

APPLICATION OF A COMPETENCY BASED TRAINING PROGRAM IN A STRICT HIERARCHICAL ORGANIZATION

Tarkan DÜZGÜNÇINAR¹

Süleyman KARATAŞ²

İlhan GÜNBAIYI³

Abstract

In institutions with a strict hierarchical structure, the knowledge and skills of the personnel must be in accordance with the requirements of the work in order to perform the tasks effectively and competently. In the event that prior formal learning and/or experience does not adequately prepare or qualify personnel for the task in-service training comes into its own. In-service training is defined as a program of professional training or staff development conducted during the course of employment. Many methods and models are utilized in the delivery of in-service programs. Similarly, in-service training in Strict Hierarchical Structures providing law enforcement services is a must for the task to be performed at the expected level. Changes in human resources management, effective use of current technologies and an understanding of the expectations of personnel, the service receivers, requires institutions in this field to update their in-service training models according to the requirements of the era and of stake holders. One of the favorite educational models of recent years, Competency Based Training is a legitimate choice to meet the needs of institutions in a short period and at the desired level. In this study, the Competency Based Training Program model was applied in an institution that takes on a leading role in ensuring the safety and security in the marine area. The results obtained from the implementation of the model considered in this study, together with related suggestions to other institutions, were presented.

Key words: Strict Hierarchical Structure, In Service Training, Competency Based Training.

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1 Doktora Öğrencisi, Akdeniz Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, E-posta: tduzguncinar@gmail.com, Orcid: 0000-0002-9607-0489

2 Doç. Dr. Akdeniz Üniversitesi, Eğitim Fakültesi, Eğitim Bilimleri Bölümü, E-posta: skaratas@akdeniz.edu.tr Orcid: 0000-0003-0002-2886

3 Prof. Dr. Akdeniz Üniversitesi, Eğitim Fakültesi, Eğitim Bilimleri Bölümü, E-posta: igunbayi@akdeniz.edu.tr Orcid: 0000-0001-7139-0200

KATI HİYERARŞİK YAPIDAKİ BİR KURUMDA YETKİNLİK TEMELLİ EĞİTİM PROGRAMI UYGULAMASI

Özet

Katı hiyerarşik yapıdaki kurumlarda, personelin verilen görevleri etkili ve verimli olarak yerine getirebilmesi için bilgi ve becerilerinin işin gereklerine uygun olması gerekmektedir. Personelin icra ettiği görevin gerektirdiği koşulları ve yeterlilikleri daha önce almış olduğu eğitim ile sağlayamaması durumunda, kurumlar personelin gelişimi için hizmet içi eğitim yöntemine başvurmaktadır. Tüm kurumlara benzer şekilde Katı Hiyerarşik Yapıdaki Kurumlarda da hizmet içi eğitim, tanımlanan görevin beklenen düzeyde yapılması için gerekli bir zorunluluk olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır. İnsan kaynağındaki değişim, teknolojinin etkin kullanımı, hizmet alıcısı olan vatandaşın beklentilerinin farklılaşması bu alandaki kurumların hizmet içi eğitim modellerini çağın gereklerine uygun şekilde güncellemesini gerektirmektedir. Son zamanların gözde eğitim modellerinden olan Yetkinlik Temelli Eğitimin, kurumların bu kapsamdaki ihtiyaçlarını kısa sürede ve istenilen seviyede karşılamak için iyi bir alternatif olduğu görülmektedir. Bu çalışmada, bir kurumda hizmet içi eğitim kapsamında uygulanan Yetkinlik Temelli Eğitim Programının uygulama şekli ve uygulamadan elde edilen sonuçlar üzerine odaklanılmıştır. Sonuçlar, ilgili başarı kriterleri göz önünde bulundurularak değerlendirilmiştir. Değerlendirme sonucunda ele alınan uygulamanın kurum özelinde hedeflenen amaçlara ulaşmaya başarılı bir şekilde hizmet ettiği anlaşılmış ve benzer yapıdaki diğer kurumların bu uygulamayı kendilerine adapte etmelerine yardımcı olabilecek öneriler sıralanmıştır.

Ahahtar Kelimeler: Katı Hiyerarşik Yapı, Hizmet İçi Eğitim, Yetkinlik Temelli Eğitim.

