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## The Training of Technical Staff in Libyan Industrial Companies: Issues in Training Needs Analysis

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### ABSTRACT

By implementing Training Needs Analysis (TNA), organisations can improve the training need-identification process and minimise the influence of social factors on nominations for training; such as kinship and friendship, which makes the managers exercised mediation "wasta" and favouritism when they perform their tasks. Therefore, paper presents the results of an investigation into current TNA practice in Libyan industrial companies (LICs), including the barriers that prevent its successful implementation and how it might be improved. A qualitative approach was adopted in collecting data by means of semi-structured interviews with 17 senior managers in two selected companies. The findings show that training needs are mostly identified through an analysis at the individual level only and that no consideration is given to organisational or operational levels. The paper contributes to existing knowledge on the application and effectiveness of TNA in industrial sectors by specifically investigating the implementation of TNA in the Libyan industrial context; it offers ideas and insights to those responsible for training in LICs to improve their understanding of the role of TNA and how they can manage the TNA process to help develop their employees.

### KEY WORDS

training needs analysis, Libyan industrial companies, libyan iron and steel company, National cement company, methodology, interviews, senior managers

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

An organisation's success is dependent on many factors, both internal and external. A key internal factor is its employees' ability to perform consistently at a level which is high enough to ensure the successful completion of all set tasks. Rapid changes in the economic environment have a potential impact on employees' skills requirements and related with ongoing technological advancements which are needed to have highly skilled staff. In a study carried out by Grais and Al-Habaibeh (2011) found that some Libyan companies are still facing many problems concerning maintenance activities of assets. This study suggested a new framework for Total Productive Maintenance (TPM) with identifying four key factors (motivation, training, internal factors, and external factors). Therefore, for implementing overall maintenance, companies should take into consideration those factors which including training. That the ability of any organisation to achieve optimum performance depends on the extent to which the skills, knowledge and attitudes of its workforce match the task requirements and organisational objectives. The importance of training for boosting an organisation's performance, expansion and profitability has long been acknowledged and the need to incorporate the training element in any organisational climate is being increasingly emphasised (Cosh et al., 1998; McClelland, 2002; Ghufli, 2014). Training is now seen as a vital part of the process of organisational development (Tung-Chun, 2001), but if it is to achieve the desired results, it needs to be tailored appropriately. This means considering identifying the desired effects on the behaviour, knowledge, and abilities of the recipients. Training employees effectively is not an easy task; several issues must be considered when designing and implementing training programmes. Training needs analysis (TNA) is crucial to the training process as it allows for consideration of these issues and maximises the chances of the training being effective (Goldstein & Ford, 2002; Salas & Canon-Bowers, 2001; Tung-Chun, 2001). This paper seeks to discuss the following questions: How is Training Needs Analysis (TNA) currently being conducted in the LICs? What are the barriers that hinder best practice? What needs to be done to make the TNA process more effective in the Libyan context?

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## 2 TRAINING NEEDS ANALYSIS

Identifying training needs is of utmost importance in any organisation. The process is usually based on an in-depth performance assessment, which considers a range of factors, including the company's mission objectives, the skills and knowledge of its staff, production, raw materials, and costs (Brown, 2002). The chances of the company receiving a return on its training investment are increased if it takes a systematic approach; that is, if it follows a series of formal steps when training and developing staff. The identification of training needs is the first of these steps; it is particularly vital (Som & Nam, 2009). As without it, it is difficult to determine whether training programmes have been properly designed (Anderson, 1994; Bowman & Wilson, 2008; Goldstein, 1993). According to Miller and Osinski (2002), a "need" can be conceptualised in various ways, but in general, it denotes a gap between what is currently available and what is currently required. Armstrong (1996:536) states that: "Training needs assessment is partly concerned with finding the gap between what is happening and what should happen. This is what has to be filled by training". The assessment aims to indicate the direction of the training, the personnel to be trained and the training content (Holden, 1991; Wexley, 1984). Thus, training needs diagnosis mainly involves gathering and analysing information. It has been suggested by some researchers that this investigation is more effective if it employs a range of techniques such as those based on both quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously (Leat & Lovelle, 1997; While, et. al., 2007).

