

A Study of Training Programmes – a case of MANAGE

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Abstract

This study was undertaken to have insight into the important variables that influence the effectiveness of training programmes and enable the trainer to reorient them, suitably dovetailing to the needs of the trainees and the organizations. The objectives are to assess the strengths and weaknesses in terms of design, delivery, content creation and training methodology and suggest ways and means to bring about overall improvement in training programmes.

Results reveal that MANAGE training programmes were found to be designed appropriately, content matched participants' needs and helped to realize program objectives; training methodology was found suitable and the training contributed to performance back at work. Some of the recommendations include, giving adequate space to emphasize skill development and field application of the content covered; Training Need Assessment (TNA) as an important requirement; field visits; greater use of audio visual aids, panel discussions. Some follow up exercise with the trainees is also suggested to not only help trainees to monitor progress but also help MANAGE to improve the quality of future training programmes.

Introduction

Capacity building of Agricultural Extension personnel is a major mandate of MANAGE and is executed by conducting different training programmes on key themes in the emerging areas of agricultural development. A study was undertaken to have insight into the important variables that influence the effectiveness of training programmes and enable the trainer to reorient them suitably dovetailing to the needs of the trainees and the organizations. The specific objectives set out for the study were:

1. To assess the strengths and weaknesses in terms of design, delivery, content creation and training methodology
2. To suggest ways and means of overall improvement in training programmes of MANAGE.

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As part of the study a review of literature was carried out on conduct of Training programs and their Evaluation to understand the parameters that contribute to the effectiveness of training programmes. The review suggests that training is a learning event wherein learning opportunities are deliberately designed to help improve performance of the learners and thereby achieve organizational goals.

The evaluation of training programme promotes effectiveness and also provides data that can be used to assess value and demonstrate impact. Goldstein (1986) defines evaluation as 'the systematic collection of information, necessary to make effective decisions related to the selection, adoption, value and modification of various instructional activities'. According to Brinkerhoff (1995) evaluation of training tells the total value of the training activity to the organization not merely the achievement of its stated objectives but also to assess on how closely are training goals linked to organizational needs, whether training plans have been adequately formulated to deliver the learning, how well are learning outcomes being achieved and the efforts made to sustain individual and organizational performance.

According to Dhaka (2008), impact assessment of training can be done based on trainees' characteristics, training design, training delivery and training conditions.

Training design has been described by Brinkerhoff and Gill (1992) as one of the most important influences on training transfer. Emphasizing the need for delivery of content through appropriate methodology, Goldstein (1986) highlights that learning is enhanced when trainees are taught not only skills, but also the general rules and theoretical principles that underlie the training content. In addition to training design and methodology, the credibility of the trainer or resource persons plays an important role in generating a positive impact of training programmes.

Jaya and Reddy (2004) in their study on Empowering Extension Managers through participatory learning found that training methodology enables enhanced participation of trainees.

Lead Points

It is reiterated from the review of literature that evaluation of training programmes is necessary to understand the various factors that influence the effectiveness of training programmes. It also emphasizes the need to study as to

how training methodology influences the learning by trainees and how trainees value training programmes on all parameters.

It is expected that the outcome of the present study would enable MANAGE in particular and other training organizations in general to design need-based, demand-driven and trainee-focused training programmes to equip the participants in acquiring innovative techniques and management skills towards achieving the goal of agricultural development.

Methodology

Ex-post-facto design was employed to understand the various parameters that influence the effectiveness of training programmes. An open ended questionnaire was designed and used for collecting primary data from the participants who had undergone training programmes organized by MANAGE during 2006-07.

The open ended questionnaire covered different aspects viz. course design and content; objectives of the programme; reading material and its usefulness; training methodology and its suitability for content delivery; expectations of trainees; and suggestions of the participants.

A total of 2994 functionaries attended the training programmes at MANAGE during the study period. The questionnaire was mailed to five percent i.e.150 functionaries and responses were received from 123 trainees. The remaining 27 trainees have shifted, transferred or have retired and hence, data could not be collected from them. Participants at all levels of hierarchy from all the States and all the themes of training programmes were taken as sample by using purposive sampling technique. A large majority of the respondents (83 per cent) were from State Agriculture Departments and the remaining were from other allied departments and NGOs.