Introduction

Training and staff development occur when personnel do not have the skills, or cannot meet the requirements, to satisfactorily perform a task. Providing education and training to resolve skill deficiencies are among the many human resource activities on which institutions direct their focus. Training is generally defined as the process of behavior change in an individual (Aydın, 2011). Individuals' knowledge, behavior and attitudes can be changed through education (Pehlivan, 1993). In-service training is the sub-branch of training: planned activities that are organized in order to gain the knowledge and skills in the shortest time possible (Taymaz, 1997).

There are commonalities in the definitions of in-service training according to Taymaz (1997), Canman (2000) and Aytaç (2009). In-service training is the training given to individuals who are newly employed as well as those who have been employed in that organization for some time. In-service training provides planned educational activities within the organization that increase the level of knowledge, skills, behavior and productivity throughout the working life. The following features should be considered when planning in-service training in an institution (Aydın, 2011).

1. Objectives and policies of the institution
2. Psychology of participating staff
3. Individual rank, title, age and experience
4. Practical application
5. Program based on needs
6. Planned and continuous training

Well-planned and effectively implemented in-service training programs have numerous benefits for employees and institutions (Taymaz, 1997). While the personnel acquire new skills in the professional sense, the institutions gain high-performing, skilled personnel (Ergül, 2006). On the other hand, it should be kept in mind that no singular training program will cover the needs of the whole workforce and further, staff may need supervising or mentoring to establish the new best practice. The most important factor is to obtain maximum efficiency from the in-service training within the objectives of the institution (Pehlivan, 1993).

Competency Based Training (CBT) is one in-service training method. It is a widely used concept in organizations today, especially in the field of Human Resources Management. CBT draws out the characteristics and behaviors a person must have for successful business performance. Boyatzis (1982) classifies competencies as threshold competencies and performance competences. Threshold competencies are the core competencies required for an occupation. Performance competences, on the other hand, distinguish between high and low performance (Cardy and Selvarajan, 2006). In this respect, it can be said that the distinction between the competencies is necessary in order to determine the competencies which do not provide competitive advantage, are not strategically advantageous or are difficult to achieve (Bennour and Crestani, 2000).

Due to both the contribution to professional roles and the overall contribution to the organization, determination of personnel competencies must be meticulously pursued by the institutions (McClarty and Gaertner, 2015). Both the determination and implementation of competencies is essential for best practice within an organization. Institutions are also obliged to make these competencies a part of their performance appraisal systems where effective performance is measured (Çetinkaya, 2009).

While the traditional training method puts time and trainer in the center, CBT targets the development of specialization in a specific field (Hodge, 2007). Lacey and Murray (2015) state CBT is the opposite of the classical time-centered training method. In addition, these two researchers argue that CBT is the most effective and striking among the business methods of education. CBT is recognized as the most important and indispensable element of vocational training in many countries. Kelchen (2015) and Norton (1987) identified the main characteristics of CBT as follows.

1. Competencies to be gained are carefully selected
2. Training is personnel-centered

3. Training materials are individually identified, prepared and applied in training
4. Focus is on learning, not education
5. Ensures staff are competent before proceeding to the next step
6. Training is developed individually
7. Each staff member is judged by their own performance

Method

In this study, in-service training methods performed in an institution with a strict hierarchical structure are emphasized. Institutions with multiple personnel and objectives determined by the administration are called hierarchical structure institutions (Tortop et al, 2006). Institutions which implemented this structure at establishment, which have and will maintain this structure into the future and which are unlikely to make changes in this regard are defined as Strict Hierarchical Institutions (SHI). SHIs adopt a structure that can be represented as a pyramid from top to bottom with decisions being made according to rules and criteria determined from the top, rather than individual and uncommon values. The scope of roles, duties and responsibilities is determined and organized from the top down. As with other institutions, in-service training at an SHI is considered an integral part of good management practice.

CBT is currently being explored as an in-service delivery method in the institution being studied. A Competency Based Training Program (CBTP) was implemented and the results obtained are being assessed. During the interviews conducted with trainees, trainers and auditors, it was understood that the application served the desired objectives according to the relevant success criteria. Recommendations on how the program can be implemented in other institutions of similar structure are listed.

Problem Statement

How is the implementation of a Competency Based Training Program in a Strict Hierarchical Institution achieved?

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study;

1. How is Competency Based Training Program implemented?
2. What are the results of Competency Based Training Program?
3. What are the opinions of the trainees about Competency Based Training Program?
4. What are the program practitioners' opinions about Competency Based Training Program?

