

Experience of Social Media, Training and Development on Work Proficiency: A Qualitative Study with Security Personnel

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Abstract

How useful is social media and training programs to the development of professionals in the security sector? In this study the researchers examined three key issues pertaining to training programs. These were marketing of training programs, participant experiences of training content and work proficiency. A sample of ten participants of a forensic training program at the Centre for management development, Accra was selected. Personal interviews were conducted with semi-structured interview guides to explore the views of participants. The themes developed showed that what sup a social media technique is an effective medium for marketing training programs. Additionally, it was reported that majority of the participants had positive experiences and outcomes from the training program which has implications for work proficiency. The findings were discussed in the light of what studies in training and development literature. Recommendations for enhancing training programs in the security sector are discussed.

Keywords: social media, training and development, work proficiency, participant outcomes

Introduction

The performance of every organization depends on the efficiency of their human capital as such it is important for management of organizations to invest in constant training and development to improve the work proficiencies of their staff (Truitt, 2011). Training and development basically deals with the acquisition of understanding, know-how, techniques and practices (Tahir, Yousafzai, Jan & Hashim, 2014). These programs may come in the form of on the job-training, workshop, seminars and conference (Okereker & Igboke, 2011)

Notwithstanding the fact that emphasis is placed more on organizational benefits from employee training and development, some studies have also reported that it is beneficial to the employee in that it affects work attitudes. Thus training and development is positively related to job involvement, satisfaction, motivation and commitment (Karia & Asaari, 2006). Conversely, the training literature reports that not having the requisite skills to perform a task can lead to high turnover, low motivation, dissatisfaction and work absenteeism (Truitt, 2011). Even though there is a lot of discussion in the training literature on training and work related attitudes, little research has been done on the marketing of such programs, participant experiences of training content and work proficiency outside security organizations.

Unfortunately, the training and Development of employees in Ghana are given much priority in organizations of health, agriculture and financial institutions whilst less is said of training security personnel. In Ghana, the police and employee of the armed forces are tasked to perform responsibilities such as protecting the state including its citizens and maintain peace at all times hence the need to improve their working conditions and competency skills (Atuguba, 2007). Furthermore, the need to identify the factors that influence the public's trust in the Ghanaian police has received scholarly attention (Boateng, 2012). However studies conducted in Ghana and beyond have focused solely on investigating the issues that arise from on-the-job training of only the police personnel within their organizations or jurisdiction and this has limited the generalization of their findings to other security officials (Maduka 2014)

In this regard, the literature on training and development ought to be expanded to include the various units in the Ghanaian security sector. Also, some factors ought to be considered when designing and implementing training programs to capture the needs of various security units to acquire maximum benefits.

The social media literature postulates that communicating short term educational programs to arouse employees' interest for participation is done best using electronic media such as Facebook, WhatsApp and LinkedIn (Dzvapatsva, Mitrovic, Dietrich, 2014). This is because there has been an increase usage of social media platforms and it has been recognised as a new way of reaching wider segments within the shortest possible time (Constantinides & Stagno, 2011). In support of this argument, some authors (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Spaulding, 2010) advance that the use of social media applications as part of recruitment tool can increase enrolment by giving better information with ease.

Other studies on the discourse have also reported that employees with both positive and negative experiences on training programs develop peculiar attitudes towards future training programs (Truitt, 2011). Thus in the present study, the authors primary objective was to assess the most effective social media techniques for marketing workshops for security personnel, participant's experiences of training content and work

proficiency levels and lastly the relationship between skills training and attitudes towards future training programs.

Literature Review

Training and Development

Several studies (Boadu, Dwomo-Fokuo, Boakye & Owusu Fuku, 2014; Ekundayo, 2015; Maduka, 2014; Oyango & Wanyoiki, 2014; Truitt, 2011) across the globe especially in Africa have assessed the influence of training and manpower development on work proficiency, performance and productivity.

For instance Truitt (2011) postulated that the design, implementation as well as the effectiveness of training programs will yield positive outcomes such as positive participant experiences, high work proficiency levels and positive attitudes towards future training levels.

In a more recent study, Ekundayo (2015) examined the influence of organizational training practices in ten oil services companies in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. It was reported that most of the training programs organized met the needs of the employees in a disorganized manner whilst other training program satisfied with skill acquisition needs. Additionally the study revealed that training and development were significantly related to work productivity and job security needs.

