

Training and Development in Telecommunications

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The lack of qualified human resource in both technical and managerial competencies in Lao telecommunication sector make the Lao Government confront with immense constraints in its other development project expansion. The GoL hence attempts to improve the HR in the telecommunication industry. The training and development are the key instruments to build the HR capacity of this industry. The sufficient investment on human capital T&D did and will produce a moderate and positive impacts on employee productivity improvement (Prongjit, 2006, p. 30), and also to the organizational performance development as a whole (Kraiger, McLinden, & Casper, 2004, p. 337). This research thereby investigated the actual T&D practices of the Lao telecommunication. Four main findings were found such as: The T&D had strong relationship to the telecom organizational performance improvement, the correlation of the training institute capacity and telecom personnel skills development is high, the T&D planning process influenced on the employee productivity development, and the T&D provision associated with the financial condition of the relevant organization.

Keywords: training and development, personnel development, Lao telecommunication

Training and Development in Telecommunications Sector of Lao People's Democratic Republic

Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao P.D.R) is a landlocked country and bordered with five neighboring countries of China, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand and Myanmar. Earlier, the telecom operation in Lao P.D.R. was dominated mainly by one player of the Lao Telecom Company or LTC (World Bank [WB], 2007). It especially was executed under the Lao Government (GoL). Since the GoL has opened the door policy for JVs and private investments in telecommunication businesses in 1994, four more telecom operators exists with more than 2,000 employees as a whole (WB, 2007). There are two State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs), two JVs and one private company. Competitively, JVs was positioned as the key player with more than 68 percent market share of the telecom market, in particular in the mobile service market (Souvannvong, 2005). The entire Lao telecommunication is particularly regulated under the Ministry of Communication, Transport, Post and Construction (MCTPC), referred to the Law on Telecommunication of Laos (President's Office of Lao People's

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Democratic Republic [PO Lao P.D.R.], 2001). Based on the population of 5,609,000 people estimated in 2004, the telecom density was 20 percent per 100 inhabitants or only 1,812,289 telephone capacity lines (1,120,830 using lines), and 42,021 internet capacity lines (4,638 using lines), referred by MCTPC (Ministry of Communication, Transport, Post and Construction [MCTPC], 2006). This inadequate performance was identified and mainly caused by insufficient infrastructure and a shortage of competent telecom personnel (MCTPC). It negatively influenced, in particular, on the effectiveness of distance communication and slowed up the development projects of the GoL (Enterprise of Telecommunications Lao [ETL], 2002). To strengthen the entire telecom operation performance, the T&D were perceived as proactive approaches that helped develop the technical and conceptual skills of an individual's skills, knowledge and abilities (SKAs), highlighted by Ganolfi (2006). The T&D needs to be a focus for all members of staff including senior managers and junior employees (Anonymous, 2006). However, Spencer (2007) reveals that the T&D possibly lead to "training fatigue" in organizing both learners and trainers as it easily becomes unconscious and ineffective (p. 52). Hence, this research attempts to explore the current practice how the T&D have been implemented and managed in the Lao telecom sector; what factors could positively and negatively influence on the T&D results; and to provide recommendations for further research.

Methodology of the Study

This study particularly applied the qualitative approach because the qualitative consequences adding a holistic illustration and explore deeper into the findings (Prongjit, 2006, p. 35). The qualitative approach focuses on naturally occurrences and ordinary events (Miles & Huberman, 1994), so the research has a strong handle on real life exploration of how the T&D have been implemented and managed in among the telecom operators and other relevant administrative bodies of governmental sector of Laos. The population of this research is among the employees in five telecom operators and department managers in other relevant governmental administration body of the MCTPC, and the training institutes of the Telecom and Communication Training Institute (TCTI) and the National University of Laos (NUOL). The supporting data got from both secondary data (reports, statistics, research, journals and etc.), and primary data. The sampling design method was non-probability; the interviewees were randomly selected to get in-dept interview by especially using the sampling methods of conveniences, networking and snowballing approaches; which means getting suggestion from one sample to another sample who knows each other. The total samples of the primary data collection consisted of eight face to face personal interviews and four interviews via phone. Each interview took around an hour to share knowledge between the interviewee and interviewer. Four techniques have been engaged such as: closed-ended question, open-ended question, role playing and construction. Before the interviews have been fallen into place, the researcher was asked to submit the official information requesting letter to the targeted organization; in the meantime, the research was also required to have the list of questions which the research expect submitted to that particular

organization in advance since they had to initially investigate whether the required information could be served for the academic purpose or not.

