

การวิเคราะห์ความจำเป็นเพื่อการจัดกิจกรรมการพัฒนาทรัพยากรมนุษย์ :  
การทบทวนข้อจำกัดด้านแนวคิดและการปฏิบัติ  
Traditional HRD Needs Assessment: The Review of Potential  
Shortfalls in Concepts and Practices

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### บทคัดย่อ

การดำเนินธุรกิจในอดีตที่การแข่งขันทางการตลาดไม่รุนแรงและสภาพแวดล้อมในการดำเนินธุรกิจไม่ได้เปลี่ยนแปลงมากนักส่งผลให้องค์กรส่วนใหญ่สามารถแข่งขันและช่วงชิงความได้เปรียบจากปริมาณเงินทุนและทรัพยากรการผลิตที่ตนมี แต่การดำเนินธุรกิจท่ามกลางการแข่งขันที่รุนแรงเช่นในปัจจุบันพบว่าเงินทุน ทรัพยากรการผลิต และกลยุทธ์การแข่งขันทางการตลาดนั้นสามารถหามาแข่งขันหรือลอกเลียนแบบกันได้โดยไม่ยากนัก อย่างไรก็ตามพบว่ามืองค์กรจำนวนมากไม่น้อยที่สามารถประสบความสำเร็จเหนือคู่แข่งทั้งที่มีทุนและทรัพยากรการผลิตในปริมาณที่น้อยกว่า มีการศึกษาจำนวนมากพบว่าองค์กรที่มีศักยภาพในการแข่งขันสูงให้ความสำคัญกับการลงทุนและวางแผนพัฒนาสมรรถนะของบุคลากรของพวกเขาอย่างต่อเนื่อง มีแผนและกระบวนการวิเคราะห์ความจำเป็นในการจัดกิจกรรมการพัฒนาทรัพยากรมนุษย์ทั้งระยะสั้นและระยะยาวเพื่อให้มั่นใจได้ว่าบุคลากรในองค์กรจะได้รับการพัฒนาความรู้ความสามารถที่จำเป็นต่อการปฏิบัติงานตามเป้าหมายที่วางไว้ อย่างไรก็ตามในระยะหลังเริ่มพบว่าแนวคิดและรูปแบบการวิเคราะห์ความจำเป็นเพื่อการพัฒนาทรัพยากรมนุษย์ที่เคยดำเนินการมาในอดีตเริ่มขาดประสิทธิภาพ มักไม่เอื้อต่อรูปแบบการดำเนินธุรกิจในปัจจุบันและทิศทางการเติบโตของธุรกิจในอนาคต บทความนี้มุ่งให้ความรู้เกี่ยวกับแนวคิด ขั้นตอนและประโยชน์ของการวิเคราะห์ความจำเป็นเพื่อการพัฒนาทรัพยากรมนุษย์ที่ดำเนินมาตั้งแต่ในอดีต ในขณะที่เดียวกันก็นำเสนอข้อจำกัดที่พบจากการทบทวนวรรณกรรมที่เกี่ยวข้อง ตลอดจนให้ข้อเสนอแนะเพื่อการพัฒนาทฤษฎี แนวคิดทางวิชาการและแนวทางดำเนินการวิเคราะห์ความจำเป็นเพื่อการพัฒนาทรัพยากรมนุษย์เชิงรุกสำหรับองค์กรเพื่อเพิ่มประสิทธิภาพจากการดำเนินการรูปแบบเดิม

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## Abstract

In the past where the market environment had been less competitive and changed slowly, most business organizations richer in capital and resources could easily overtake and gain more market competitive advantage over their competitors. Nonetheless, this is less likely the case for a business operation in today's dynamic world. In today's aggressive business environment, many organizations can easily gain both capital and resources locally and globally. New forms of marketing strategies have been routinely created, adjusted or easily imitated. However, nowadays numerous successful corporates with less capital and resources may perform better than their resourceful rivals. Studies show that these highly competitive organizations have continuously invested on developing their staff competencies. Their long-term and short-term Human Resource Development needs assessment (HRDNA) and subsequent plans can ensure their well-trained staff possess knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to perform their assigned work. However, owing to the combative ways of doing business today, the HRDNA ensuring staff high competence and business success in the past has recently become less effective, obsolete, and not ministered to the direction and future growth of businesses. This article aims to 1) review concepts, steps and benefits of traditional HRDNA, 2) point out some potential shortfalls, and 3) provide both theoretical and practical contributions to create a new body of knowledge in the field of HRD, and assist organizations in adjusting their HRDNA process.