Research Design

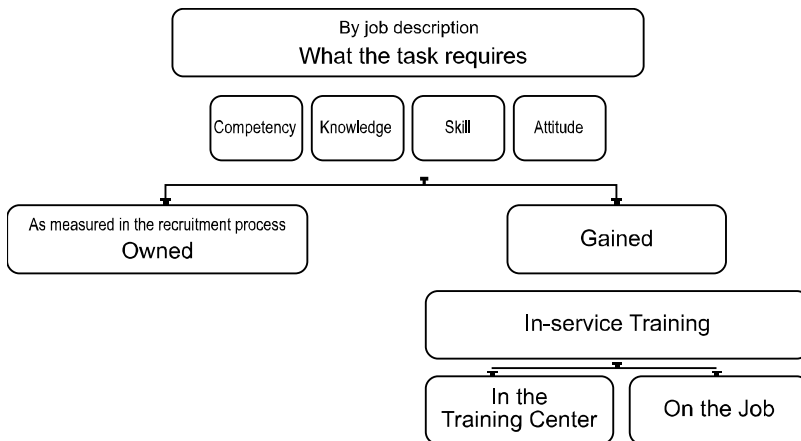
The study is an example of in-service training research conducted in an SHI's unit. In this study, "A Sample Case Study" model was used. In this model, various problems related to a real or probable event are examined in detail. The case study reveals the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life events such as individual life cycles, small group behavior, organizational and managerial processes and interpersonal relations (Gwee, 2013). In addition, the case study provides the opportunity to obtain information suitable for the purpose that statistical methods cannot provide (Sarpkaya, 2002).

This method was chosen because CBTP is a newly applied training method in the subject institution and the research subject wants to be examined in its own environment. In creating the research design, the lack of previous studies on this subject and its usefulness in specific situations were taken into consideration with the expectation of confirming CBTPs would be one of the best delivery methods for the organization.

Data Collection

Within this institution in-service training of new personnel, during the orientation period, aims to establish standardized methods in the expectation that: this will reduce mistakes made by personnel; provide standardization among personnel who perform the same duties; improve relations between subordinates and superiors; tools and systems will be used efficiently; personnel will be able to adapt to changes as well as establishing a learning culture. The method of determining the institution's need for in-service training can be summarized in Figure-1.

Figure-1: Describing the needs of in-service training



The following types of in-service training are provided in the institution.

1. Basic training
2. Compliance (orientation training)

3. Development training
4. Completion training
5. Promotion and executive training
6. Special mission training

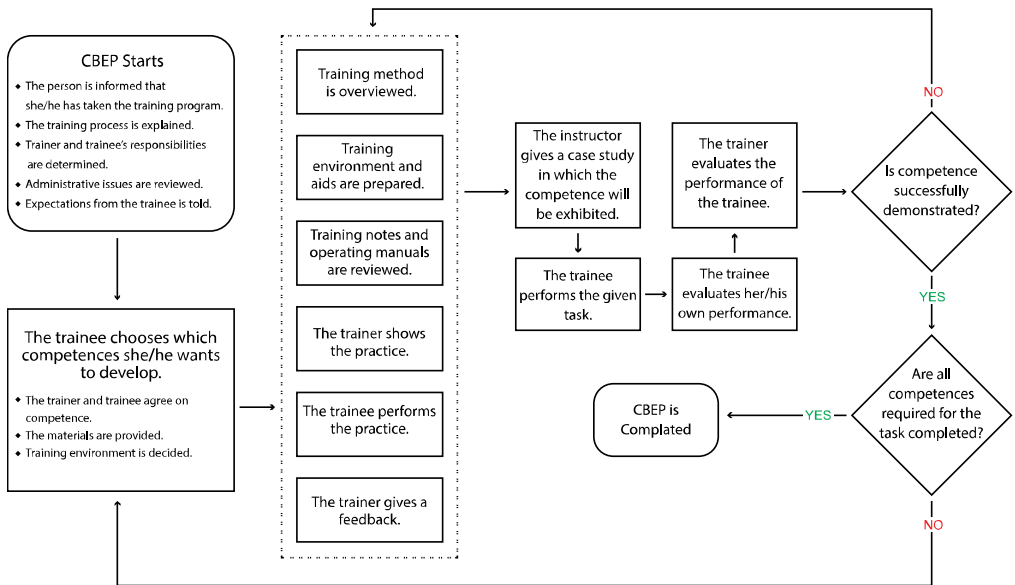
raining given in the institution is applied in three ways: as classroom, on-the-job and mixed methods. Classroom training provides educational activities that are organized either in the institution's various educational areas (classes) or in a remote location. On-the-job training begins after staff are appointed to a position. Experienced personnel are assigned as a role model providing guidance for the newly appointed staffer in order to learn the position requirements. The advantage of this training is that it is carried out on the job, in other words, in a real work environment. Training of personnel using the tools, systems and devices to be used during the execution of the task makes this training method more effective.