TNA has been defined in several ways. Rossett (1987:3) put forward that with the use of relevant and appropriate data collection methods (e.g., surveys, interviews, and observations), training needs assessment can help to identify specific organisational issues while also identifying those that require some form of training solution. This is usually achieved by designing appropriate training interventions based on the gathered empirical data. Furthermore, according to Tracey (2004:457), training needs assessment incorporates the investigation of many ways in which instructional and informational schemes as well as materials can be designed and developed following the identification of a need to do so with the help of a performance analysis. Since "needs analysis" is more commonly used in the literature and the most familiar term to most training professionals this term is used in the current research.

TNA is only successful and beneficial process to organisations if the content of the training matches the identified training needs (Van Eerde et al., 2008). It is therefore vital that in the course of TNA, managers employ the information-gathering methods that will best allow them to identify the skills employees most need to develop (Shehu & Akintoye, 2008). In this way, TNA plays a crucial role in the development of both workforce and managerial skills (Liska & Weldzius, 2000; Pappas, 2004; Marzouk, 2009).

### 2.1 TNA Theoretical Framework

Numerous training theorists have pointed to the importance of TNA from both past and current literature (e.g. Goldstein & Ford, 2002; Salas et. al., 2001; Taylor & O'Driscoll, 1998; Reid & Barrington, 1997; Nelson, et. al., 1995; Wright & Geroy, 1992; Ostroff & Ford, 1989; Boydell, 1976; McGehee & Thayer, 1961). Inspired by the well-known tripartite-level of TNA, the O-T-P model adopts a very systematic approach to needs analysis, and this has allowed decisions about training needs to be taken on a basis of integrated macro into micro analyses. In other words, the model engages in analysis across various levels, moving from an emphasis on one individual employee (micro level) to the whole organisation as a system (macro level). In doing so, it allows the model to capture even minor changes within the organisational setting which could have an impact on training effectiveness. Hence this model is strongly founded in the evaluation of training needs to satisfy both organisational and task/job needs in line with the specific needs of the individual employee (Clarke, 2003).

In general, training needs analysis, as the first step in the training process, seeks to identify those performance gaps that can be remedied by training. It employs "surveillance, investigation and data analysis" (Tracey, 2004:678) to establish the organisation's current and desired performance levels, focusing particularly on the abilities of its staff and their support network. More recently, Denby (2010:148) explains that: "TNA will help an organisation to target specific business issues through designing bespoke training solutions".

TNA helps companies to ensure that they will get a good return on their training investment and enables them to avoid making errors in their training programmes (Elbadri, 2001). Nevertheless, as highlighted by Arthur et al. (2003), research on training with a specific focus on TNA is relatively limited and not enough is available in the literature, hence providing further support for the conduct of the current study to address this issue. Another motivation for the current study is the use of a theoretical framework in an endeavour to develop a better understanding of TNA (Mathews et al., 2001). Over the last three decades, both training theorists and researchers have repeatedly expressed concern about the tendency of organisations to make training decisions on an ad hoc basis rather than in accordance with a systematic approach. Surveys have shown that recommendations put forward by researchers are not being implemented and that a gap remains, even today, between theoretical assumptions and practice in the workplace (Taylor & O'Driscoll, 1998). Latham (1988) explains that this situation has arisen because of both theory and research failing to influence practitioners.

## 2.2 The Current Study

The main aim of this study is to investigate the training needs analysis and possibility of implement appropriate model to the Libyan industrial companies. Also, it aims to discover the problems facing those companies in Libya when you perform TNA process and identifying the key factors to improve the training activities performance. The main objectives of this study are to discuss the following three points to contribute to existing knowledge. They can be summarised as follows:

- a) To explore current TNA practice in Libyan industrial companies (LICs).
- b) To identify any barriers that hinder its successful implementation.
- c) To investigate ways in which TNA might be improved.