Similarly, Boadi et al. (2014) through their study on training and development and employee performance asserted that the organization of training programs comes with negative experiences from participants and management such as inadequate time allocations for training sessions and funding. However it showed that there was a significant relationship between training and job satisfaction.

Moreover, Oyango & Wanyoiki (2014) investigated the influence of training and development on performance of professionals in health institutions in Kenya. Using a sample of 56 comprising doctors, nurses and clinic officers, it was reported that training programs were significantly related to employee performance.

Maduka (2014) reported the experiences of the police force in Abia State in Nigeria with regards to training programs the findings revealed that the personnel were not adequately trained on the skills needed to perform their duties. Also, it was revealed that when they receive training they were not deployed to areas where those skills were needed. Thus it was implied that for the police personnel to increase their performance in a specific unit training programs should be tailed in that direction.

Social Media and Marketing

The upsurge of social media platforms has been on the increase as a result of its user friendly features and cost effective ways of communicating. Social media literature opines that, the digital space has been revolutionized as a result of competition within the sector due to its efficient ways of getting better results. Due to this, a lot of researchers claim that, social media can be used as a marketing tool in order to have a competitive advantage (Constantinides & Fountain, 2008; Frimpong & Vaccari, 2015; Kim, Jeong, & Lee, 2010; Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Spaulding, 2010).

Constantinides and Stagno (2011) advance that, the use of social media applications as a strategy in higher educational institutions can help in recruiting students which forms part of the marketing strategy. This assertion is also supported by (Helgesen, 2008; Hemsley- Brown & Oplatka, 2006) who also affirm that, social media yield results when applied to university marketing strategies. Boyed (2008) view on higher education is that, social media is common with younger generation and that effective use of it can increase the adoption rate. It is however imperious to note that marketing of educational programmes through social media can increase enrolment due to the wider reach and give prospective students with better information which helps in decision making. In addition, Constantinides and Stagno (2011) address the need to use diverse platforms of social media such as YouTube and other blogs to help improve teaching and learning other than recruitment purposes only.

In Ghana, the internet penetration according to Frimpong and Vaccari (2015) is relatively on the increase coupled with the high rate of mobile phone usage across the country. Besides, most of the applications on the mobile phones use the internet hence; marketing activities can be channeled through that platform. Bernhardt, Mays and Hall (2012) claim that, one of the P's in marketing thus Place is satisfied when social media is used. In support of this argument, it is evident that, social media platforms do not require brick and mortar to operate but rather in a virtual space thus, the use of social media is less expensive with a potential to reform the digital space as noted by Patino, Pitta and Quinones (2012).

Quality of Training

Vyas (2014) defines quality of service as the degree of discrepancy between customer's normative expectation for the service and their perceptions for the service performance. In the light of this, service quality changes from industry to industry (Parasuraman et al., 1988, 1994). Parasuraman et al. (1985, 1988) opined five key dimensions of service quality; reliability, tangibles, empathy, assurance and responsiveness, and these factors determine how a customer weighs the quality of a service. The dimensions proposed suggest that, services are perishable and cannot be stored for a later date and as such it needs to be consumed at the point of delivery. Due to the nature of service, the delivery and consumption process must exceed the expectation of the customer.

In the educational context, the teaching and learning, counselling and asking of questions are forms of service delivery to students who are invariably customers as well (Yeo, 2008). Hence, the expectations of students must be met with the service promise of the institution.

Service encounters come about when the students experience delivery of service, of which the experiences serve as a measurement for quality or otherwise. These arguments mean that, any negative experiences may result in dissatisfaction and negative word of mouth can hinder the progress of future training and development programmes.

Research Questions

What are the most efficient medium in social media technique is used for marketing workshops for security personnel?

Does training experiences at workshops influence work proficiency?

Does indirect skills training influence attitudes towards future training programs?

Methods

Participants

A total of 10 participants who are security personnel in the public sector were selected for the study. These were five military officers and five police officers. The participants had their education up to at least secondary level. Eight of them were married and two single. All the participants were men and aged between 30 and 45 years.

