boise State University conducted an evaluation to determine if the goals of the program had been realized, and if there were any opportunities for improvement. Following Scriven's (2007) *Key Evaluation Checklist* as an evaluation framework, the team investigated the following three dimensions of the training program – one process-related dimension and two outcome-related dimensions:

- 1) Content and Activities (process): Do the content and activities for the training program provide learners with the knowledge and skills they need to be operationally successful?
- 2) Operations Compliance (outcome): Is the program leading to increased operations compliance retail-wide?
- 3) Confidence/Competence (outcome): Is the program leading to increased confidence and competence among existing store managers?

The evaluation of the RMD Program was both formative and summative. The evaluation was formative because the evaluand (the program being evaluated) was an on-going program that must continue to serve the needs of the managers who require operations knowledge and skills to be successful in their jobs. The evaluation was also summative because it focused on the 49 existing retail store managers that completed the program between June 2008 and October 2009. Today, managers that join the company participate in the RMD Program beginning on their first days of employment, eliminating the need to train existing managers.

The evaluation team used a combination of human resources reports, audit scores, learner self-evaluations from before and after training, interviews, and surveys to obtain the detail needed to evaluate the program.

Evaluation Results & Recommendations

The evaluation team used a 4-level rubric (Excellent, Good, Fair, and Poor) when determining the quality of each dimension of the program based on the data collected from the multiple sources.

The process dimension, Content and Activities, was rated *Excellent* based on the objectives being well-written, the materials being accurate and useful, the curriculum being presented in a logical order, and the objectives being linked to all standard operating procedures and annual audit items. The two outcome dimensions, Operations Compliance and Confidence/Competence were also both rated *Excellent*. The data revealed that the RMD Program provides learners with the knowledge and skills need to comply with all written company policies and procedures. All store managers reported increased confidence in all areas after completion of the program. In addition, supervisors of store managers reported an increase in store managers’ competence levels.

Considering the quality of the three dimensions of the program, the evaluation team determined that the overall quality of the RMD Program was *Excellent* (see Table 1).

Table 1
RMD Program Dimensions and Weighting

Dimension	Retail Management Development Program				Weighting
	Overall Quality: <i>Excellent</i>				
Content & Activities	✓				Extremely Important
Operations Compliance	✓				Extremely Important
Confidence/Competence	✓				Very Important
	<i>Excellent</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Poor</i>	

Based on data reviewed, the evaluation team found no apparent weaknesses in relation to the three dimensions evaluated. However, interviews and surveys with program trainers and participants indicated some opportunities for improvement, which included:

- Re-write program objectives according to Mager's method (1997) to include conditions and criterion as well as performance.
- Incorporate a standardized assessment focusing on knowledge-related items.
- Include additional best practices within the materials to achieve high audit scores.
- Enhance some existing topics within the materials (e.g., profit and loss statements, inventory management, corrective action, and parts and service).
- Analyze the causes of low company-wide audit scores within the Inventory Management area.

References

Scriven, M. (2007). Key evaluation checklist. Retrieved from

http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/checklists/kec_feb07.pdf

Mager, R. F. (1997). Preparing instructional objectives (3rd ed.). Atlanta, GA: The Center for Effective Performance, Inc.

Biographies

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