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RESEARCH ARTICLE

PRACTICES AND PROBLEMS OF HUMAN RESOURCE TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT: EVIDENCE FROM GEDEO ZONE HEALTH SECTOR, SOUTH NATIONS, NATIONALITIES AND PEOPLES REGION, ETHIOPIA

¹Tagesse Mathewos Sugebo, *, ²Admasu Abera Lalisho and ³Eyoel Sileshi Belayneh

¹Department of Public Administration and Development Management, College of Business and Economics, Dilla University, Ethiopia

²College of Business and Economics, Dilla University, Ethiopia

³Instructor, College of Business and Economics, Dilla University, Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT

These days, in the world of globalization, competition and dynamic situations, human resources and its training and development are most important and usually stand at the front. The main purpose of this study was to assess the practices and problems of human resource training and development programs in health offices of Gedeo Zone. To achieve the aim of the study, data were collected from primary and secondary sources. The researchers took a descriptive method and mixed approach of a research. In addition to the questionnaire, the interviews and focused group discussions were used. The major findings confirmed that the practice of conducting needs assessment was found very weak and individual trainees were not given chance to determine their own training and development needs. There were absence of clear criteria for selecting trainees and trainers for the programs. There was no internally developed system of evaluation by which the effectiveness of training programs was assessed. Besides, inadequate budget, low priority given to the programs and also absence of clearly stated training and development policy were found the most important constraints. From the study, it could be concluded that the health offices have lost money on training and development activities because it was poorly designed and not strictly linked to performance of employees. As a result, it is recommended that needs assessment has to be carried out systematically in the health offices. Regional health bureau and Zonal health department have to develop training and development directives which include guide for needs assessment, selection criteria and other related issues to make it effective.

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INTRODUCTION

Human resource is touted as the most important, influential and impactful asset of an organization (Renuks Vembu, 2010). Without human resources no organization could realize its potential goals and interests. Emphasizing the importance of human resources to organizations, Bagashew (2005) states that, it is human resources that create organizations and make them survive and prosper. It is their efforts, talents, and skills in using other resources such as knowledge, materials and energy that result in the creation of useful products and services. Human resource is different from other resources in that it has a will, free choice and intrinsic value that are treated differently from other resources. It is through this constituent that other resources would be acquired and used.

Thus, it is their competence and commitment that largely determine what an organization sets as goals. The modern world is characterized by rising customer needs and expectations for better and quality provision of services particularly in the health sector. In this situation, only organizations that can meet or exceed these customers rising expectations for quality health services will survive and prosper.

On the other hand, the quality of health services, their effectiveness, efficiency, accessibility, and viability mainly depend on the human resources that deliver the services. This is to say that, the success and failure of the health sector in rendering the health services depend on the quality of their human resources among other factors. The quality of human resources, on the other hand, mainly depends on the effectiveness of the training and development programs that this sector designs and executes (WHO, 2002).

*Corresponding author: Admasu Abera Lalisho,
College of Business and Economics, Dilla University, Ethiopia.

Training and development of human resources in the every sector is vital in preparing a capable and skilled workforce with the expertise to meet current and future challenges by providing them with technological skills as well as critical thinking abilities (**Haslinda Abdullah, 2009**).

In line with this human resource training and development is necessary particularly for health sector due to very dynamic environment they operate, knowledge exploitation, technology transfer, promotion of workers, and other socio-economic demands more critically. A range of problems are faced by organizations and human resource development professionals in managing and implementing effective human resource training and development, especially in the climate of globalization and the new technological revolutions. However, their deficiencies in supporting the effectiveness of human resource training and development pose a challenge to the implementation of effective human resource training and development (**Haslinda Abdullah, 2009**). Empirical evidence from developed and developing countries has identified considerable problems to the management of human resource training and development (**Ardichvili and Gasparishvili, 2001; Budhwar and Sparrow, 2002; Budhwar, Al-Yamadi and Debrah, 2002; Alzalabani, 2002**). However, there is limited empirical evidence of practices and problems of human resource training and development in Ethiopian health sector in general and in Gedeo zone health sector in particular.

