

ROLE OF TRAINING IN MANAGING FLOW OF INVENTORY IN HUMANITARIAN RELIEF SUPPLY CHAIN IN KENYA: A CASE STUDY OF KENYA RED CROSS SOCIETY**Owen Wahome**

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CITATION: Wahome, O., Ng'ang'a, R., & Sakwa, M. (2013). Role of training in managing flow of inventory in humanitarian relief supply chain in Kenya. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Entrepreneurship*, 1 (3), 497-508.

ABSTRACT

There is considerable evidence that the number of worldwide natural and man-made disasters is increasing, resulting in loss of life, property and acute shortage of supplies. The increasing complexity and magnitude of global emergency relief operations create a critical need for superior humanitarian supply chain management processes. The irregular demand patterns and unusual constraints inherent in large-scale emergencies present unique challenges to physical supply systems. Humanitarian operations are quite complex and therefore very difficult to understand and to manage. Historically, employee's competence in humanitarian relief operations has been known to affect delivery of humanitarian aid and goods in a positive way to those who need them most. Highly competent employee are able to work in the most effective and efficient manner and therefore able to minimize the loss of life and maximize the efficiency of the rescue operations. The purpose of this study was to investigate role of training in managing flow of inventory in humanitarian relief supply chain in Kenya. Specifically, the study was out to establish the competency development strategies used in the KRCS, the relevance of training content to work and the general effects of training to employee work performance. The study adopted a descriptive research design. This design helped to ascertain and describe the characteristics of the variables of interest. The target populations for the study were employees of Kenya Red Cross Society, Tana River Branch. The branch had a total of 35 employees and was selected for the many scenarios both natural and man-made in the recent past that have called KRCS interventions. The study adopted a census and questionnaires were used to collect data from the respondents. The data collected was analyzed using Excel package and the results presented using tables and charts. The findings of the study revealed that KRCS has competency development strategies and plans in place which facilitated regular training programs. However, the relevance of training content to work was wanting. Following these findings the study recommends that Human Resource Development should ensure that content of training programs should be related to work since those that are unrelated to an employee's field or are random in nature can make employees lose faith in the value of training, and they may not take future job-related programs seriously. The study also established a relatively high labour turnover and therefore recommends intensification of training since appropriate training contributes positively to employee retention because it makes employees feel recognized for their strengths, and it

creates possibilities to develop their qualities. At the same time provisions made for training and development activities lie at the heart of their ability to attract and retain the best employees for their organisation. Human Resource Management should also establish career progression paths so that employees can undertake appropriate training actions based on the career aspirations, age and related work needs.

Key words: *Natural and Man-made Disasters, Kenya Red Cross Society, Humanitarian Relief Operations, Supply Chain Management Processes, Human Resource Development, Human Resource Management.*

Introduction

Despite diverse definitions and different understanding, competencies can be understood as cognitive, functional and social abilities and skills, including all individual resources one can use for performing diverse tasks in various areas, gaining required knowledge and achieving good results. Every competency is based on a combination of mutually linked cognitive and practical skills, knowledge, motivation, orientation values, beliefs, emotions, and other social and behavioral components, applicable as a whole in an efficient activity (Svetlik, 2005). Gruban (2003) defines competencies as the ability to use knowledge and other capabilities, necessary for successful and efficient accomplishment of an appointed task, transaction of work, goal realization, or performance of a certain role in the business process. Competency has also been defined as the capability of applying or using knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviors, and personal characteristics to successfully perform critical work tasks, specific functions, or operate in a given role or position. Therefore competence is an attribute of an employee otherwise known as “human capital” or “human resource” that can be transformed into productivity. This is different from “qualification” which is “requirements of a certain class of work tasks a job”.

Competency development is not simply a means of arming employees with the skills they need to perform their jobs: it is also often deemed to be representative of an employer’s commitment to their workforce (Storey & Sisson, 1993). It may also be perceived to reflect an overall organisational strategy that involves adding increased value, as opposed to reducing costs. Many of the world’s most successful companies are aware that the provisions they make for training and development activities lie at the heart of their ability to attract and retain the best employees for their organisation (Bassi & Buren, 1999). It is therefore imperative that employers provide an opportunity for their workforce to learn (Arlond, 2005; Bernsen, Segers, & Tillema, 2009), as proactive development schemes will not only improve the capabilities of their team but will also motivate staff and subsequently engender a more loyal employee set (Kyndt, Dochy, Michielsens, & Moeyaert, 2009).