**Keywords :** Needs Assessment, Need Analysis, NA, Proactive, Shortfalls, Concepts, Practices

## INTRODUCTION

It has been broadly accepted that to ensure staff possess adequate knowledge and skills to perform jobs, organizations should primarily invest in training their personnel (Spio-kwofie, Danso, Edzii, 2016). There is growing evidence that profitability, sales, absenteeism and organization learning all improve in workplaces where there is a strong focus on training and development activities (Beebe, Mottet, Roach, 2004; Chalofsky, Rocco and Morris, 2014; Dawson and Edwards, 2009; Grieves, 2003; ). Blan and Thacker (2007) highlighted that when employees

could not perform their jobs owing to deficits in knowledge, skills and abilities, a training program is often advised as the first solution. While training has been seen as one of the most popular human resource development activities (HRD) or a magic human resource development tool in most organizations currently, Firdousi (2011) warned that poorly-constructed HRD programmes or training may not effectively address the actual needs of the organization or employees in the desired way. To ensure the development of well-functioning HRD/Organization Development interventions, the needs assessment (NA),

the first and the foremost phase in most HRD processes, should be comprehensively studied. This is supported by Cook (2005); Gupta (1999) and Witkin and Altschuld (1995) finding that the waste of developing poor training programmes could be derived from poorly conducting a needs investigation which should identify the real development needs in their human resources toward business strategies. To ensure the success of HRD activities and achievement of organizational goals, a proper HRD needs examination should be carried out strategically during the first stage. The purposes of this academic article include 1) to introduce concepts, benefits and general steps of the classical HRD needs assessment, 2) to highlight some shortfalls of the traditional NA and malpractices extracted from literature reviews, and 3) to propose both theoretical and practical contributions for organizations and the HR Departments to consider when adjusting their NA process.

### **HRD Needs Assessment, concepts, benefits and steps:**

NA has been acknowledged as one of the most significant phases in most training and development processes. (Werner and DeSimone, 2012). Because the HR Department plays a major role in an organization's Management – planning strategy, management development and organization development (Coens and Jenkins, 2000), NA has always been an essential task the HR departments must do before introducing their staff HRD activities to ensure their workplace

professionalism (Gupta, 1999). The requirement of NA as an important part of the HRD process can for example be found in several Human Resource Development, Learning and Instructional Design as well as Organizational Development models. These, for instance, include 'Analysis for Improving Performance: Tool for Diagnosing Organizations & Documenting Workplace Expertise' proposed by Swanson (1995); 'HRD-Organization Alignment/ Integration Model' developed by Sthapi (2010); 'Standard Systems View of Instructional Systems Design' advised by Schiffman (1995); 'Training and HRD Process Model' highlighted by Werner and DeSimone (2012); 'Systematic Training Model' presented by Armstrong (2009); or 'Strategic Management Process model' described by Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart and Wright (2015).

According to Lawson (2016), failing to scrutinize the real needs of the organization, leads each year to many corporates wasting large amounts of money arranging training programmes which could never succeed in addressing the actual needs of their businesses and specific professional development. Khanfar (2014) was also concerned with this, pointing out that not being able to identify the real needs of the organization before implementing a training program, causes both money to be wasted and needed knowledge and required skills of employees remaining unfulfilled.

Appearing on review of literature, NA could be closely linked with other terms such as 'Needs Analysis' or 'Assessing Needs', 'Training

Needs Analysis’, ‘Learning Needs Analysis’, and ‘HRD Needs Investigation’. The detailed description of terms and concepts can be seen on Table 1.

**Table 1:** examples of related terms and concepts of Needs Assessment found in literature.

Need Assessment (NA)	Training Needs Analysis (TNA)	HRD Needs Investigation (HRDNI)	Learning Needs Analysis (LNA)
A process designed to identify gaps or deficiencies in employees and organizational performance (Saks and Haccoun, 2007, p.89).	A systematic method for determining what caused performance to be less than expected or required (Blan and Thacker, 2007, p.101)	A process that identifies the gap between what is currently happening and what should be occurring (Delahaye, 2005, p.120).	A review of learning and development requirements that is designed to support individual, team and organizational development (University College London: UCL, 2016, p.1)
A process to identify the organization’s needs, and it is the first step of the training process (Prammanee, 2015, p.11).	A systematic and comprehensive investigation about varied problems to identify some problem dimensions accurately (Malung, 2015, p.194)		
The process of determining the cause, extent, and appropriate cure for organization ills. The process addresses the organizational context and combines organizational analysis, data gathering and interviewing techniques to identify and shrink the gap between desired and actual knowledge, skills, and performance (Lawson, 2016, pp.3-4)			The tools that are used to measure the gap between current and desired practice and asks: How big is the gap? Is it known or unknown to the target audience? What current practices issues are pressing on this issue for the target audience? Is there motivation to learn something new and if not what would provide it? (Office of Continuing Education and Professional Development, Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto, 2016, p.1)
A process by which an organization’s HRD needs are identified and articulated. It is the starting point of the HRD and training process (Werner and DeSimone, 2012, p.109)			

By integrating the above concepts of terms related to NA and their definitions, this article attempts to throw light upon 'NA' as 'a planning strategy exploring the needs of both the staff and the organization to develop an HRD/OD program to minimize performance gaps, overcome future challenges and achieve organizational goals'. The definitions discussed and the new integrated definition of NA in this article, in other words, suggests that need assessors should conduct this crucial phase, investigating concerns in various areas before designing or implementing any improvements or development programmes addressing performance gaps, future challenges and meeting the company goals.