In this study, emphasis is given to training and development of employees in health sector of Gedeo Zone, Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR). And it is expected in the zone to have a strong base of its human resource management functions in general and training and development undertakings in particular. Training and development activities should be planned and designed to help the health sector of the zone to accomplish its objectives. Thus, this study is conducted to examine the practices and problems of human resource training and development in the health sector of the Gedeo zone.

Statement of the Problem

In every arena organizations are getting more and more technologically oriented. In such a situation, without proper human resource training and development, trying to prepare the work force to accept these technological changes is a major challenge (**Venkatesh, 2014**). In other words, unless employees are given appropriate and continuous training, they will fail to cope up with changes that take place in an organization. Training and development upgrades and updates the knowledge and skills of employees and makes them prepared for promotions and more responsibilities. Well-trained worker might be better motivated, require less supervision, be absent less often, and have fewer accidents. Besides, training and development results in improved efficiency, improved quality of services, lower labor turnover, more efficient scheduling of work, improved responsiveness to specific customer requirements, and greater commitment to an organization as a whole (**Muhammad Hashim, 2012**).

If organizations in general and health sectors in particular fail to train their employees, they would face difficulties in providing timely, efficient, and quality services to their customers as well as the society as the untrained employees fail to keep in place with the continuous changes that take place both locally and internationally in the health and other sectors.

Currently, though much is not written and communicated about the outcome of training in Ethiopia, many organizations are conducting training and development programs for their human resources. Starting from the formal establishment by proclamation in 1962, the civil service in Ethiopia has been playing crucial role in discharging services to the public (**Negarit Gazeta, 1962**). Training and development of civil servants has much importance. This is because it helps them to effectively carryout their duties and prepares them for future responsibilities. However, the civil service in Ethiopia has been short of training programs. The practice of providing training and development activities for the purpose of promoting employees for more responsibilities was very limited. As a result, the efforts being made by the organizations in improving the capabilities and potential of their human resources in directing their organizations towards the realization of organizational goal has been very low. The absence of adequate training and development of health sector managers and employees in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitude hampered the successful implementation of the health policy of the country in general and the Woredas' health activities packages in particular. In addition, due to lack of proper training and development programs, health activities of various Woredas in the zone has been facing different problems such as problems in planning, organizing, directing, staffing, and evaluating the Woredas health activities.

Moreover, the trainings in the Woredas and Dilla town health offices were also organized without adequate needs assessment and identification of the crucial areas of limitations and problems in the performance of individual employees. The selection of appropriate trainees and trainers for the training programs is given less emphasis. Training opportunities are given to individuals based on good relationships with immediate supervisors and top level managers. So, this inadequate and inefficient training and development of employees was not able to improve the poor performance and commitment of individuals in undertaking their daily tasks and meeting the organizational objectives. The researchers of this study have been working in the zone under the study for about six years. This has given them a chance to be familiar with some of the employees and management bodies who have been are working in the health offices of the zone. This also enabled the researchers to observe some of the problems mentioned above. Because of this, the researchers trust that it is an appropriate and priority issue to examine the practices and problems of human resource training and development in the health sector of the Gedeo zone.

Research Questions

This research is intended to explore the practices and problems of human resource training and development mainly

in the health offices of Gedeo zone. It was particularly concerned with finding answers to the following basic research questions.

- How the health offices in the Zone were assessing needs for training and development?
- What are the used to select individuals for training and development programs in the health offices of zone?
- How human resource training and development programs were evaluated in the health offices of zone?
- What basic problems do the health offices in the zone face in their human resource training and development undertakings?