Investment in training measures and the implementation of development schemes are becoming increasingly acknowledged as vital elements of HRM (Oakland & Oakland, 2001), and studies across a wide range of industries and sectors have all found a positive correlation between investment in training and employee commitment (Bassi & Buren, 1999). For example, studies conducted by Ng’ang’a *et.al* (2013) on training issues among employees from different government departments in confirm that employees were more committed to their jobs and the achievement of the objectives of the organisation when they felt that the company cared about their training and development needs.

In summary, appropriate training contributes positively to employee job performance and retention because it makes employees feel recognized for their strengths, and it creates

possibilities to develop their qualities (Kyndt, et al., 2009; Visser, 2001). To conceive the idea of this research paper, the study conceptualized that training and development programs enhance employee performance and therefore hypothesized that; learning experiences, formal classroom training, performance management, and mentoring are learning and development techniques used to elicit positive actions based on the career aspirations and ages of the participants as explained by Medcof & Rumpel, (2007).

Statement of the Problem

The link between Human Resource Management (HRM) Practices and firm performance has been researched and a positive correlation has been found (Armstrong, 2010). Well-designed HRM Practices play a strategic role by promoting organisational success in highly competitive markets in which technological change constantly influences how employees perform their jobs. Recent advances in technology and rapid changes in the world have placed increasingly stringent demands on the human operators in many organizational systems. The need for improved and more varied skill levels, coupled with current fiscal constraints, requires that modern employee training systems impart the complicated, higher-order skills required to operate modern work equipment systems. Furthermore, this must be accomplished in effective and efficient manner. The challenge has been that some organizations perceive competency development as a cost not a means of arming employees with the skills they need to perform their jobs. This in the long run ends up sending a wrong picture as far as employer's commitment to workforce is concerned. At the end of it all; the organization may start experiencing low morale among employees, labour turnover, increasing work-related accidents and law suits among others which may be very expensive.

The study was based on the idea as explained by Kyndt, *et al.*, (2009) and Visser, (2001) that; appropriate training contributes positively to employee job performance and retention because it makes employees feel recognized for their strengths, and it creates possibilities to develop their qualities. Therefore, there is need to develop appropriate training strategies. It was from this perspective that the study hypothesized that; learning experiences, formal classroom training, performance management, and mentoring are learning and development techniques used to elicit positive actions based on the career and other aspirations of employees.

Research Objectives

The purpose of the present research was to advance understanding of role of training in managing flow of inventory in humanitarian relief supply chain in Kenya. Specifically, the study was out to establish the competency development strategies used by the KRCS, the relevance of training content to work and the general effects of training to employee work performance. It was from this background that specific objectives of the study were conceived. These were:

- i. To investigate competency development strategies used by the KRCS to develop their employees.
- ii. To establish the relevance of training content to work at the KRCS.
- iii. To establish the general effects of training on employee work performance at the KRCS.

Theoretical Framework

A study by Ng'ang'a *et.al* (2013) postulated that; training revolves around practicality. That is; how training affects firm productivity rather than training for the sake of training. Training connects to the overall business strategy and individual performance. It should be designed to

move staff forward by providing new skills, new processes, new procedures, and a better understanding of the organization. This fits well with what is known about adult learning theory and the need for it to be useful and applicable to the current situation. Adult Learning Theory suggests that adults are autonomous and self-directed and need to be actively involved in the learning process. The Adult Learners Model (Cross, 1981) suggests that adults have varying degrees of readiness and ability to learn. Cross (1981) also suggests that adult learners have a need for flexibility and enjoy control over their learning. When trainees are engaged in the learning process, they become active participants rather than passive recipients, and active participation can increase learning and transfer of training (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson 1998). However, one of the greatest challenges faced by HRD professionals is identifying instructional or delivery methods that enhance the adult learning process. Although new forms of instruction such as self-paced, online learning are emerging, the dominant form of instruction is still the traditional instructor-led classroom scenario. Though, a dominant form of giving instructions, lecture method is frequently maligned. As Korte (2006) pointed out, the method itself might not be an issue because the lecture can be useful in imparting information and knowledge to the learner. However, the issue might lie in poor execution of this method. Davis and Davis (1998) suggest several ways to make lecture more to prior knowledge.