When discussing the steps of conducting NA from various literature reviews, it was found that NA has been extensively written about, and reproduced numerous times in both Human Resource Development, and Training and Development books published and used for teaching in universities worldwide. Werner and DeSimone have, for example, emphasized 'Assessing Needs' as an essential step in the HRD process in their books. This famous process could also be referred to as 'ADeImE model' or 'ADDIE model' in an Instructional Design process. The NA phase is a critical step in the HRD process which was presented in their early edition books, and it has appeared in every edition even in their last publication in 2012. Parmmanee (2015) explained that "After WWII the ADDIE training model was developed and

introduced. ADDIE is an acronym for Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation phases of a systematic instructional design model used by US military trainers to improve job performance" (p.10). This was also confirmed by Anderson (1994) reporting that most of the training carried out today is hands-on and has not really changed much from that which took place at the time of the Industrial Revolution more than two centuries ago. These fundamental concepts of NA have been well supported and administered. The straightforward steps have been widely applied in various types of organizations and business sectors. This might be because they could be denoted on the point of its whole systematic training mechanism and guidance for HR practitioners. These start from searching or investigating for root causes of failures (data gathering) to define development needs, drawing up measurable training target behaviors and judgment criteria, designing valuable and meaningful training materials as well as teaching and learning methods, determining potential trainers, implementing and evaluating the success of the HRD programmes based on the criteria set.

Whilst Lawson (2016) acknowledged that without restrictions, needs assessors could outline steps to conduct their NA giving as much detail as possible or just a few simple steps. The common steps of traditional NA found in literature reviews could be undertaken as follows: 1) identify problems or needs, 2) determine needs-assessment design, 3) collect

data, 4) analyze data, and 5) provide feedback or write a need assessment report. The examples of NA/TNA/HRDNI actions in each step proposed by scholars in the field of HRD are reviewed in table 1.

**Table 2:** Example steps of NA/TNA/HRDNI proposed by scholars in the field of HRD/T&D

NA Steps	Lawson's NA (2016)	Prammanee's TNA (2015)	Warner and DeSimone's NA (2009)	Sak and Haccoun's NA (2007)	Blan and Thacker's NA (2007)	Delahaye's HRDNI (2005)
1	Identify problem or need	Indicate topic		Notice concerns		Survey both external and internal environments
		Scope problems	Acknowledge potential development needs from 3 main data sources: organizational/ strategic level, task level, and people level	Review the importance of concerns	Consider trigger causing performance gaps	Table 1: Example steps of NA/TNA/HRDNI proposed by scholars in the field of HRD/T&D
2	Design need-analysis plan and methods	Determine participants				Review possible data sources
		Consider choices of data collection methods		Consults with stakeholders	Look at the input and source of data	Design data and methods which best fit by considering qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques
3	Collect data	Determine methods & Develop data collection instruments				
		Gather data from multiple sources & Collect data using multiple methods	Collect data in 3 levels: organization, the task and the people	Collect data in 3 levels: organizations, the task & the people	Examine possible data sources: Org, tasks & person	Gather data

NA Steps	Lawson's NA (2016)	Prammanee' s TNA (2015)	Warner and DeSimone' s NA (2009)	Sak and Haccoun' s NA (2007)	Blan and Thacker' s NA (2007)	Delahaye' s HRDNI (2005)
4	Analyze data	Identify the obstacles to effective performance	Identify the obstacles to effective performance	Identify the obstacles to effective performance	Identify performance discrepancy by conducting organizational analysis; task analysis and person analysis	Analyse data based on the type of data collected to design learning experience, learning objectives, competencies, learning outcome
		Summarize data collected	Determine solutions to performance problems	Determine solutions to performance problems		
5	Provide feedback	Analyze learners	Encourage people who may be involved to prioritize HRD needs		Present both Training and Non-training needs	Write an HRD needs investigation report
		Set characteristics and Summarize results				

Some straightforward benefits of this needs examination can be highlighted as below:

Firstly, NA could ensure effectiveness in how training and HRD activities are designed. Gupta (1999) claimed that valid training programmes should be organized and built based on determined needs as it is important to find out real organizational development needs (NA) before implementing any HRD or training activity. Lawson (2016) in addition, supported that companies could waste many thousands of dollars, if they fail to provide training which could develop the required KSAs of staff or business needs. This was agreed by Firdousi (2011) that the main purpose of conducting NA is to guarantee

the achievement of its desired outcome and not waste time and money organizing programmes which are not really required.