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to examine the practices and problems of human resource training and development in health offices of Gedeo Zone. The specific objectives of the study are:

- To identify how training and development needs were assessed by the health offices in the Zone;
- To examine the bases used to select individuals for training and development programs in the health offices of zone.
- To examine how the evaluation of human resource training and development programs in health offices of the zone takes place; and
- To assess the major problems of human resource training and development programs that the health offices of the zone faces.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Basically, the choice of an appropriate research method depends on the nature of the problem at hand and the type of data needed. In order to explore and describe the practices and problems of human resource training and development in the health offices of Gedeo zone, the study employed descriptive method of research. This is mainly because it is better than others in describing and interpreting the state of affairs as it exists. Therefore, it is believed that this method helps to identify major problems that have negatively influenced human resource training and development programs in the zone.

As the nature of the problem at hand is mainly descriptive, it necessitates the use of mainly qualitative approach. Both primary and secondary sources of data were used to gather pertinent information on the issue under the study. Primary data were gathered through questionnaires, interviews and focused group discussions from office holders, supervisors, practitioners and key informants. Such a concurrent triangulation enabled the researchers to understand the situation clearly and cross-check the information collected from various sources.

Secondary sources of data for this research work were obtained from books, annual reports, health abstracts, various journals, proceedings, internet sources, and other relevant published and unpublished materials related to human resource training and development activities.

Regarding sampling techniques, there are six Woredas and two town administrations in the zone under the study. In order to gather representative, sufficient and relevant data for the study, simple random sampling technique was employed covering four Woredas and one administrative town health offices. In addition, one zonal health department was included so as to triangulate and enrich the information collected from other health offices. Concerning the respondents, out of the total of 110 coordinators and practitioners, 80 (72.5 percent) was selected. From 28 supervisors, due to their small size, all of them were included. Generally, out of 138 total populations, 108 (78.3 percent) sample respondents were included as part of the study. Accordingly, questionnaires were distributed to these office holders and supervisors in the respective sample offices. From this about which ninety two questionnaires were properly filled out and returned successfully. These represents about 85 percent total response rate.

The response formats for the items in the questionnaire were multiple choices and Liker scale (strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree and strongly agree). Finally data collected using various instruments were presented, analyzed and interpreted in to sub-sections based on their similarities. The results of the study were summarized and presented with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS Version 20).

Significance of the Study

Research study is mainly conducted to solve practical societal problems and/or add valid knowledge to the existing ones. As human resource training and development is critical to the success of the organizations, this study can help employees to develop skills needed to perform their jobs, which directly affect the organizations business strategy. The findings and workable recommendations given are expected to have lots of help to the concerned authorities in the Zone in directing their attentions to the areas that require corrective measures and also may enable to indicate future direction in designing, executing and evaluating human resource training and development programs. In addition, the output of this study will serve as a springboard for other interested researchers to undertake wider scope and in-depth analysis on the same or related issues.

Scope of the Study

This research was limited to the human resource training and development activity undertaken in the health sector of Gedeo zone and may not be generalized to some other sectors and organizations. The study focused only on training and development aspects of human resource management functions covering needs assessment, selection of individuals, evaluation and their major problems.

It was also confined only to the periods since 2010 with the assumption that it is possible to get active documents on the issue under the study and there might not be much turnover in the past four years.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the analysis and interpretation of data that were collected through different instruments. The information regarding training and development needs assessment practices, selection criteria, setting objectives and methods, evaluation of training and development programs, and issues related with the major problems of training and development are presented and analyzed. Conducting training and development needs is the starting point of human resource training and development process. It involves establishing areas where employees lack skill, knowledge, and ability in effectively performing the job and also identifying organizational constraints that are creating roadblocks in the performance. Therefore, conducting the training needs assessment in an organizational level, task level, and person level requires systematic analysis. Table 1 below summarizes the responses obtained from the questions raised regarding the issues related to training and development needs assessment.

it. Failure to recognize the importance of needs assessment by all concerned bodies, no experts, and no directives to undertake training and development needs assessment were ranked as the fourth, fifth, and sixth reasons respectively. The information gathered through interviews also indicated that there were no formal and frequent practices of conducting human resource training and development needs assessment.