## 3 METHODOLOGY

Since the aim here was to explore in-depth current TNA practices in Libya, a qualitative research approach was adopted whereby semi-structured interviews were deemed as the most appropriate data collection method.

### *Research Design*

This method was also chosen because it has been used with great success in Arab organisations, where managers often prefer to talk rather than to write and complete questionnaires (Altarawneh, 2005). Saunders et al. (2007) define an interview as a purposeful discussion between two people or more. In this study, the purpose of these discussions was to investigate current practices and barriers to TNA in LICs; the semi-structured format was used to guide the discussions, while open-ended questions allowed the interviewees to make the points they saw as significant and relevant. By incorporating a qualitative approach, that provide the researcher with the opportunity to explore the participants' perspectives, by adopting an 'insider's perspective', where the managers would be considered as being the experts in understanding and implementing TNA in their organisation (Berg, 1998).

The managers' participants were selected by the recommendation of the "Board of Directors" on the grounds that they have information which is not available to the rest of the workers and they are actual participants in training activities.

### *Participants*

As shown in Table 1 below the interview sample comprised of seventeen managers (those responsible for training) from two large companies in Libya: nine from the Libyan Iron and Steel Company (LISCO) and eight from the National Cement Company (NCC). All the participants were approached through arrangements between the researcher and the managerial team in all factories.

### *Procedure and data collection*

Prior to the conduct of the interview, a pilot study was conducted with three participants to check the timing of the interviews (1:15 minutes each) and to ensure that the questions were easy to understand. After gaining the informed consent of the participants in writing, all the interviews were carried out in a quiet room in both companies. A list of open-ended questions was asked in relation to the following: the companies' background; human resources development and organizational structure, plans, policies and strategies (e.g., participants were asked to state the body responsible for HR development and training within the company); needs analysis processes (e.g., the sample was asked whether or not the company distinguishes between technical, professional and behavioural skills when doing training); and the analytical methods of training needs (e.g., participants were asked to put forward some suggestions to improve the methods used for specifying needs). Seven of the interviews were recorded on tape, with notes being made on the remaining ten. At the end of each interview, the interviewee was given the chance to talk freely about their views and attitudes towards TNA. This allowed the participants to engage in more thinking in relation to their previous responses and even provided an opportunity to highlight any issues which were not raised in the semi-structured interview.

Table 1: The interviewees based on company and position

N	Company Name	Management Level		Total
		Senior Management	Middle Management	
1	Libyan Iron and Steel Company	4	5	9
2	National Cement Company	3	5	8
	<b>Total</b>	7	10	17

### Data analysis

After the interviews, had been transcribed, the data was subjected to thematic analysis. This is an analytical method that allows the researcher to extract themes or ideas from a given text; these themes are linked to the research questions and main objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The main purpose of this analysis is that it allows the representation of the participant's own perspective through his or her account of experiences, beliefs, and perceptions (Park, et. al., 2004); in this case, the all top managers of both companies.

## 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Following the thematic analysis, six main themes emerged: planning training; conducting TNA; methods of identifying training needs; improving methods for specifying training needs; providing training; and opportunities and challenges. The qualitative results are presented in the following six sections and each section outlines the main findings in detail. Moreover, these findings are also discussed in accordance with past literature on this topic. An overall conclusion is also included along with a list of recommendations for Libyan companies to take into consideration to improve the training need process.

### Planning training

Eight of the seventeen participants explained that the major reason for setting up training for technicians in the company is that there is a perceived need. i.e. that the training plans are set according to the needs of the technical and other departments. In both companies, determining these needs is the job of the training department, which generally presents potential training plans in its annual reports or via a special committee. One participant suggested that training plans are produced: "...according to the annual suggestions by the various executive departments". More specific reasons for putting training plans in place include: "...any changes or adjustments that may arise in terms of the job description, or upon new employees joining the existing workforce, or advanced technologies and modern practices being introduced into the company". The regulations of training highlighted the basics of preparing the plan; set the project of annual training plan, the proposed budget, including the training and academic courses, symposiums, and conferences inside the country or abroad, the regular study in the Training Centre. This project should be approved by board of directors in September each year. The plan shall be put into action for example, from the 1st of January up to end of December.