In terms of business solutions, the work of NA has been accepted as one of the most strategic HR tasks assisting staff members to gain KSAs they need to obtain to achieve organizational goals and strategies. According to Blan and Thacker (2007) NA helps to ensure that organized training activities are aligned with the strategic plans of organizations. Taylor and O'Driscoll (1998) explained this bringing up that powerful training upsurges companies' productivity, quality and services. Not only could the companies reduce cost and time

wasting during the production process caused by their untrained staff, but they could also gain more money when staff become skillful. This is because when they master their work, they make less mistakes, work faster, or with better quality giving the companies a worthwhile financial gain. Lawson (2016) summarized that NA could investigate real business and workforce problems, analyze the causes of difficulties, identify possible solutions, estimate appropriate resources and time and strive to overcome the target problems.

Furthermore the result from the NA process could guide how the whole HRD and training process may effectively be designed, implemented and evaluated. Blan and Thacker (2007) indicated that the NA process gives performance criteria which trainers could use to examine the development of their trainees at the end of their HRD programmes. Lawson (2016); Sak and Haccoun (2007); and Spio-Kwofie, Danso and Edzii, (2016) agreed that assessing HRD needs in all businesses is crucial since it provides organizations with key information guiding methods to design HRD activities/interventions and points to emphasize. It could for example, scope what content to include in the program, suitable types of training (workshop, self-study, or on-the-job), proper time ranges, correct target audience and the degree of urgency.

By the same token, conducting NA could help evaluate and identify the real development needs of the workforce. It assists the management team to consider important HRD

activities each staff member should undertake (Taylor and O'Driscoll, 1998). Firdousi (2011) commented on this adding that it reveals the number of employees who need to be trained as well as guide the right lessons and types of HRD programmes that should be organized to develop KSAs demanded in the workplace for their employees.

Moreover, NA identifying and addressing correct KSAs deficiencies of staff could increase their job satisfaction, reduce high turnover rate and allow them to see their opportunities to follow their career development plan. Bowman (1987) described that conducting needs investigation reveals weak areas which employees could not overcome. Being trained to deal with these challenges could engage them with the organization and reduce an organization's high turnover rate. Also Spio-Kwofie, Danso and Edzii (2016) found that effective NA could point out the correct specific obstacles that both new and current staff struggle to overcome when carrying out their jobs. Once they are trained and capable of handling their difficulties, their job satisfaction level may increase and they are likely to look forward to growing a realistic career future with organizations.

Besides, it was found that NA could save organizations time and money. According to Werner and DeSimone (2012), "HRD professionals are often asked to justify the allocation of resources. This involves a financial assessment of the impact of HRD programmes. Taylor and O'Driscoll (1998) underlined that training is a big



investment. Especially during the lean times, without careful investigation of real causes of problems or if training is not planned wisely, it could cost organizations badly. This is in line with Blan and Thacker (2007) viewing that whilst there is an increased concern about costs, conducting NA allows organizations to see how time and money could be wisely invested and may be spent more carefully on HRD activities.

### **Some shortfalls of the traditional NA and malpractices**

Whilst conducting NA seems to provide organizations with plentiful benefits, some potential shortcomings of the traditional NA could be noticeable and therefore worth articulating. This article is highlighting at least 7 potential limitations. These include 1) over-emphasizing performance gaps; 2) not identifying KSAs needed for jobs in the future; 3) not encouraging staff to work beyond their required previous competency; 4) growing negative self-concepts of staff; 5) having potential to gain less important data; 6) Being difficult and using much time and money to collect data; and 7) lacking clear practical knowledge in conducting NA.

The first conceptual shortfall of the traditional NA is too much spotting the performance gaps rather than addressing the future growth of an organization. It can be recognized that most definitions and concepts of NA overly emphasize diagnosing the performance problems. Wright and Geroy (1992) commented that since the work of Moore and Dutton on

training needs analysis was published in 1953, most theories about training and development refer to needs based on the equation 'Standard or Desired Performance – Present or Actual Performance = Training Needs'. This notion can be widely seen. For example, Spio-Kwofie, Danso, and Edzii (2016) presented that effective training programmes should be developed only after a performance gap is identified. This gap can be inspected by comparing between the skills employees currently possess and the skills required for them to effectively perform a job. Lawson (2016) also emphasized this view in that gaps can be measured by examining the staff efficiency compared to the organization standards by conducting frequent performance appraisals. Despite these, Mitchell (1987) and Anderson (1994) clarified that the traditional concept of needs assessment aims to address unfulfilled goals that could not be achieved instead of looking forward to finding out how the workforce could be improved and prepared for performing their jobs based on the organization strategies or anticipated future direction. Kaufman (1982) also supported this pointing out the word 'need' is dependent upon comparing what is happening with what should be happening. This is in line with Delahaye (2005) concerning that most central concept which overly emphasizes only on detecting the gap between the level of performance employees have displayed and the expected performance criteria set by their companies. This is important to emphasis as it could affect how HR departments perform their