Instruments

The interview guides used were self designed and it comprised of ten open ended questions with probes measuring channels of social media for marketing, training experiences, work proficiency and attitudes towards future training programs.

Procedure

The interviews were conducted at the end of the workshop session. All participants were fluent in the English speaking language and so the interview sessions were largely conducted in English. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, voluntary participation and confidentiality issues were observed. Permission was sought from the participants before the data was audio taped and was agreed. The interview took 5 hours for two days. A period of 3 hours was spent on the first day and 2 hours for the second day. The recorded interviews were transcribed over a period of 2 days before content analysis was done to generate the themes.

Ethical considerations

During the course of the research some ethical principles were adhered to. For instance the authors sought permission from the management of the center and then stated the benefits of the findings to the center. Participants were also briefed on the content of the study. They were also told that they had the option to take part in the study or opt out without facing any sanctions from the researchers. In other words they were given consent forms which explained the processes involved in the study. Additionally, the participants were sought for audio recording of their responses and they assured that the transcribed data would be saved with a password to secure it for the sake of confidentiality.

Data Analysis

The data was analysed using content analysis where emerging themes on the experiences of the security personnel on training were developed. The second author personally immersed herself into transcribing the data after which the codes and themes were developed. The themes and the transcribed data were given to the first author for examination until an agreement was reached on the themes. Following the development of the themes, the authors realized that the trainees had positive experiences about the workshop and identified the social medium thus WhatsApp to be the most effective communication tool for marketing training programs. In the light of this the authors formulated meanings and reviewed literature to aid the themes found.

Trust worthiness of the results

We followed the steps outlined by Maxwell (1996) to produce trustworthy results. That is making that we acquire the exact and complete representation of respondent's experiences. To ensure reliability, we used an efficient tape recorder to aid a detailed transcription of interview data. Also between the authors we investigated the interview data to ensure the credibility of the data.

Results

The study revealed themes on their training experiences of participants in the forensic workshop. These are effects of social media and benefits, training experiences and attitudes towards future training programs.

Effects of Social Media

This theme described the participants view on the most effective social media channel for marketing workshops

for security personnel. The participants said that out of the various forms of social media, WhatsApp seem to be the most effective means for communicating workshops to security personnel. They used concepts such as reliable, fast, cheap and convenient to describe the WhatsApp channel. Excerpts of the participants responses are stated and to ensure the code of confidentiality, status of security personnel is used to represent each excerpt. Reports from the study on WhatsApp was consistent with Mangold & Faulds (2009) & Spaulding (2010). Additionally, the responses describing the effectiveness of WhatsApp as communicating tools shows the extent to which internet software packages via mobile phones is being highly accessed and subscribed to as reported by Frimpong and Vaccari (2015). Excerpts of the responses of the participants depicted the WhatsApp not only served the purpose of marketing programs but a means of exchanging information amongst relations and peers. Besides the use of the medium was also conditional as it benefitted people who were enlightened in technology.

"I received message about training program through a WhatsApp message from one person I know. In fact amongst all channels for communicating it is the most reliable and accessible once you are technologically inclined" (Police officer, 3).

"Using WhatsApp as a means to communicate training programs is cheap and can reach a larger of people" (Police officer, 2).

Additionally, some participants said that WhatsApp was also good for group discussions on assignments and lecture notes. Thus people who had challenges with the training content had the advantage of accessing training content after the sessions.

"When I do not attend classes I sometimes chat with my colleagues on the platform in order to get reading notes and assignments so that I can catch up with the next class" (military officer, 4).

Training experiences

This theme described the experiences of the participants at the workshop. Two of the participants talked about the content of the program. From their responses, participants affirmed their development of moral principles in addition to the requisite skills for their jobs acquired from the training. Notwithstanding the fact that training the participants on security issues was the main objective, it also influenced their mindset about the discourse. The statements were made in this form:

"The course has made me achieve good moral lessons in my work place. It has helped me acquire information and techniques for computer intrusion" (Police officer, 5).

"The program has help me immensely and my perception about security hitherto has transformed over the period" (military officer, 2).

Another participant talked about the skills they acquired which was not directly related to their jobs but was still beneficial. The skills acquired indirectly brings to the fore how extensive the training program was and its ability to satisfy diverse training needs of all participants. Responses made in the light of the above are as follows:

"The course makes me understand the new trends in the area even though it is not related to my work" (military officer, 1).