Five of the participants stated that their company demands constant improvement in all sectors; training is geared towards improving employees' skills as this is a way of raising overall productivity. *"The company decides whether to pursue training or not based on the need; if there is a need, there is training. Certainly, the company does not do training for the sake of it; there is generally a reason behind it, be it improvement of productivity or catching up with developing technologies"*. These findings find support in previous empirical work by Cosh et al. (1998), McClelland (2002) and Ghufli (2014) which also emphasised the importance of incorporating training interventions in organisations to improve their performance, expansion, and profitability.

In contrast, two of the participants claimed that their company carries out training regardless of need; they suggested that some of the training is unnecessary and does nothing to improve the company: *"Although training is needed, many of the courses are unnecessary, but they are conducted anyway, so to say training is done based on need does not tell the full story. Some courses are pointless; there is no preparation or rationale behind them"* This means that there is no relationship between training and training needs. Similarly, Tung-Chun (2001) also recognised the importance of including training as a vital element of organisational development. However, the author also pointed out that to achieve the desired outcomes, such training must be tailored appropriately and in accordance with the needs of the company. As in the current study, although the importance of training is well recognised, there still seems to be a lack of training needs assessment to suit the purpose of the training put into place. That is, according to the above participants, there does not seem to be any attempt to identify the desired effects of the training on the behaviour, knowledge, and abilities of the employees; a prerequisite of any training intervention within an organisational setting (Tung-Chun, 2001). The absence of a training needs analysis (TNA) limits the chances of the

training being effective (Goldstein & Ford, 2002; Salas & Canon-Bowers, 2001; Tung-Chun, 2001). In other words, further research needs to be undertaken in relation to the assessment of the effectiveness of its implemented training scheme. In emerging markets, there is a shortage of skilled staff due to intense competition between companies in all economic activities (Newburry et al., 2014), whereas employee development is not necessarily limited to any specific job (Noe et al., 2014).

It was evident that in most cases, training is performed in response to perceived need, though most of the participants were unable to articulate what these needs are in any detail. This suggests that they may not be fully aware of the many reasons why companies should train their staff. In fact, research by Hassan, et. al., (2005) has shown that for any training to be effective, it must be based on the actual needs of the employees in this context, Jamil (2006) mentioned that the role of TNA is to ensure that the training is only provided for the eligible employees, as training is considered training when the needs of the employees are met otherwise it is not as effective. Based on the responses of the participant's a thorough and accurate assessment of actual rather than perceived needs seems to be lacking in the two Libyan companies investigated in the current study. In fact, whether these findings would also be reported in other Libyan companies would be worth investigating in future research.

### Conducting TNA

Most participants had some experience of setting up training and analysing training needs, with more than half reporting that they had three or more years' experience in this area. This suggests that they should be familiar with the TNA process, but this was not evident in their answers, which gave little detail about the process of specifying training needs. Similarly, Alkinani (2013) reviewed the current literature on TNA in Arab countries and noted that most companies still struggle in relation to the adequate and accurate identification of staff training needs. In particular, Ghufli (2014) referred to a few researchers such as Al-Khayyat (1998) & Al-Faleh (1987), who observed that Arab organisations tend to suffer from some significant professional deficiencies such as no job descriptions, a lack of clear performance appraisals, and a rather undefined and unsystematic way of assessing development needs of employees. Therefore, based on these past research findings, it is of no surprise that the participants did not seem well equipped enough to address the process of specifying training needs. Having said that, this remains a significant organisational issue as shown by the findings of the current study.