Content analysis, frequency and percentages were used to analyze the patterns and trends of the responses. Firstly, the common variables as identified in the lead points were consolidated from the filled-in questionnaire. Secondly, the responses under each variable were further classified into different categories for the purpose of interpretation. Care was taken to retain the meaning of the responses while classifying them into different categories. Finally, the classified categories were coded to work out the frequencies and percentages highlighting the patterns and trends in the study.

Results and Findings

Data relating to various issues of training programmes have been presented and interpreted under the following subheads.

1. Course Design and Content

The majority of the respondents (88.62 per cent) opined that the training programmes were designed appropriately with brevity of content to highlight the emerging concepts in agricultural development, meeting the requirements and needs of the participants fully. About 11 per cent of the respondents felt that programmes were not designed appropriately and hence, require improvement.

Table 1. Course Design and Content

Category	Response percentage
Perfect design	88.62
Needs improvement in programme design	4.88
Inappropriate design	6.5

The suggestions offered to improve the training design reflect the location specific needs and participant's aspirations. Sparingly few respondents opined that though the design of program was appropriate, the heterogeneity of participants made learning difficult. Another suggestion was to carry out a Training Needs Assessment (TNA) before designing the program so that the specific requirements of participants could be met.

2. Objectives vis-à-vis Content

A large majority of the respondents (86 per cent) felt that the course content helped to realize the program objectives fully while 10 per cent felt that it matched to a limited extent. The remaining stated that content did not help to realize the objectives of the program.

The trainees' responses as how the content helped to realize the program objectives are presented in table 2.

Table 2. Responses regarding Objective and Content of the Programme

Sl. No.	Category	Response Percentage
1	Content coverage was sufficient and adequate	60.87
2	Compatibility ensured in content and its delivery mechanism through interactive sessions, brainstorming and discussions	8.7
3	Helped to put learning into practice by planning sessions in the training programmes	21.74
4	Experts views and successful examples help to align content with objectives	6.52
5	The objectives and content are discussed in the beginning of the programme to set agenda right	2.18

It can be inferred from the above table that the respondents felt that various measures like coverage of content to address all the objectives of the program, methods like interactive sessions, brainstorming and discussions inviting experts and quoting successful examples and cases and discussing objectives in the beginning of the program make the content useful and realize the program objectives.

Some of the suggestions of the respondents to improve course content in tune with the objectives include:

- State specific / Project specific need analysis should lead to superior content development
- Content should be flagged as 'Issues' leaving more time for interaction and discussion by participants in the class
- Need to include extension activities related to other disciplines like animal husbandry and veterinary science even while discussing agricultural extension.
- Field visits and interactions with successful groups to know the field problems should be included more often.

3. Reading material

A total of 98 participants responded to the question on frequency, use of Reference and the Reading Material while the remaining 25 respondents did not make any mention on this subject. From among trainees who responded, about

95 per cent had referred or used the reading material while only 5 per cent did not use the Reading material supplied during the period of the training programme. Though the frequency of referring the Reading material varied from 'often' to 'occasional', it can be inferred that the Reading material was found to be useful and hence referred and used by the respondents. The responses are categorized in the table below.

Table 3. Use of Reference or Reading Material

Category	Response Percentage
Referred whenever needed	19.39
Read quite often	29.59
Consulted for any doubt	18.37
Occasionally used	27.55
Not used	5.10

The specific instances where the reading material was referred and used for different purposes are further categorized and summarized in the table below;

Table 4. Reference of Reading Material

Sl. No.	Category	Response Percentage
1	Used for designing and organizing training programmes	39.71
2	Used as reference material or ready reckoner for updating knowledge; shared as reference material with colleagues	16.18
3	Used for extension work and implementing programs like crop insurance special packages and MSP operations at the field level	11.77
4	Used for planning, policy-making, and preparation of extension plans of the district and block action plans;	10.29

monitoring of projects; preparation of
action plans of KVK

5	For organizing groups, conducting their trainings and meetings	10.29
6	While giving advice to farmers	7.35
7	While preparing radio and television talks, group discussions, case studies and reports	4.41

From among the total respondents, about 40 per cent of them mentioned that the reading material was used for designing and organizing training programs, 16 per cent used it as a ready reckoner for updating knowledge, solving day-to-day problems and shared the reference material with colleagues. About 30 per cent of the respondents stated that it was useful in extension work like planning, policy-making, and preparation of extension plans, implementing programs, giving advice to farmers, and solving problems while only 4 per cent felt that it was useful for mass media activities like Radio and Television talks and group discussions, case studies and reports. About 10 per cent of the respondents mentioned that it was helpful for organizing groups, conducting their training and meetings. It can be inferred from the above responses that the trainees found the reading material useful, hence referred and used it for various purposes.