Therefore, from this finding it can be concluded that though the extent is different the reasons mentioned above were some of the reasons for not conducting the training and development needs assessment in the sector. However, the first and the second reasons have taken the lion's share in hampering the practice of conducting needs assessment in the health offices of the zone. There are several methods to conduct needs assessment. Among these the common ones are observing employees performing the job, performance reviewing, conducting focus groups, complete questionnaires, perception by manager, and perception by self.

Table 1. Training and Development Needs Assessment Practices

No.	Items	%	
1	Did your office conduct human resource training and development needs assessment since 2010?	Yes	32.6
		No	64.1
		I don't know	3.3
2	If "yes", how often your office assesses needs for training and development?	Very frequently	13.3
		Frequently	26.7
		Less frequently	56.7
		Only once	3.3
3	If your answer for item 1 is "No", what is (are) the reason(s) for not conducting training and/or development needs assessment?	No experts to undertake	
		Shortage of budget	43.5
		No responsible body	19.5
		No directives	10.9
		Failure to recognize its Importance	17.2
	Attention has not been given	60	

Source: Field Survey, 2014

It was reported by more than 64 percent of the total respondents that there was no practice of conducting needs assessment. About 32.6 percent of the total respondents agreed on the existence of such practices. Even from those who have shown agreement on the issue, about 56.7 percent replied that the needs assessment undertaken in their respective office was less frequent. In addition, the information gathered through interviews and focused group discussions shown that there were no formal practices of conducting human resource training and development needs assessment. Therefore, it is possible to infer that the practice of conducting training needs assessment was very low and infrequent in the health sector of the zone. As it can be observed from the Table 1 above, the principal reason for not conducting needs assessment was lack of attention towards the issue.

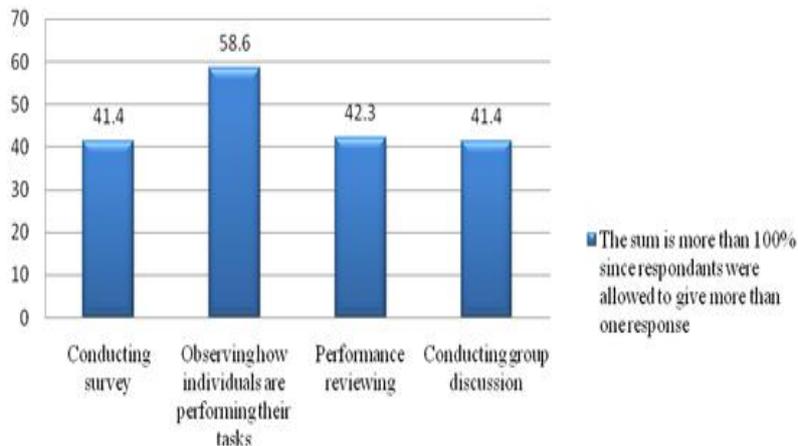
This is confirmed by the majority (60 percent) of the total respondents. The second most important reason cited by 43.5 percent of the respondents was the shortage of budget to training and development needs assessment. Lack of responsible body was also the third reason for not conducting

In line with this, respondents were asked how their organizations gather information in analyzing training and development needs as indicated on the chart below. Accordingly, majority (58.6%) of the respondents agreed that observing how individuals are performing their tasks was mostly used to conduct training or development needs assessment by their health offices. Performance reviewing ranked the second while conducting survey and group discussions ranked as a third. From the above information, it is possible to infer that observing how individuals are performing their tasks, performance reviewing, conducting survey and group discussions were commonly used as information gathering methods for analyzing training and development needs in most offices of the sector on instances where needs assessment was carried out.