Training needs are usually identified on an annual basis, following team meetings and annual reports and assessments. One participant explained that in his company, training needs are initially identified by the line manager, then passed on to the factory manager and then forwarded to the Human Resources department. Managers are responsible for nominating the employees to be trained (for example, new recruits to the company). *"The process of determining the training needs is carried out by the line manager, according to an application presented by the Productive Workforce department, in which trainees are nominated and the required training stated"*. Others explained that training needs are first identified by supervisors. Therefore, based on the above findings there seems to be a lack of a clear approach concerning the process of identifying training needs in the selected companies. However, this might not necessarily be an issue of great concern since according to some management scholars there can be a range of different formal and informal sources involved such as the senior management, the immediate supervisor (Mathews et al., 2001), trainers (Chiu et al., 1999) and trainees (Sims et al., 1989). According to Mahfod (2014), at the task level, TNA requires systematic gathering of information about a specific task, or set of tasks, in an endeavour to determine the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for certain aspects of a specific job to be completed and, he pointed out, individuals vary in terms of their strengths, weaknesses, knowledge, skills, and aptitudes. As such, examining the nature and type of employees in need of training at an early stage during the process helps to boost the effectiveness of the organisation.

The company needs to be convinced that training is crucial to the productivity and development of personnel, so managers (or supervisors) are then required to investigate and collect information to justify the training. *"The basic rule in training is to see whether it is needed or not. This might be suggested by a manager or a supervisor who might think certain individuals should be trained, or that certain machinery will work better if training was provided. Following that it is the job of supervisors to survey and investigate if such training is needed."*

Three participants stated that the training department prepares a plan, covering everything from the type of training required to duration and cost, which it puts forward to the decision makers who are usually the senior managers. *"The HR department needs to show a full plan, based on evidence for the need. This plan, which should be comprehensive, is then put forward to senior management"*. If the plan is approved, the HR department takes over responsibility for delivery of the training. In fact, five participants saw this as the last step in the training process which draws attention to the important role played by HR in this domain: *"Deciding the courses or training and approval thereof is generally followed by the implementation and delivery of training, and that also falls within the responsibility of the HR department"*. In fact, based on past literature, HRD has been shown to be closely connected to, if not even defined as *"training and development"* (e.g., McLagan and Suhadolnik, 1989; Swanson, 1995).

However, two of the top managers were critical of the HR department's performance in this regard, arguing that training decisions are sometimes based on poor surveys and therefore inadequate knowledge. They felt that the HR department should be more professional: *"They know their role, but I am not sure that they reach the desired standards; there needs to be professionalism when taking training decisions"*. As such, it seems that HR and the management section were not working in parallel in this domain. It has been previously noted that for HRD to be effective in the Libyan context and to yield productive organisational outcomes, it is essential to build a partnership between governmental, educational and hotel sectors through workforce planning (Naama, et al., 2008). Perhaps this is a potential partnership to advocate in Libyan industrial companies to bridge the gap between HR and the management sector. This could be further explored in future research.

### **Methods of identifying training needs**

The survey seems to be the method most often used by participants to identify employees' training needs. Questionnaires are the most common instrument, but performance reports (by supervisors) are also employed to indicate training needs: *"...through questionnaires and the opinions of the immediate or line managers"*. Interestingly, it was highlighted that these methods lack a critical approach, and that no mechanism exists to refine them: *"...ordinary routine methods, perhaps without much of a critical approach"*. It has been previously documented that questionnaires tend to be quite general and mostly applicable in TNAs with less specific goals and objectives, which can in turn undermine the accuracy of the assessment of the training needs of the organisations (McClelland, 1994). Such could possibly be a plausible explanation for the above observations made by the respondents of the current study.

The two companies also draw on annual reports and direct communication with supervisors and line managers to identify training needs. This is an interesting finding as some researchers have indeed pointed out that training needs identification is more effective if it uses more than one techniques in particular those based on both quantitative and qualitative data (Leat & Lovelle, 1997; While, et. al., 2007). Furthermore, in line with Shehu and Akintoye (2008), the TNA process should specifically underlie those information-gathering methods that will best allow managers to identify only those skills that employees need to develop the most (Akintoye, 2008). Perhaps in the current study the participants felt a gap between the tool selected for training needs identification and its perceived effectiveness.