One must also take note that 25 trainees did not answer this question. There may be different reasons for trainees not responding to this question. However, 'No Response Status' needs to be analyzed. In future, proper care needs to be exercised in terms of quality, size, language, application, value, attractiveness etc., while preparing the reading / reference material to ensure its better use by most trainees.

While discussing the utility of the reading / reference material, about 97 per cent of the respondents opined that reading / reference material supplied in the program was useful and helped to improve their performance.

4. Training Methodology

From among the respondents, a large majority (96 per cent) felt that the chosen training methodology was suitable for the subjects / topics dealt during the training programs while only 4 per cent felt that it was not suitable. It could be inferred

that trainers took special care in developing and using appropriate methodology for delivery of the content which is proclaimed as a major strength of MANAGE. The participatory training methodology in MANAGE can be traced to its COVERDALE approach adopted during early 1990's. It has paid rich dividends over the years in terms of its appeal to clients, problem solving nature and training as a means rather than an end. The resource person acts as a facilitator and primarily enables learning by participants with brief inputs in shorter spells.

The often repeat statements / opinions of the responds on the training methodologies and their appropriateness in delivering subjects / topics during the training programs are summarized as follows:

- A combination of group discussion, classroom exercises and case discussions were useful with all its advantages
- Case studies to understand the concepts, teaching aids, preparation and presentation of project reports, interaction among different groups, feedback and dialogue is uniquely advantageous
- Field visit, hands on experience and participatory method of teaching enhanced involvement and thereby learning
- Visits to SHGs and examples quoted, help assimilation of things to do
- Participatory methodology helps in breaking inhibitions and creating an atmosphere/ environment for exchange of ideas and information

The suggestions of the respondents to improve the training methodology are summarized below:

- More field visits may be organized to successful cases as it enhances the value of training
- Audio visual aids and latest equipment to be used in the classroom as it improves reception and learning
- Reading notes as per the teaching methodology should be supplied on all the subjects in advance and certainly before the lecture of experts
- Interactions among participants to share knowledge/experiences at the beginning of the training programme is always helpful

5. Trainee Centered Approach

Majority of the respondents i.e. 83 per cent felt that the delivery of content was trainee centred, 5 per cent felt that it was trainer centred and remaining 12 per cent opined that it was both trainee and trainer centred. Enhanced learning is guaranteed if the trainee related factors like age, work experience, qualification, location of the trainee and expectation from the programme are kept in view while designing a training programme.

Some of the views of respondents are given as under which exhibit that the trainee centred approach is used in MANAGE training programmes.

- Delivery of content was as per the need of the participants
- Trainee-centred live examples were interesting and useful
- Clarification of doubts and providing opportunity to discuss and offer suggestions
- Experience sharing by fellow trainees was very useful
- Arguments and disagreements do find place in the training session

A few suggestions offered to make it learner centred include the following:

- Training need analysis may be done before organizing the programmes
- Trainers need to be more sensitive to trainees' needs and expectations rather than their own capabilities
- Trainers need not emphasize his / her conceptualized ideas ignoring practical implications for participants

6. Preference of Training Methods

The training methods as rated by the respondents included practical orientation, group discussion, classroom exercises, field visits-cum-field exercises, case discussions and presentations, panel discussions, lectures, film shows and audio and video and computer aids. After studying the responses carefully, these were classified on a five-point scale i.e., excellent, very good, good, average and poor. The rating percentage of each of the training methods is summarized in table 6.

Table 6. Methods of Training used

	Poor	Average	Good	Very Good	Excellent	Total
Practical orientation	12.12	6.06	58.59	18.18	5.05	100
Group discussion	4.23	4.23	54.92	32.39	4.23	100
Classroom exercises	4.47	1.78	68.74	20.54	4.47	100
Field exercises / field visits	19	8	50	19	4	100
Case discussions and presentations	6.25	4.47	56.25	25.89	7.14	100
Panel discussion	14.29	0.95	64.76	17.14	2.86	100
Lectures	9.65	5.26	58.77	21.06	5.26	100
Film and Audio	3.77	7.55	56.61	26.41	5.66	100

It is evident from results on this subject that practical orientation in MANAGE Training Programmes is rated as good by about 59 per cent of the respondents while 23 per cent of the respondents stated that it ranged from very good to excellent. However it was rated as poor by about 12 per cent of the respondents. Therefore, this is an area, which needs improvement to make training programmes more useful, effective and learner centred.