Selecting the right individuals for training and development program is very important for both the organization and the individuals chosen. Some of the selection criteria for selecting trainees or trainers for training and development programs are summarized in chart 2 above. With regard to

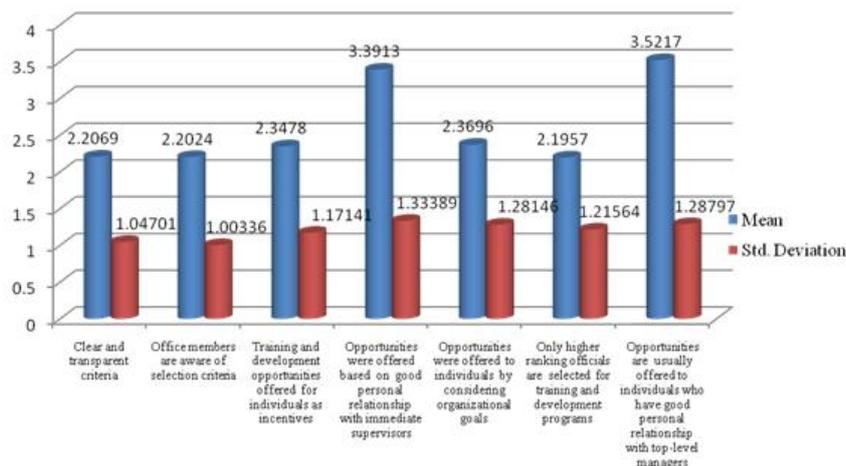
item 1, the researchers tried to look whether there were clear and transparent criteria in selecting trainees or trainers for training and development programs in their offices. In line with this, respondents expressed their disagreement regarding the issue with mean and standard deviation of 2.1 and 1 respectively.

1.28. The respondents disagreed on the assumption that only higher ranking officials were selected for training and development programs with mean score and standard deviation of 2.19 and 1.21 respectively. Respondents were also requested if training and development opportunities were offered to individuals who have good personal relationship with top level managers.