With regards to the question of who makes the training decisions, five participants stated that the process for specifying training needs is mainly determined by line managers or supervisors because these people are best equipped to decide who needs training and who does not (implying that they also choose the candidates for training). Two participants explained that training is sometimes suggested by senior managers and then assessed for suitability by line managers: *"Supervisors are the best people to suggest the needs and propose them to senior managers, but at times the opposite happens. But it all depends on what the employees need and what improves their skills"*. Three of the participants provided generic answers, saying that training needs are decided in committee and that line managers have no say: *"Simply, training needs are decided in committees that sit a few times a year; they discuss them and decide there and then"*. Again, in line with previous findings reported in this study there does not seem to be any specific approach concerning making training decisions.

When asked whether they follow a specific training needs analysis technique, none of the participants said they adhered to any technique. *"I do not know whether we actually follow any technique, all I know is that we base training on productivity and efficiency; if training is needed, we conduct it. So, specifying the needs is decided based on supervisors who make judgements and proposals and the final decisions are made by the senior management committees"*. Another participant explained that the company's training policy does not stipulate the use of any specific technique, and this can lead to randomness and confusion: *"Certainly we do not follow any technique; if we did, it has to be written in the training policy. But maybe that explains the confusions often faced when deciding on training needs"*. At the extreme, one participant stated that in some areas, the same training is conducted annually, regardless of need. For example, he explained, simple training in basic computer skills is done internally without regard to its potential usefulness: *"Sometimes training takes place by default, whether there is a need or no need"*. These findings further reinforce the point made by Taylor & O'Driscoll (1998) whereby over the last three decades there has been concerns raised with regards to the tendency of organisations to make training decisions rather randomly without making use of a systematic approach, which also seems to be the case of the two companies investigated in the current study.

### **Improving methods for identifying training needs**

When participants were asked how the methods for specifying needs might be improved, they made several suggestions. They highlighted the need for a separate training department instead of to follow the general management of HR as in LISCO or the management of productive forces as in NCC and argued for better evaluation of training courses and for educating employees about the importance of training. In fact, Iqbal (2011) postulated

that when conducting basic TNA, it might be good to allow employees to select the best way to meet their needs using their own judgement. This could help them in terms of feeling more empowered and active in resolving issues that they could have encountered following training (Schneier, et. al., 1988). Perhaps a similar and hence more active approach towards training needs specification would have been useful in the context of the two current Libyan companies.

They also wanted to see more scientific approaches being employed in TNA, and courses on TNA being offered to practitioners. They felt that those responsible for training need to be educated and trained themselves on what is the best way to determine training needs. Altogether, the above findings draw attention to the existing gap between theoretical assumptions and practice in the workplace (Taylor & O'Driscoll, 1998). As Latham (1988) explained, such could be the result of both theory and research failing to influence practitioners; as could possibly be the case of the two Libyan companies in the current study. With regards to Arab countries it has been observed that needs assessments are mostly based on *"wants rather than true needs"* (Aagnaia, 1996; Atiyyah, 1993; Al-Madhoun & Analoui, 2003; Altarawneh, 2010; Abu-Doleh, 2004). Such an approach can perhaps indeed explain the various discrepancies observed by the participants in this study.

### **Providing training**

Participants stated several different reasons for offering training. Six participants said that the main reason for training is the adoption of new technology or equipment: *"Certainly there is a need when we buy new technologies or equipment for the factory"*. Interestingly, Denby (2010:147) stressed the need to consider training beyond its traditional purpose (as reflected in the above findings); that is, not restricted to just *"teaching"* new skills to employees and/or assisting them with regards to how they can *"do things better"*. However, whether this could have also been a major issue for the participants in the current study is still unclear. Five highlighted that the recruitment of new employees is a major reason for training, and this is normally done when they start work: *"I know that every new employee has to go through basic training depending on their capabilities"*. Another participant explained: *"Generally, we conduct training for those who are newly hired, and when we bring new equipment and mainly we think that training can lead to more productivity"*. As documented by Yaakub (1996), the right training can empower new employees in developing a very good understanding of their job requirements, and much quicker than if training was not provided. Three participants said that training is offered when employee evaluations show a gap in knowledge which is leading to underperformance: *"I actually decide or base my training needs analysis on how poorly I see employees perform; if that is the case, then I will nominate them for training"*. It has been previously recognised that indeed training can certainly positively affect the individual level, especially in relation to boosting employee productivity and loyalty (Yaakub, 1996) as well as their productivity (Clarke, 2003).