In the evaluation activities carried out by the institution, it has been observed that some personnel who have been assigned to their position after completing the basic training successfully have difficulties in converting their knowledge into practical application. CBTP was established in order to enable personnel to reflect the basic competencies related to the position as reflex behavior and quickly, in time of need.

The outlines of CBTP are given in Figure-2.

Figure-2: Competency Based Training Program

Competence Based Training Program



Source: Adapted from Calmadora, 2014.

The following principles underlie the CBTP in the organization.

1. The training program is prepared by determining the requirements of personnel. For this reason, the first step is to evaluate the staff. Subsequently, interviews are conducted both with them and the evaluation supervisors regarding their performance.
2. A trust based relationship between the trainee and the trainer is expected to be established. The trainer clearly expresses his intention and explains the program. The training program is finalized, taking into consideration the requests of personnel.
3. The training program is based on information received from the trainee and with the intention that it be completed on the same day. The information derived for the training is selected from among the issues personnel encounter performing their duties effectively on a daily basis. For information gathered that is not relevant for the near future, the method of self-learning is applied.
4. The content of the training program is applied in a specific order. In this way, the aim of the program is not lost.
5. Participants must practice as much as possible to ensure learning by doing. The trainer outlines the theoretical knowledge briefly and in general terms. This is followed by practical application with the issues explained in detail as the practical experience progresses. The trainee is expected to attempt to solve problems as they encounter them, before the trainer will assist.
6. The trainer must show respect for the personality and prior experience of the trainee. The trainer is not always in the center of the training. The trainer asks open-ended questions when necessary. This enables the trainee to discover their error and find a solution.
7. If necessary, group work is done. With this application, the trainee will receive information about which they are unaware or about which they are hesitant to ask. Further, they reinforce their understanding of the subject by attempting to explain to others.
8. Self-learning responsibility is given to the trainee. As constant training will not be possible or available throughout their career, trainees need to be taught how to reach the additional information that will be needed and how to reflect it in the task.

CBTP was first implemented as a pilot application. The trainee were notified at least 20 days before the date of the scheduled training. The notification included the purpose of the program, the method of implementation, the list of competencies targeted to be gained, and information about the trainer. On the first day of the training program, after meeting the instructor, the trainee decided which competency they wanted to begin with. The aim in the trainee choosing the starting point is for them to understand that the process does in fact start with them, that it will be personnel oriented. Following the selection, the instructor explained the general aspects of CBTP.

The training started with reading the information sheet on the selected competence. It continued with the instructor's demonstration of the way in which the information in the sheet is applied. The trainees described what they had read and understood and then applied the example practice. The trainees produced a solution to a new issue given by the instructor and demonstrated this in practice.

At the end of the application, both the trainee and the trainer evaluated the trainee's performance. If both were convinced that the trainee had gained the competence to solve these and similar issues, they then moved on to the next competence and the process was repeated. If the trainee or trainer doubted that the competence had been acquired, the process reverted to the beginning as shown in the diagram. The trainer changed the case at the second attempt if the trainee preferred.

After the above process was completed for all competencies, the program ended when both the trainee and the trainer agreed that all competencies had been acquired. Upon completion of the training, the trainer gave feedback to the trainees about what they had learned and asked what they thought they could do to complete these processes more quickly and/or effectively.

Findings

In this study, the application of CBT in an SHI was analyzed. The results were initially and individually obtained from the trainee, trainer and the evaluator and assessed before being evaluated as a whole.

The CBTP was conducted with the participation of twenty-five trainees and four trainers in a pilot area. Participants were selected from among personnel who had the same status, had participated in similar basic or compliance training and had worked in the operational units of the institution. The trainees consisted of men between the ages of 24-32 with 1-5 years experience in the profession. Although the practices differ within each branch, the program duration remained the same across all areas, that is 3 days per training, 3 to 5 hours per competence. During this period, the program continued as outlined and was completed in a timely manner.