Some participants spoke about their experiences in relation to their own perception of their work proficiency levels. Furthermore, most of them expressed their satisfaction on how the training content met their needs in their field of expertise.

"As a homicide investigator, I am happy I participated in this program and it has boosted my expertise in investigation procedures" (military officer,4).

"I participated in all the modules of the course and find them very useful and will have a great impact on my field of work" (Police officer,1).

"The course on bomb management was very useful because as a soldier I have been handling bombs and I feel this course has given me enough exposure as to how to handle victims of bomb attacks" (military officer, 3).

"The course on crime theories and electronic crime is more related to my job position. It has enhanced my performance at work" (Military officer, 2).

Attitudes towards future training programs

This theme showed the attitudes of the participants towards similar programs which will be organized in the future training programs.

On the average some participants expressed their willingness to invite other participants for future training programs. Also excerpts of their responses showed that their acceptance to partake in future programs was related to the reputation of the institution as the participants who had had experience from previous institutions. This implies that the management of the trainees' work organizations will respect certificates issued upon completion of program.

"I will participate in next program as well as recommend it to my colleagues because I believe it will equip me with the requisite skills for performing our duties" (military officer ,1).

"Once I am informed about the program in advance, I will partake in it and also recommend it to others because it is the best program so far as compared to other courses organized in other institutions" (military officer 4)

Whilst some participants gave recommendations for enhancing the programs.

"I would like to recommend that the course should be taken to an advanced level in the near future" (Police officer, 4).

"More reading materials must be provided and the duration of the course should be extended from 8 to 12 weeks" (military officer,3).

"I think the practical aspect of this course should be considered seriously in the next training session" (Military officer, 1).

Discussion

The study sought to gain an in depth description of participants experiences of the choice of social media and advantages, the experiences of participants of training content o work proficiencies and their attitudes towards future training programs. The transcribed data revealed that the WhatsApp being a social medium had an influence on participants' training experience. It was also reported that the experiences of participants were related to their perception of their own work proficiency. Furthermore these experiences were also related to their attitudes towards future training programs.

The study adopted a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences. Considering the sample size of ten from the various security units and the nature of qualitative research, the findings of the study cannot be generalized to participants of other training programs.

However, the findings is consistent with previous studies (Boadu et al, 2014; Ekundayo, 2015; Oyango & Wanyoiki, 2014; Truitt, 2011) who reported that, training and development have an impact on satisfaction and subsequently boost work performance. However it was inconsistent with studies which revealed that security personnel who participated in a training program in Abia State in Nigeria were not adequately trained on the skills needed to perform their duties (Maduka, 2014). Similarly, it was inconsistent with other studies which reported that, the organization of training programs comes with negative experiences from participants and management such as inadequate time allocations for training sessions and funding (Boadi et al. 2014).

In addition, the finding of the study supports other work (Constantinides & Fountain, 2008; Frimpong & Vaccari, 2015; Ghauri, Lutz, & Tesfom, 2003; Kim, Jeong, & Lee, 2010; Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Spaulding, 2010) who claim that, social media is a vibrant way of reaching masses and this serves as a marketing tool to achieving more results.

Recommendations

The findings of the study bring to the fore suggestions for future research and practice. Future studies on social media, training and development should focus on assessing the effectiveness of both traditional and social media in marketing training programs in a comparative study. Additionally research could be done to assess the experiences and effectiveness of workers in both short and long durational training programs. In terms of practice, management of organizations should conduct a needs assessment before allowing employees to participate in training programs taking into consideration the reputation of the institution organizing the training program.

Conclusions

The use of social media in marketing of training programs has come of age and from the study, it is evident that social media plays a vital role in influencing the outcomes of marketing activities. Due to this, it is imperative that institutions of higher learning should incorporate social media platforms as part of their marketing strategies in order to yield the required results. Again, the study revealed that participants use WhatsApp to discuss projects, assignments and share ideas which is a key in aiding effective discussions.

Besides, the study unequivocally revealed that training is significant in ensuring success in organizations leading to satisfaction and this makes it clear that decision makers should incorporate training and development programs in their calendar to help employees give off their best.

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