work. This is because the traditional concept of NA does not guide the HR departments to design any extra or meaningful staff learning experiences more beneficial than those stated in the list of KSAs staff require to perform their jobs currently. Organizations could also lose the opportunity to potentially have a workforce capable of driving and increasing organizational productivity or service quality for their future organizational development. In reality, Brinkerhoff (1986) suggested that it is not sufficient to focus just on employee failings since there should be two different types of Need – ‘Diagnostic Needs’ and ‘Analytic Needs’. He described that ‘Diagnostic Needs’ are concerned with determining how best to ensure employees standards can be improved whereas ‘Analytic Needs’, often dealt with by a management team, look at changing the way staff techniques and tasks can be carried out better to achieve organizational goals and challenges in the future.

The second limitation of the classic needs assessment is some mismatches between the identified performance gap and knowledge, skills or abilities (KSAs) required for the job in the future. There are high possibilities in today’s fast-changing world that the required competencies of staff members based on the result of the NA process may not be related to the actual KSAs of jobs needed for staff to perform effective work in the future. This is because many new types of jobs, positions or tasks requiring different KSAs have emerged while current jobs keep disappearing or are redesigned

all the time. This is due to changing customer needs and expectations as well as new technology being purchased by the industry. According to Forbes media (2016), The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) considers major changes will occur between 2010 and 2020 leading to a huge decline in both numbers and percentages of employees. Pearce (2014) explain this claiming that the Internet has created enormous changes in the global economy during the last twenty years. Technology is presently of greater importance than at any time since the Industrial Revolution but so also are various economic factors leading to vast changes in employment. The next 10 years will see the demise of many occupations and industries. The substantial evidence could also be seen when Charan (2013) used the example of Kodak company which had to close down. He exemplified and warned business leaders that as the world is changing so dramatically, corporate leaders and management must be ready to react and adapt immediately to the changes and even to recognize new opportunities before they even occur. Nowadays, it is necessary to be forerunners and introduce new operation methods, machinery and staff competencies. In addition, according to the article entitled “the Future Work Skills 2020 Reported” presented in Forbes magazine by Schulz and Gill (2015), by 2020 up to 50% of employees will be freelance. Their survey also report that many Employers, HR professionals and Educators produced a list of skills essential for working success in the 21<sup>st</sup>

Century namely: adaptability, analysis/solution mindset, collaboration, communication, digital fluency, empathy, entrepreneurial mindset, resilience, self-awareness, social/diversity awareness. It can be seen that the performance gap analyzed based on jobs or task analysis identified in the past may no longer match with the skills needed in current or future business conditions. In the present very competitive environment, to become effective organizations, staff need to be more flexible, creative and multi-skilled as well as having a more global, and teamwork focus. Effective NA should therefore provide the workforce with certain HRD activities promoting newly required skills for current or future jobs in the market, otherwise; an organization can lose the opportunity to gain competitive advantages over their competitors.

The third impediment of the old fashioned NA is it fails to become a great motivator for staff to work better and to their full potential. Staff who do not identify as possessing any performance gap, are often ignored and regarded as not needing further development. Without defining the word 'needs' beyond the 'performance gaps', most average staff could try to perform their work just to meet their job standards. When standards are accomplished, many employees will not increase their effort to improve their work beyond the standards and organizations will waste potential talent. Working above the set job requirement could result in a greater work standard being set for their next year and if organizations fail to recognize this enthusiasm

in staff, the employee may well become disheartened and fail to unleash their full potential. Really good employees could well take part in self-development then move on to work for a competitor. Expressly, many organizations are failing to recognize staff potential and conditioning their performance based on sets of only basic criteria in their work.

The fourth possible drawback of traditional needs assessment is the growth of negative self-concept attitudes in staff which could make them less confident in continuing to do their work. While Werner and DeSimone (2012) clarified that the person analysis aims to identify "who needs to be trained. And what kind of training they need" (p.111), Bell and Ford (2007) pointed out that 360 degree-performance appraisal is often used to see a whole picture of an employee. This is also confirmed by Seifer, Yukl, and McDonald (2003) commenting that a number of companies start using multi-source feedback and 360 degree feedback as a reference of training needs analysis data source. This deficiency investigation of employees could, as a result, be regarded as their failure to perform their job which are viewed and indicated by people around them. Training programmes could be seen as a kind of warning or punishment for their poor working capability. While Gecas (1982) explained that comparing one employee's performance against that of another could create a negative self-concept and lack of self-confidence among employees, Franken (1994) stated that much research indicates that

motivation comes from a good self-concept. This also relates to Peck (2016) describing that self-esteem, self-concept and motivation concerns how you feel about your capabilities and value as an employee and thus influences the choices you make about what you can achieve.