Two of the participants stated that there is a need to continually stay competitive in the market and thus, training is needed to update skills and knowledge: *"We live in a competitive environment which means that employees need to be constantly trained to meet such competition"*. Another participant explained: *"Sometimes the company has to adjust the methods used at work so training is provided; also, it is based on the assessment of managers"*. As explained by Syed et al. (2011), the importance of training cannot be undermined in industrial sectors since it enhances the development of human resource; perhaps a main reason as to why companies are investing massively to benefit from a highly equipped human asset. On the other hand, companies do not seem to offer training to promoted employees or when creating new work opportunities due to changes in technology and methods of work: *"...some well-known reasons for training, but I think newly promoted employees and new work opportunities do not receive training"*. This result may be needs more investigation through further research as there seems to be still gaps in knowledge in relation to why sometimes training is still not provided even if there is some form of change in the organisational setting. Thus, before the organisation can proceed to training it must conduct the process of training needs analysis, it's prerequisite steps is considered important to help in designing and implementing training programs (Bin Arshad et al, 2015).

### **Difficulties and challenges**

In terms of the difficulties of assessing training needs, six participants felt that the main problem is managers' lack of experience. As one participant explained: *"There is a significant lack in terms of identifying training needs due to lack of experience. In other words, these needs are not studied well. In addition, there are hardly any specialised training centres"*. A study by Tlaiss and Krauser (2011) found that *wasta* (aspects of social networking or connections) is a key ingredient with regards to the career success of managers in the Middle East. In comparison to the West where social connections are usually relied upon to assist people, *wasta* in the Arab society seems to be deeply rooted in their culture and hence has an impact on the career success of managers. As such, the prevalence of *wasta* in the workplace Middle Eastern culture clearly highlights the importance of informal work relations and strong family connections (Metcalf, 2006). Therefore, may the *"wasta"* is considered the alternative way to ensure work effectiveness whereby Middle Eastern managers assign more importance to this

rather than formal training and rehabilitation. Such a theoretically based the argument could be empirically investigated in future research.

A further difficulty (cited by three participants) is that employees themselves do not realise how important training is to their ability to perform their jobs well. *"Some employees are not willing to participate, in addition to the limited number of training programmes"*. Two participants explained that some employees do not wish to leave their families for offsite training courses: *"Employees at times do not care about training, and that is a major difficulty, especially if it is far from the workplace"*. Three others spoke of employees as having a negative attitude towards training: *"Employees at times do not like to participate in training, especially if they think it is difficult or not convenient"*. Two of the participants suggested that this is because training is perceived as boring by employees, while two others argued that their attitude is explained by the fact that they are not involved in choosing the training courses: *"At times, employees just attend courses that are pre-designed by others and that explain why they dislike attending them"*.

Others saw managers and supervisors as being mainly to blame. Three participants said that they do too little to help employees appreciate the value of training, and that they need to put more effort into promoting it: *"Employees need to be encouraged to attend training and help with specifying the training needs"*. In line with the above findings, past research has noted cases where many industrial sectors indeed do not always benefit from their heavy investment in training, which perhaps is the result of a lack of clarity in relation to the identification of their internal needs, which subsequently leads them to find it difficult to design and implement the most suitable training and enhancement scheme for the organisation (Denby, 2010). It could be argued that managers must ensure that the importance of training is clearly conveyed to the employees to maximise the likelihood that the organisation as a whole is in a better position to experience the benefits of its training programs.