Source: Field Survey, 2014

Chart 1. Methods of Gathering Information for Training and Development Needs



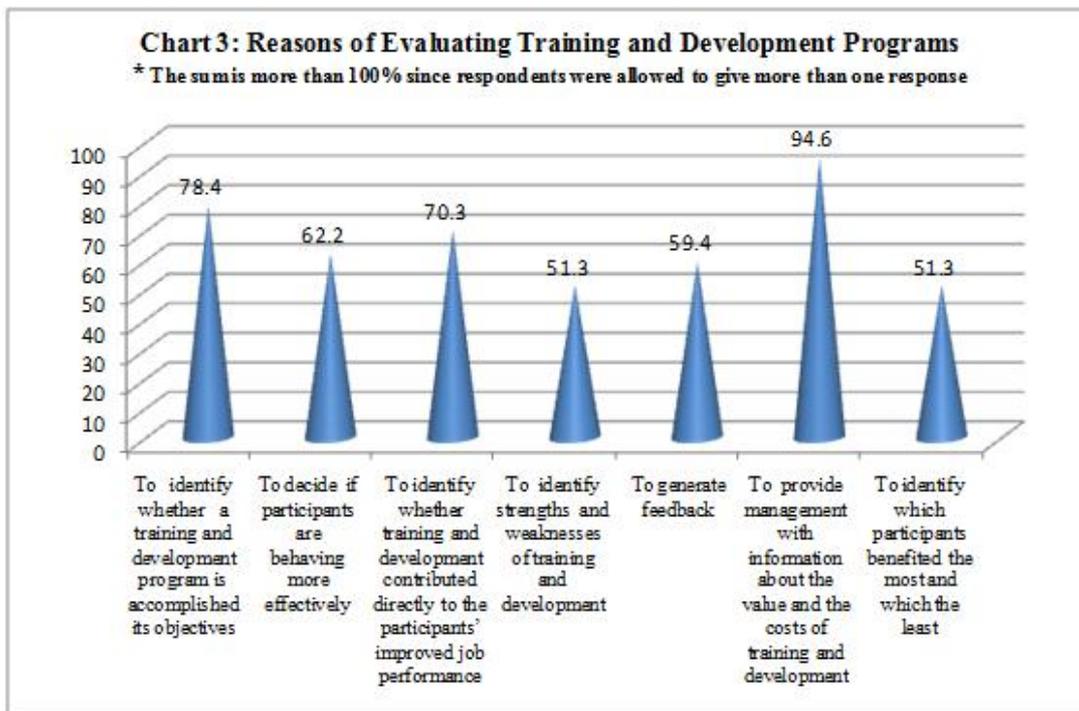
Source: Field Survey, 2014

Chart 2. Selection Criteria for Selecting Trainees/Trainers

In item 2 of chart 2, respondents were asked if every member of their health office was well aware of the selection criteria. Accordingly, with 2.2 and 1 mean and standard deviation respectively, the respondents replied that they were not aware of the selection criteria. With respect to item 3, respondents have shown their agreement with mean score of 2.34 and standard deviation of 1.17 that training and development opportunities in the health offices of the zone were not offered as incentives for individuals. As shown on item 4, respondents agreed that training and development opportunities were usually offered to individuals who have good personal relationship with immediate supervisors and this is explained by mean and standard deviation score of 3.39 and 1.33 respectively.

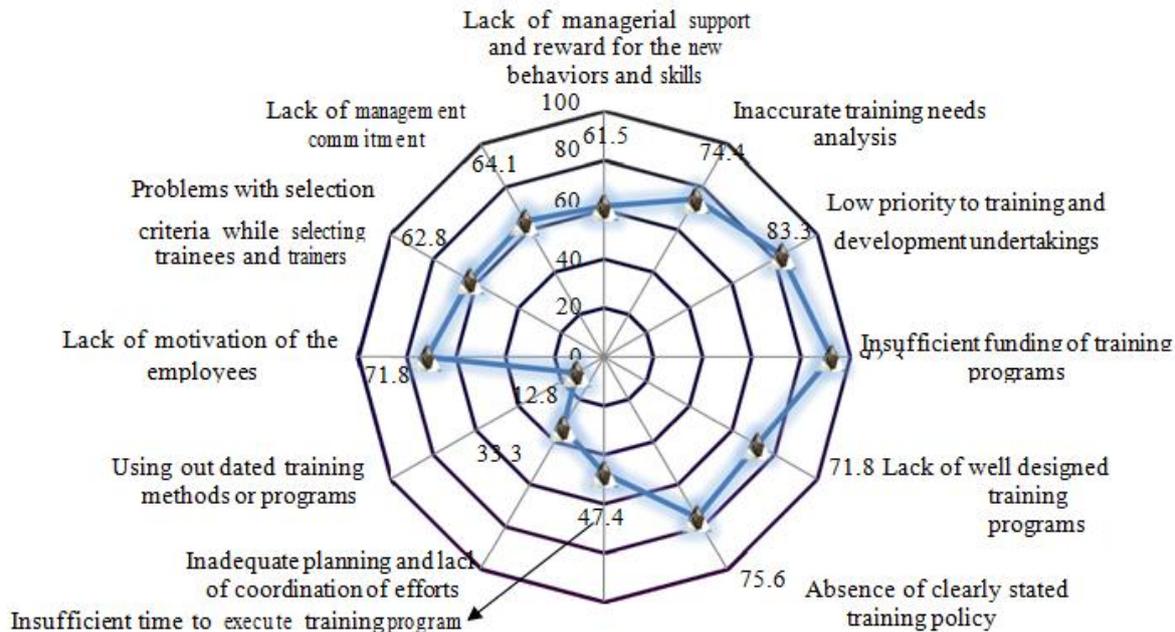
Concerning whether training and development opportunities were usually offered to appropriate individuals by considering organizational goals, the respondents showed their disagreement with mean 2.36 and standard deviation score of