It is common for the researcher to jot down and have direct observation during the interviews to reduce the bias when the interviewees answered the questions. The interviews were not subjected to any model as the researcher anticipated making the interviews flow naturally to get more concurrent information. Each interview took at least one hour for information exchange. After each interview, the data was immediately processed, reorganized, corrected and analyzed by using the content analysis with anonymity protection for academic purpose before finalizing the complete report. To enhance the reliability and validity of the information interpretation, the data analyzed had been rechecked and corrected in corporation with a highly experienced academic researcher. Four main results were found which are (1) T&D role has relationship with the organizational performance enhancement, (2) telecom personnel skill development are associated with the capacity of the T&D, (3) T&D planning process in telecommunications sector of Laos, and (4) T&D has relationship with the financial portfolio of the organization. They are demonstrated and explained in the following paragraphs.

Results

Relationship between Training and Development and Organizational Performance

The T&D became a learning process that involves the acquisition of skills, concepts and organizational rules to enhance the employee's performance. The T&D have commonly been designed as an essential instrument for changing the employees' attitudes and behaviors towards the organizational goals. The friendly relationship and team-building among new employees, seniors, supervisors, managers and employers were able to be invented during the training. It furthermore created a good relationship with the outsiders, especially with the suppliers. Therefore, the T&D enhanced the employee's productivity and associated to the performance development of the organizational values.

Correlation of Training and Development Institute Capacity and Telecom Personnel Skills Development

The efficacy of the personnel T&D tasks in the Lao telecommunication sector significantly associated to the capacity of the MCTPC and the training institutes of the TCTI and NUOL. The MCTPC, for example, is the key actor supervising the entire Lao telecom operation. They are to wisely formulate policies and development plans of the telecommunication evaluation. The MCTPC thereby required strengthening the vertical administration capacity of the existing staff. Meanwhile, the TCTI and NUOL are the main training institutes supplying the technicians and administrative personnel for the Lao telecom respectively. Supporting the capacity enhancement of the MCTPC, TCTI and NUOL,

the requirement of sufficient facilities and high experienced trainers were highly correlated. Even numerous technicians were concurrently supplied, their qualification were still limited due to a shortage of academic instructors, training equipments, materials and etc. Most the theoretical study and only some on-the-job training provided at LTC site were not yet enough; because the practical training was considered to better improve the trainee's skills rather than the theoretical training. Thus, the efficacy of the telecom personnel was highly associated with the capacity of the T&D institutes.

The arrangement and implementation of the T&D often had bias. An unfair selection practice for the prospect trainees usually incurred. The same trainees and seniors were often singled out for the oversea training/seminars. Also, the employees whom had good networking with the managers and different competent levels of employees were allowed to join the available training together. It was even more difficult to ensure the success of the training when the relevant organizations sent another single trainee to attend the next module of a continuous training program. This clearly resulted from misunderstanding during the communication and eventually affected the continuity or delayed the progression of the training. Additionally, a provision of training was highly dependent on the assistant of the donors' support and trainers' availability. Thereby, the capacity building improvement at the vertical organization particularly was gradual.

Training and Development Planning Process in Telecom Operators

The process for the T&D planning in telecom operators in Lao P.D.R. consisted of four phases of need identification, planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. Whether these four elements are able to ensure the effectiveness of the T&D or not; it depends on how appropriately each element is formulated and translated into actions. Principally, the T&D values are to align with the organizational goals and business needs. To align the T&D along the business needs, the employees were tremendously to participate. Their participation aided to differentiate the goals and depict the skills required. Moreover, the T&D goals were difficult to achieve without the employee's motivation. The motivated and job-related employees were mostly observed to perceive and interact well during and after the training. On the one hand, the line managers practically had important roles on the process of the trainee selection whereas the decision for offered skills was principally made by the top manager. In short, the telecom operators in Laos have utilized both centralized and decentralized management systems; however the decision making was chiefly made by the top managers/boards of directors.

Relationship of Finance and Training and Development

The training in the Lao telecommunication was seen as a cost rather than an investment. Some telecom operators did not include the annual budget of the personnel T&D in the strategic development plan. Additionally, It was argued that there is no matter how impressive the T&D plan have been

defined if the decision making was not logically conducted, specifically the recruitment management. The recruitment decision making vastly influenced on an increase of the T&D budget. Many employees in some telecom operators had been hired as a consequence of an order from the hierarchical power. Apparently, some applicants were employed without considering whether they obtained the required skills or not. Sometimes the right people were not allocated into the right jobs. While some important tasks were frequently not able to be completed due to a deficiency of competent staff; over employee supply existed in some departments. Ultimately, more T&D were required to be provided; it then raised the training budget meanwhile the organizational productivity betterment still remained steadily. A part from this, a career development was noticed as another influential variable bonded to the company's financial condition. An unclear plan of career advancement made the talented employee leave the organization. Some claimed that the opportunities were not granted to the trainees to try their trained knowledge out. Although the companies obtained the potential staff in house, they still outsourced external employees. With such evidence, the companies did not only lose the capital for the former T&D cost; but also paid more for outsourcing. This definitely increased the turnover on human capital of the organization and made talented employees leave indirectly.