The fifth obstacle in NA is always using the same organization-wide questionnaire to obtain needs information from all groups of staff. Delahaya (2005) agreed that interviews, focus groups and questionnaires are commonly used tools in conducting NA. This is in line with Dyson, Hedgecock, Tomkins and Cooke (2009) and McClelland (2007) acknowledging that a questionnaire is often used to collect employees' opinions concerning their training needs. Firdousi (2011) further explained that "Training needs assessment can be as simple as asking an employee what training programmes they would like to undertake in order to improve themselves... many people can be questioned in a short span of time. Moreover, they also provide the employees with the opportunity to acknowledge their needs on paper which they may be too embarrassed to admit needing in a face to face meeting" (pp.113-1144). Whilst asking staff to complete a questionnaire seems to be a quick-hand data collection technique used in needs assessment surveys, distributing the same questionnaire to obtain needs information from all positions, which many HR departments do, may impede the assessor from obtaining certain significant needs information from some key informants. This is because most

organization-wide questionnaires are often developed containing general questions by HR Departments, therefore its capacity to scrutinize the real needs of all levels of staff is often restricted. Partly this is because HR staff could not always understand the nature of the jobs, work situations and functional standards of all positions in every department. It is important to consider employees working in different positions may have different tasks, roles, responsibilities, understanding and perspectives regarding their job and organizational needs. Based on these restrictions, operator level staff may for example mention some development needs which are less relevant to their jobs or could not help the organizations to attain their goals. This is because they are not aware of their organizations strategic plans. In the same vein, the organization-wide questionnaire could be developed containing too generalized questions. This again limits the opportunity for some key informants to share some important indicative answers regarding organization' directions, strategies or business trends. By using the same questionnaire to obtain general needs responses from all staff members, the company could only analyze needs data based on primitive general information.

The sixth constraint of classical NA is it requires too much effort, time and money spent on designing and developing correct data collection instruments, data collection processes and data analysis. Lawson (2016) found that "[When conducting NA] many factors must be taken into consideration, including time, money, number

of people involved, resources available, and so forth. A full-blown needs assessment is both time-consuming and costly... few organizations are willing to make that kind of investment” (p.6). McClelland (2007) added that “An assessment is a much more involved and complicated process. An assessment may contain a survey, or multiple surveys, as well as other means of data collection (such as on-site observations) in order to obtain comprehensive feedback on a particular subject or subjects” (p.12). Werner and Desimone (2012) acknowledge the same difficulty informing that developing effective data collection instruments is not easy and it needs certain people trained in the field of research and measurement. According to Nowack (1991), without a well-designed questionnaire, staff may be unable to recognize a training programme to meet their and the organizations needs. This suggests that needs assessors must have specific training to discover the specific needs of staff and without effective data collection instruments could cause poor quality data leading to useless results unable to address the real needs. Additionally, in many organizations, needs data is likely to be collected during their company annual surveys. Waiting for the best time of the year and the return of completed questionnaire from all employees could be a waste of time because it could be too late to solve the problems or required development could then be obsolete. The seventh practical barrier to implementing NA is that many organizations still follow a

quick-fix bandage NA approach based on their NA knowledge shortcomings. Although it has been found that while some organizations currently employ a traditional systematic model, just as many do not. Anderson (1994) revealed that “most organizations follow their own less systematic procedures based on tradition, office politics and various internal and external pressures....Trainers seem to lack a theoretical basis for what they are doing and often fail to integrate training activities into the wider organizational context” (pp. 23-24). This was confirmed by Prammanee (2015) stating that “Even though NA is very important for training, many organizations fail to perform it properly and therefore negatively impact the whole training process” (p.10). Werner and DeSimone (2012) supported this adding that “Managers often decide to use their limited resources to develop, acquire and deliver HRD programmes rather than to do something they see as a preliminary activity (p.109). Thacker (2007) and Firdousi (2011) also found that many managers solve problems with unnecessary training and most problems identified by managers as requiring training actually do not require training. Rosner, (1999) and Lawson (2016) also identify this shortfall explaining that some problems can be solved by training but not all. Training is not always a solution if the real causes of problems are not addressed. Often problems arise because of poor management, wrong equipment or work practices. Well conducted NA will reveal whether problems will be solved by training. While Wright

(1994) presented that 80 to 90 percent of productivity can be improved through addressing the work environment or culture, Blan and Thacker (2007) acknowledged that other factors such as reward-punishment incongruences, inadequate or inappropriate feedback, and/or obstacles in the system are also good examples of some non-training needs that have no KSA deficiency. This can often signify that many organizations do not have people possessing the necessary knowledge to conduct Needs Assessment. As a consequence, they still fail to identify the real causes of their organization and staff development needs.

### **Theoretical and Practical Contributions**

At this point, some proactive suggestions based on theories and research found in related literature reviews together with the writer's viewpoints are proposed to address the shortcomings and mistakes of the classical NA.