And concerning this, respondents agreed with mean score and standard deviation of 3.52 and 1.28 respectively. The information gathered through interviews revealed that there were no practices of communicating the selection criteria to the members of their respective health office. Therefore, it is unlikely that every member of the health department/offices of the sector was well aware of the selection criteria that their offices used in the selection of either trainees or trainers. Evaluating training and development programs is one of the crucial issues in the process of human resource training and development. Evaluation of training and development effectiveness is the most critical phase in not only assessing the quality of training imparted but also to see what future change in training plan should be made to make it more effective. It must be evaluated by systematically documenting the outcomes of training in terms of how trainees actually behave back on their jobs and the relevance of the trainees' behavior to the objectives of the organization. The summary of the results are presented in chart 3 below.



Source: Field Survey, 2014

Chart 3. Reasons of Evaluating Training and Development Programs
*The sum is more than 100% since respondents were allowed to give more than one response



Source: Field Survey, 2014

Chart 4. Problems of Training and Development Programs
*The sum is more than 100% since respondents were allowed to more than one response

As shown in chart 3 below, respondents were asked for what purpose training and development programs evaluation have been used in their respective offices. Accordingly, the great majority (94.6 percent) of the respondents replied that the

main purpose behind evaluating the training and development programs was to provide management with information on the value and costs of training and to determine its cost effectiveness. About 78.4 percent of them believed that

training and development programs were evaluated with the aim of identifying whether a training program is accomplishing its objectives whereas 70.3 percent of them confirmed that the reason was to identify whether training has contributed directly to the participants' improved job performance. All other reasons for conducting training and development programs evaluation were accounted for less than 63 percent for each and relatively this is insignificant. The interviews made with core process owners shows that most of the health offices in the zone gave more attention to the factors related with cost of training and its effectiveness, and objectives of training. Therefore, it is likely to infer that cost and objectives of training were the main reasons forcing most of the health offices in the zone to conduct training and development programs evaluation so as to measure its effectiveness. There are several factors that hinder the effectiveness of training and development programs. Chart 4 above shows some of the factors that constrained the effectiveness of training and development programs in each offices of the health sector of the zone. In line with this, respondents were asked whether their office has faced problems in training and development endeavors over the last four years. Accordingly, the first three great majorities (92.3 percent, 83.3 percent, and 75.6 percent) of the total respondents identified insufficient funding of training programs, low priority to training and development programs, and absence of clearly stated training policy as the major problems that were mostly influenced the complete undertaking of the programs respectively.

The next three most important problems identified by the respondents in the health offices of the zone were inaccurate training needs analysis, lack of well-designed training programs and lack of motivation of the employees, and lack of management commitment and these were accounted for 74.4 percent, 71.8 percent, and 64.1 percent of the total respondents respectively. The interviews made with core process coordinators has also shown that inappropriate budget allocation for training and development activities, low priority and lack of attention towards the importance of training program, absence of clearly stated policy to guide the training activities, and lack of well-designed training program were identified as common problems among others in the health offices of the zone in the last four years. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that lack of adequate budget allocated to training and development programs, low priority to training and development undertakings, absence of clearly stated training policy, inaccurate training need analysis, lack of well-designed training programs, lack of management commitment, problems with selection criteria while selecting trainees and trainers, lack of managerial support and reward for the new behaviors and skills, insufficient time to execute training programs, inadequate planning and lack of coordination of efforts and use of out-dated training methods and/or programs were the major problems faced during training and development programs endeavor in the health sector of the zone.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions are drawn:

- It was revealed in the findings of this study that the practice of conducting needs assessment in respective offices of the health sector was unsatisfactory. Little opportunities were given to individual employees in order to determine their own needs or deficiencies. This has caused a gap and failure in relating training and development needs with actual problems of individual employee.
- There were no clear and transparent criteria for selecting individuals for the programs. Most of the time opportunities were given to individuals based on their good personal relationships with immediate supervisors and top level managers. This has led to complaints among employees and adversely affected their commitments towards the realization of organizational goals.
- The needs had been conducted mostly focusing on analysis of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of the individuals while less emphasizing on the role of the organizational and task levels of analysis in determining the need. Therefore, it could be reasonable to conclude that the health offices of the zone have lost money on training and development activities because it was poorly designed and not linked to performance problems.
- It was ascertained by the findings of this study that the system of training and development evaluation by which the outcomes of the training and development programs are evaluated was given less emphasis. This has led to ineffective and inefficient evaluation system and wise less use of scarce resources in the sector.
- The effectiveness of the training and development programs had been hampered by insufficient funding of training programs, low priority to training and development programs, absence of clearly stated training policy, inaccurate training needs analysis, lack of motivation of the employees, lack of management commitment, problems with trainees and trainers selection criteria, lack of managerial support and reward for the new behaviors and skills, insufficient time to execute training programs, and inadequate planning and lack of coordination of efforts were among the major problems observed in the sector.
- In general, it would be concluded that human resource training and development activities were not scientific and effective so as to provide and satisfy the growing needs and expectations of the customers and society at large for quality services.

Recommendations

Based upon the above conclusion and findings of the study, this part of the research work is focused on the following recommendations to enhance the office and other stakeholder's ability in the delivery of training and development programs in the health sector of the zone.

- Training and development programs mostly help an organization in accomplishing its goals and objectives if it is conducted in a proper way. This is also possible when training and development programs are provided to employees by identifying gaps by which training can

make a real contribution to organizational success. Therefore, trainers, coordinators, and individual workers should collaboratively carry out training and development needs assessment systematically in their offices. This helps in avoiding the misuse of the scarce human, financial, and material resources and enables to deliver satisfying services to the customers, and to effectively accomplish organizational objectives in general.

- Each office in the health sector of the zone has to develop mechanisms for collecting information about the gap between what is and what ought to be by employing organizational, job/task and person analysis. The practice of conducting training needs assessment by the respective office should take into account the needs of individual employees. This helps them to determine their own needs and develop the right selection criteria, objectives, contents, and evaluation systems. Efforts have to be made by regional health bureau and zonal health department to develop needs assessment manuals to use as a guide line for effective identification of needs and design appropriate training and development programs. Core process coordinators/heads in respective offices have to build the capability of individuals in charge of identifying their own training and development needs.
- Since there were no clear and transparent selection criteria, training and development opportunities were offered to individuals based on the good will and personal relationship of immediate supervisors and top-level managers. Such practices affected the morale and initiative of other employees as well as the offices in achieving their goals and objectives. Therefore, the regional health bureau and zonal health department should develop training and development directives which included trainees and trainers selection criteria by participating representatives from each Woreda health office. The directives prepared should be disseminated to all individuals in the offices. Training and development opportunities should be offered to appropriate trainees mainly based on needs assessment and it should not be given as favor to individuals so as to collect their per diem. This training opportunity should also be given without considering the status and personal relationship with others.
- It is recommended that coordinators, trainers and trainees in each respective offices of the sector has to design and endorse a system of evaluation for their training and development undertakings in terms of reaction changes, learning attained, performance or newly acquired job skills, work behaviors and organizational improvements.
- In order to properly address the problems stated in the preceding section, the zonal health department and Woreda health offices have to create a link with NGOs and/or donor agencies such as world vision in order to obtain the required materials, financial and technical support in their training and development endeavors.

In addition, they have to give priority to the training and development undertakings and also should create awareness on its importance. Moreover, zonal budget allocators should give emphasis for training and development activities while allocating budget for various items of expenditure and significant amount should be appointed to training and development activities. In general, proper needs assessment, need based selection of trainees and trainers, development of the achievable objectives and contents, selection of suitable methods, and proper evaluation of the programs should be there for the effectiveness of the training and development programs.

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