Five of the seventeen participants stated that their company has appropriate indexes of performance related to crucial factors of success in the form of annual/periodic reports: *"The company depends on the number of evaluation elements in the annual reports, which are general items, in addition to leadership evaluation and vocational assessment"*. However, three participants stated that their company either has no such indexes or that there is no follow up after training. They highlighted this as one of the main problems: *"Unfortunately, there are no written indicators according to which employees' performance is evaluated. Evaluation is carried out based on the criteria stated in the annual report"*. Overall, it seems that participants have little awareness on the indexes provided to assess performance and to choose annual reports as the best indication. Therefore, there seems to be a lack of a predetermined standardised procedure in relation to performance assessment both within and across the companies. This raises an issue that needs to be addressed in the Libyan industrial sector if the government aims at improving performance assessment regardless of the nature or type of company.

## 5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper contributes to the debate literature by supporting existing available evidence on this topic and sheds light on novel issues which have not yet been explored such as mediation "wasta" and effectiveness of the TNA process and, how do we determine the right person for the right training. It presented the results from interviews with seventeen participants about current TNA practice in LICs, the challenges facing its implementations and how the process can be made more effective. The analysis shows that currently, training needs analysis in the selected companies is limited in several ways:

1. The companies do not design their own training programmes, but select programmes from lists offered by other local and foreign companies. These programmes are discussed with training specialists and an annual plan is prepared and presented to top management for approval.
2. There are no clear criteria for identifying needs for training programmes at home or abroad, and training is not linked to rewards or incentives. The process of identifying training needs for individuals is primarily influenced by economic factors.
3. No distinction is made between technical/professional skills and soft skills; there is no focus on amending individuals' behaviour.
4. At all levels, there is an apparent lack of awareness and understanding of the issues surrounding the identification of training needs, training implementation and training assessment.
5. Social relationships, kinship and friendship unduly influence the TNA process.
6. Since the clear majority of managers in these companies have no idea how to analyse of the performance to know the individual skills, knowledge, and abilities for employees, they are unable to assess his training needs by analysing his skill and knowledge in the performance of his duties.
7. Neither of the companies in the sample has a formal policy on needs analysis; training decisions are made on an ad hoc basis or in response to nomination by supervisors. In other words, these companies pay no attention to the analysis of the three levels integrated prior to the design any of training programmes.

This lack of focus on the organisational and operational levels can give the impression that the process of assessing needs was not properly implemented. Consequently, this certainly does not help much in designing training programmes that meet the actual needs of the technical staff and helps to achieve the desired objectives of the training.

The results of this study are useful as they provide a starting point for designing a TNA model to enable LICs to improve their training activities so that they are better able to improve their performance and hence their local and international competitiveness. Furthermore, research in this area is still maturing hence the findings of the current study are valuable since they can direct future research towards identified gaps in knowledge.

Furthermore, from the research conducted the following recommendations are proposed to help the selected companies address the problems associated with the TNA process and improve their training programmes:

1. They should recruit qualified, skilled specialists in needs analysis and training and make training managers part of top management.
2. More stringent procedures should be put in place for recruiting employees, along with clear standards for appraising performance and a suitable reward/incentive system.
3. Everyone in these organisations should have a clear job description, so that the companies can determine the training gaps between employees' current skills, knowledge, and abilities and what is required to achieve company targets.
4. Training needs analysis should be a systematic process that links training needs with the organisation's evolving strategies, plans and policies.
5. It may be appropriate there to be a productive relationship in training programmes between the Libyan government and the industrial sector in Libya.
6. There is a dire need to acknowledge the dearth in research on Libyan industrial companies and hence an empirical insight into the training situation of these companies would be desirable not just to develop an understanding of its work climate and training effectiveness but also to engage in some form of comparison between industrial sectors in Libya following the findings obtained from the current study as well as with the help of future research aimed at addressing the aforementioned gaps in knowledge.
7. As previously reported by Bowman & Wilson (2008), that the existence of a clear and transparent approach to the TNA process may help to boost trust in that process and the organisation. While also encouraging the HR sector and other managerial sectors to promote a nomination process for training. Such would also be a prerequisite for the effective and collaborative functioning of Libyan companies bearing in mind that they tend to operate under influence the mediation "wasta".
8. The role played by HR in Libyan industrial companies could be further advocated with an aim of filling in any existing gaps in communication between the managers, employees and any other personnel involved in the training process.

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