Similar trends were observed so far as the field visit and field exercises are concerned. Fifty percent of the respondents rated the usefulness of field visits as good, 23 per cent as very good to excellent and remaining 27 per cent as average and poor. Similar trends were observed for other methods of training including group discussion, classroom exercises, case discussion, panel discussion, lecture and film shows etc. On an average, all the training methods used in MANAGE are rated as good by about 60 per cent respondents and very good to excellent by about 25 per cent respondents.

In view of the above findings, there is a clear scope to improve upon the training methods like practical orientation, field exercises and panel discussion. Sustained efforts also need to be made to improve the quality of group exercises and case discussion and presentation which is a strength of MANAGE training methodology.

7. Support Services

The responses to the question on 'whether the support services viz., boarding, lodging, transport, recreation, local visit etc., create an impact on the training programs' are classified and presented in the following table:

Table 7. Impact of Support Services on the Training Programme

Category	Response Percentage
Yes	95.94
No	0.81
No response	3.25
Total	100

Most of the respondents (96 per cent) felt that the support services viz., boarding, lodging, transport, recreation, local visit etc., create a definite impact on the effectiveness of the training programmes. In order to understand as to how the quality of support services influence the training programme, the observations of respondents are consolidated below:

- Inadequate or lack of board and lodging facilities discourage trainees to participate
- Boarding, lodging, transport, recreation, local visit etc. offer full opportunity to learn in the classroom as well as outside, in the company of faculty and participants
- Yoga classes, serene atmosphere and lively campus add to learning
- The training programme becomes as much memorable as the facilities including internet and access to the library
- Good support services help trainees to remain focused

Conclusion

From the results of the study, it can be observed that MANAGE training programmes were found to be designed appropriately and the content matched the requirements and needs of the participants at the field and the course content helped to realize the program objectives.

The reading material was found to be referred and used by a majority of the respondents and it helped them to improve performance. Learning from the training has contributed to the performance in back-at-work situation. Training methodology was felt to be suitable for the subjects / topics dealt during the training programs and training was useful as expected by the trainees. Most of the respondents also felt that the support services viz., boarding, lodging, transport recreation, field visit etc., create an impact on the training programs and hence are important.

Recommendations

To bring about improvement in the training programmes based on the study findings, recommendations are given as under;

1. The training design executed in MANAGE programmes was largely appreciated by the participants. However, training design should have adequate space to emphasize skill development and field application of the contents covered
2. Training Need Assessment (TNA) has emerged as an important requirement before launching a training programme. It would eventually help to make the programme client focussed, location specific and dovetailed to project / programme requirements.
3. The findings on usability of reading material by participants were very encouraging. However, supply of the material in advance along with the references of useful websites would further improve the usability quotient of the material.
4. While most of the training methods and training aids were appreciated, the field visit needs to be more purposeful and invariably organized for the programmes which mainly focus on agricultural development viz., Agricultural Extension Reforms, Public Private Partnership, Precision Farming, Commodity Interest Groups, ICT applications and Market Led Extension. Use of Audio Visual Aids and Films also need to find place in a programme of five days to complement the input in the classroom sessions.
5. In order to strike a perfect match between the training programme and the expectations of participants, it may be worthwhile to have a few resource persons who are implementing projects / programmes. Some follow up exercise with the trainees for 6 months to one year would help trainees to monitor the progress and also help MANAGE to improve the quality of future training programmes

6. Though MANAGE training programmes were largely trainee centred, in a few cases, it was suggested that resource person should be adequately briefed to focus on the requirement of the trainee and the training programme
7. It was strongly brought out that MANAGE training programmes need to improve on the practical orientation, conduct of field visits and field exercises. The panel discussions were largely missing in MANAGE training programmes which is a superior method to cover different perspectives on the same subject in a lesser time and hence, need to be part of MANAGE training methodology
8. A large majority of the participants were of the view that some room in the design be kept for sight seeing as is done in all high quality programmes nationally and internationally since the participants also come with some agenda of this nature in their minds.

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