#### ***Theoretical Contributions***

Firstly, the concept of the word 'needs' in NA should be expanded from the inflexible search for a competency gap to proactive needs emphasizing KSAs for future organizational development. Instead of being reactive or improving performance gaps solely based on outdated functional competencies, organizations should ensure awareness of the current highly competitive business environment. Basically 'Needs' should cover a wider area - being future orientated and relevant. According to Firdousi

(2011), "[Needs Assessment's] Goals should include milestones and objectives to help take the employees from where they are today to where the organization wants them in the future" (p.115). Werner and DeSimone (2012) confirmed that needs in HRD should include those that are proactive and future oriented since HRD aims to enhance organizations' effectiveness by overcoming their regular problems, prevent problems from occurring in the future, and ensure participation by those most likely to benefit. The concept of proactive Needs Assessment proposed in this article therefore refers to a planning strategy exploring the needs of the staff and the organization to develop an HR/OD program to reduce performance gaps, overcome future challenges and achieve organizational goals. To ensure organizations achieve their goals and gain competitive advantage, staff must possess both wider ranges of competencies needed by business while maintaining standards of KSAs according to expected performance.

Secondly, proactive needs assessors must work closely with the key stakeholders to collect meaningful needs data. Theories in NA should put emphasis on the strong connection between NA purposes and the organizations development plan. Needs assessors working closely with all management teams could receive ideas about organizations' directions, strategies, and goals. Lawson (2016, p.7) provides good reason for this saying that "To get a clear picture of the problem and its business impact, start with senior management. Ask more strategic questions

that address the direction of the organization as well as anticipated industry changes”. When the executive team are bought in, not only could the needs assessments be easily conducted but also most HRD/OD plans could be easily approved cooperatively. Similarly, Firdousi (2011), found that “Since most supervisors are involved with the planning of projects and the future strategic plans, they know what will be needed to fulfil the vision of the organization. They should be able to communicate where their employee’s current abilities lie and what more is needed to get them to the next level for new goals to fulfill their target and meet deadlines” (p.114). With greater involvement by line management and other key organizational players, NA can be more effective because they will have a vested interest in the success of programmes. Management commitment will be greater if they feel training programmes are developed in direct response to their specific needs.

Thirdly, the proactive NA framework should clearly add informant’s classification steps, identify types of data based on the classified group of people and suggest the use of both probabilistic and non-probabilistic sampling techniques. In order to avoid time and budget wastage, groups of stakeholders required for NA data collections should be identified at the beginning. McClelland (2007) supported this suggesting that after pointing out the goals of the assessment, it is necessary to match them to the groups of the assessment population. Also, to save time and money

data may be collected only from resourceful participants or their samples. Purposive sampling techniques for example, should be guided to indicate certain members who could provide rich meaningful qualitative information (Miles and Huberman, 1994 ; Creswell, 1998). While an in-depth interview is one of the most useful techniques to discover key messages from these VIPs, assessors need not interview all employees. The assessors may discontinue collecting their qualitative data from a new informant when data in their hands sounds saturated (Seale, 1999). To collect needs data from large groups of employees using questionnaires, again data may not need to be collected from all participants as sufficient completed questionnaires could effectively provide significant data for the needs analysis. The assessors might reduce the number of participants they obtain needs data from by using some probabilistic sampling techniques to randomly draw a smaller number of participants which can adequately represent the whole sampling frame of each group. According to Johnson and Christensen (2004), “Sampling is the process of drawing a sample from a population. When we sample, we study the characteristics of subset selected from a larger group... After researchers determine the characteristics of the sample, they generalize from the sample to the population; that is researchers make statements about the population based on their study of the sample. A sample is usually much smaller in size than a population; hence, sampling can save time and money” (p.197). By dividing participants

into groups, selecting the right informants and using random sampling techniques, data could remain accurate, be acquired faster and cheaper. On the contrary, if there is the need to use the central data collection instruments to obtain data from all groups of employees, it is necessary for the assessors to adjust questions in their data collection tools and methods to match different groups of their informants and allow room from them to share additional meaningful information so that each group could share and provide significant information as well as present essential needs based on different work, roles, viewpoints, and responsibilities.

Fourthly, proactive NA should clearly clarify that there is no one best NA process that could work for all organizations or businesses. New potential sources of information and data collection techniques are re-designable and could be introduced based on a number of factors such as types of industry, business model, organizational culture, resources, climate, policies, or role models from best practice in the business. To confirm the validity of needs information, data may be collected from different sources from both inside and outside organizations. Needs can be obtained by using several investigators or using different data collection methods. Examples of different sources of target population could be seen when Lawson (2016) suggested that target population may include employees, direct reports, co-workers, human resource personnel, management teams, vendors, customers,

competitors, business partners, industry experts and observers. As a result, assessors need to identify who they are, their roles, what related key information they may share and suitable data collection techniques. Johnson and Christensen (2004) explained another 2 useful techniques that 'Investigator triangulation' refers to "the use of multiple investigators in collecting, analyzing and interpreting the data" and 'Method triangulation' refers to "The use of multiple research methods to study a phenomenon" (p.250). It can be ascertained that assessors devising more flexible NA data collection techniques, methods and processes could obtain more valid meaningful needs information.