At the end of the training, both trainees and trainers were asked to assess the CBTP. Trainers stated that the program is very useful for self-improvement, that they enjoyed the process and supported the program because they had the opportunity to transfer their knowledge and experience in a meaningful way. Trainees, on the other hand, emphasized that they were more willing to complete the learning process because it was under their control. They stated that the learning process was different from training in the classroom, that they understood the subject more quickly and easily and that they had the opportunity for self-evaluation.

The trainees' level of knowledge and skills following completion was also evaluated by personnel performing audit duties within the organization. In the assessment, sample assumptions and behaviors were tested to demonstrate the competence of the personnel. It was stated that the level of knowledge of the trainee had increased and they had completed the applications easily and successfully.

All of the staff trained under the CBTP stated that the training program had met their expectations. The majority of participants added that they had reached a clearer understanding of the competencies and expectations of the institution through the training, that they found the method of education different and more effective than the alternatives, and that they had accomplished more in a shorter time by self-managing their own program. Participants also suggested that the implementation of the program not only to technical personnel in a specific field but also to all personnel of the institution would be beneficial both for the personnel and the development of the institution.

Trainers stated that it was the first time they had participated in this one-to-one training format. They added that while they were accustomed to being in control of the training process rather than the trainee having the control themselves, they appreciated the change in dynamics, that the training was completed in a shorter time than expected and that they witnessed participants' success through the exhibition of the attitudes and behaviors gained.

In the audits carried out by the field experts assigned by the Authority and based on measuring the responses of the personnel to the assumptions given to the task, the auditors stated that they had also witnessed a high rate of exhibition of the expected attitudes and behaviors in the trained personnel and that they had shown great success in fulfilling the assumptions.

Following the feedback received from the trainees, the trainers and supervisors, the institution decided to extend the training program throughout the country and apply it to the personnel employed in the operations departments of other units. In this way, CBTP has been accepted as an in-service training model within the institution. The training program is planned to be implemented in various units of the institution in the near future.

Discussion, Conclusion and Suggestions

CBTP was determined to be an effective training model due to its focus on staff, not the trainer, requiring one-to-one or small groups, and continuing until staff and trainer were satisfied the competence had been achieved. It is expected to be a prominent training model for the future. As Hodge (2007) points out, the CBT differs from the traditional method of training which places time and trainer in the center. Rather it is the employee who has been placed at the center of CBT to develop, or specialize, in a specific field. This ensures that the employee is open to development and is willing and ready for more than she/he has achieved to date. The program included all of the basic characteristics determined by Kelchen (2015) and Norton (1987). While the organization found the progress and results of this test program to be more than satisfactory, the time spent per staff to complete a cycle of CBTP is an issue. Reducing the time to complete can only be achieved by the inclusion of more trainers. However, this would require the shift of qualified staff currently working in critical positions to trainer roles, possibly posing difficulties for the institution in performing its other functions effectively.

It was observed that personnel felt valued in the one-to-one training. These feelings, though not necessarily in the short term, are expected to contribute positively to a sense of corporate belonging in the medium and longer term.

As each position in the organization is broken down into tasks and then into competencies within those tasks, a CBTP will take a significant period of time to fully cover the training requirements for any one position. This will have an impact on the organization in that remaining staff will have to cover for those personnel undergoing training as well as perform their own duties. Although the CBT has many positive contributions to offer, the extra workload on the unit may have a potential negative impact and therefore should not be ignored. This and other potentially negative situations could be overcome by conducting training in simulation environments. Realistic (simulated) environments can help staff and trainers to achieve more effective training in an environment independent from external influences.

Training is one of the important functions of institutions striving for qualified personnel. Training and staff development are handled in a holistic way focusing on selection, placement, evaluation and needs. Institutions are required to use limited resources effectively and to focus training in priority areas.

CBTP takes its place among the modern in-service training methods. The results-oriented structure, which focuses on the trainee rather than the trainer, the structural difference between the CBT model and classic training models and, most importantly, the connection between the trainer and the trainee sets this model apart. However, the institution and similar SHIs should consider the possible limitations of this method which requires one-to-one training, before deciding to implement the CBTP. CBTP is ideal for training personnel, particularly in critical positions requiring initiative and independent decision making.

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Akdeniz Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi (AKSOS)

Adres: Akdeniz Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü
Akdeniz Üniversitesi Enstitüleri Binası B Blok 2. Kat Dumlupınar Bulvarı
07058 Kampus / ANTALYA

Tel: 0242 227 44 00 – 1479

E-Mail: aksosdergi@gmail.com

Web: aksos.akdeniz.edu.tr