Discussion

The studies of Prongjit (2006) and Casper et al. (2004) were confirmed that the T&D had positive impacts on both employees' SKAs enhancement and to the organizational performance improvement. The employees, for instance, became more confident in dealing with their responsibilities and interacting with their colleges after getting trained, affirmed by many trainees in the tourism sector of Luang Prabang (Southiseng, 2006). Not only the friendly relationship among employees within organization and outsiders were possibly strengthened; but the T&D also helped to direct the employees' ambitions towards the organizational enhancement. The accomplishment of the T&D nonetheless would be more certain if the training offered was aligned with the business needs and supported by the competent trainers and adequate facilities (MCTPC, 2002), sufficient budget as well as the employees involvement. At the same time, the practical training (on-the-job training) was believed to better boost the technical skills in the Lao telecom sector as the employees could learn and get the knowledge practiced in the same time. This made them understand more and know how to put the training skills into practice as well as applying in the working tasks. The career development was defined as another a valued-driven for individual career and psychological success (Lazalova & Cerdin, 2007). The proactive career developments are vital to the employee intention to leave if it was ignored. Nevertheless, even the career development value was broadly known to strive the individual productivity and create the loyal employees of the organization, its implication was still rarely implemented in the Lao telecom businesses. Unless those companies were the telecom SOEs since they had to manage their employees' benefits along with the governmental policies orientation. Nevertheless, the protean career advancement must be clearly established and transparently communicated throughout the whole organization.

The same as the performance-based system application, it might be useful to motivate the employees in some organizations, but it was not always applicable in the telecom operators of Lao P.D.R. Although some employees' compensation and working environment were good enough, the employee retention could not be ensured with such performance-based system. The current telecom operators of the Lao P.D.R. are likely considering for the outputs of the T&D provision rather than the organizational outcomes. This kind of management is commonly practiced in most of every business in Russia (Alexeev, Gaddy, & Leitzel, 1992, p. 138). If comparing to the presentation of Noe, Hollen, Gerhart, and Wright (2006), the training generally focuses on improving employee's performance in their current jobs while the development relates to the learning, assessment of motivation and ability that help employees prepare for their future. It is a future-oriented that assists employees to get ready for changes from the new technology application, work designs, new customers or even new products market. To successfully commit with those changes the individual organization is to promote the employee under the scheme of competitive leadership to reinforce their responsibilities and accountabilities (Southiseng, 2005). On the contrary, it is infrequently practiced in the reality, the leadership attributes are not yet much translated into actions. Some employees were even less inspired due to a lack of job progression while some companies were seen as a training center that employees were likely to leave and work with other organizations of which they could find more progressed career advancement and get high paid later on.

Conclusions and Recommendations

According to the results and discussions above, it can be concluded that even the training and development have their own alternative definition and implication, they are however share the same goals of enhancing the employee and organizational performance. Training and development practice are closely inter-correlated, nevertheless the differences between the T&D terms were not yet clear to most of the Lao telecom operator. Similarly, the telecom operators are not only confronting with the lack of qualified HR supply for the telecom market demand, but also the problems of competent employees retention. Hence, both the existing telecom operators and future investors whom expect to penetrate in the telecom markets of Laos are strongly recommended to take the employees maintaining issue into account. Briefly speaking, this study is limited only within the telecom sector; the future research that expects to test the T&D factors and relations should investigate more in other businesses. This research study particularly utilized the qualitative approach to study and analyze the study; the further research should apply both qualitative and quantitative approaches in order to test the reliability and validity of the information. The researcher for further study would get diversified information if the group discussions among the employees have been delivered. Most of 90 percent of this study mentioned about the training variables and its relation in practical work, but the development elements and its implication were hardly ever discussed. Hence, the future research should explore more about the development and learning matters with a clear explanation of their implications. Finally, to reinforce the effective T&D the research and development (R&D), the training transfer and total

quality management (TQM) are recommended to be introduced and examined in relation with the T&D or HRD in the further research in order to enhance the organizational sustainability.

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