#### ***Practical Contributions to organizations***

Firstly, HR department should develop line managers, supervisors and heads of department to conduct needs assessment of staff under their supervision. The HR departments, could first provide some HRD programmes convey the message that the NA task analysis and the person analysis of employees are a major responsibility of supervisors, line managers and department heads and they are capable of carrying this out correctly. These can be done as part of their leadership development programmes. The useful lessons, for example, are problem solving techniques, distinguishing between training needs and non-training needs solutions, alternative HRD interventions such as coaching, job rotation, job enrichment, job enlargement, mentoring, counseling, performance appraisal, identifying needs of their



subordinates, assisting their subordinates to clarify their own needs, designing HRD programmes to improve work performance, and addressing future work challenges of their subordinates. Remember since the department heads and line managers are those who work closely with their subordinates, from their experience and expertise, they could understand their subordinates nature of work, recognize the real development needs of their subordinates better than the HR department. The HR members, on the other hands, need to spend most of their time doing strategic partnership role working on conducting organizational analysis with all executives. The needs analysis reports from each department should eventually be submitted to the HR departments to examine, determine the correctness, provide useful feedback and use the data for further analysis to figure out an overview of organization development direction.

Secondly, organizations may consider using some technology to help collect data from large groups of employees. To reduce time and cost when collecting needs data, some surveys could be launched online. Surveying needs online allows some employees to access the questions through their work or personal electronic devices such as desktop computers or their own smart phones. Some survey applications offer basic data analysis functions that could save time and money for analyzing the data obtained. Additionally, if some sophisticated analysis is needed, the assessor can later transfer or export the data into the forms which could assist further

analysis. Another benefit of using technology to collect needs information is the data could be kept each year for displaying the trends of workforce competency and development.

Thirdly, promoting the benefits of conducting needs assessment as an HR intervention to assist staff' to set their career development goals instead of pointing out their poor performance. When NA is acknowledged as a technique to set and help achieve both organizational and employees' career goals, it allows trainees to see a positive side to participating in the training program as well as encouraging them to feel part of an important resource helping organizations to reach their goals.

Fourthly, HR staff members should become a member of some related HR professional industry associations. Whilst there is no perfect process in conducting NA, becoming members of HR professional associations in the industry where they are working helps HR people to learn how other companies in the same business conduct their NA. It is likely that they could learn some good techniques from other successful organizations. This can also assist updating HR knowledge, new HR interventions and techniques.

In conclusion, the long-established concepts and steps of HRDNA have been regarded as a beneficial task which most competent organizations must plan and execute before organizing any training or HRD activities. This is to ensure their employees acquire all

necessary KSAs to perform their assigned work. While great development programmes help achieve the desired workforce competence, it could also prevent companies wasting money and time. Precise NA, furthermore, suggests how the rest of the HRD process should be designed, implemented and evaluated. Also conducting a proper NA should lead to well-constructed training/HRD programmes that are based on the determined needs. Since effective NA could identify real development needs of organizations, tasks and people, it leads to solutions that should eradicate staff difficulties at work, improve the quality of their working life, increase their job satisfaction and help both organizations and staff achieve their ultimate goals. Despite these marvelous advantages of traditional NA, some potential deficiencies of NA should be investigated and considered for subsequent theoretical and businesslike revision. These include placing too much emphasis on performance gaps without also addressing the future growth of an organization; failing to match identified performance gaps with the required knowledge, skills or abilities (KSAs) needed for future job changes; not motivating staff to perform to their full potential; creating low self-esteem in staff needing training; using central questionnaire to obtain needs information from all groups of members; requiring too much afford, time and money on designing and

developing proper data collection instruments, data collection processes and data analysis; not having easy steps to follow.

This article also propose both theoretical and practical contribution to for further reconsideration. These are expanding the concepts of 'Needs' should cover performance gaps, future challenges and future organizational goals; HR departments should work more with management team to obtain needs concerning strategic perspectives; adding steps to identify groups of informants and specify suitable data collection techniques and instruments; clearly open door for new investigating techniques which are suitable for diversity of organization and businesses; instilling KSAs needed for department heads, managers, and supervisors to help conducting NA, introducing available technology to help collect data; getting HR knowledge to be up-to-date from related association or institutes in the fields or industry. Since NA has played a significant roles in HRD and organization development, it is from time to time necessary to revise the long-established concepts and steps of NA to be more proactive. This is to guide the HRD activities to be developed to fit the real needs of organization and staff to upsurge workforce competency and strengthen companies' competitive advantages over their competitors.

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