Adult Learning Theory recognizes that adults, unlike children, need to see the practical application of lessons in order to translate training into improved job performance. One foundation for the transition to active adult learning is found in the adult learning theory of Knowles (1950). In his studies of how adults learn. However, there are some similarities in the adult and child classroom, although adults generally have distinctly different motivations to engage in learning. The ALC models reflect these differences from traditional teacher-centered models of child and adolescent education. Instructors should be familiar with Knowles' research as a foundation to develop effective lessons and delivering them in a manner best-suited to the learner. Adult learning theory is founded on the principles that effective training is:

- i. **Relevant** – to the experience or intended experience of the adult learner. Whereas children and adolescents will attempt to learn content isolated from its application, adults learn best when they see the relevance of the taught concept to their experience
- ii. **Engaged** – the adult learner retains knowledge and concepts more readily if they are engaged in the process of discovery and exploration rather than being the recipient of information
- iii. **Active** – the learning process should be active, and replicate as closely as possible the environment within which the skill or knowledge will be applied. Rather than memorizing code sections, adults would retain and apply knowledge more effectively if they worked to discover the content, and then were able to practice its application in a simulation or scenario.
- iv. **Learner-centered** – The traditional classroom taught concepts and prepared students to pass tests and other measures of their progress. Unfortunately, the student's retention of that knowledge was often nominal beyond the confines of the class. The emerging intent of police academy training is to produce the most effective outcomes possible; to see students apply classroom skills in a real-world setting. The focus on the learner acquiring knowledge is a critical step in effective training.

Relevance of the Theory

Adults spend a considerable amount of time and energy exploring what the benefits are of them learning something and the costs of them not learning something before they are willing to invest time in learning it. It is seldom convincing for them to be told by someone (even the boss) that it would be good for them. Training should be based on valid needs of the intended audience. All information provided about the training, including lesson plans, should include reasons for learning. The benefits of learning should be clearly shown. Activities should be based around real work experiences. As trainers design training, they should incorporate as much "search and discovery" into the training as possible for experienced learners. Present training with as many options for learning as possible. Lastly, learning activities should clearly demonstrate to the learner where he or she would benefit in their jobs. Quality training is built around the concept of nourishing those intrinsic motivators. Learning feeds on itself and suggests to the learner to become even more proficient in the job.

Methodology

The study adopted descriptive research design. This is a process of collecting data in order to test the hypothesis or answer research questions concerning the current status of the subjects under investigation (Mugenda and Mugenda 2008). The design facilitates the determination and reporting of the way the phenomena under study is in terms of behaviour, attitudes and values among other characteristics (Gay 2005). This design therefore enabled the study to ascertain and describe the role of training in managing flow of inventory in humanitarian relief supply chain in Kenya

The population of the study was 35 employees of Kenya Red Cross Society-Tana River Branch. All the employees were considered for the study and therefore a census used. Kothari (2004) describes census as a complete enumeration of all the items in a population. The study respondents therefore were 3 administrators, 7 members of logistics staff, 18 relief staff and 7 support staff. Self-administered questionnaires were used to collect data. The data collected was analyzed using Excel package and the results presented using tables.

Findings and Discussions

The Response Rate

Out of the 35 questionnaires distributed to the respondents 27 questionnaires were returned. This translated to 79% response rate and has surpassed the minimum threshold response rate of 75% suggested by Bailey (2003). The response is shown in table 1

Table 1: Response Rate

Category	Frequency	Percent
Administration	3	11
Logistics	6	22
Relief	13	48
Support	5	19
Total	27	100

Out of these respondents, (18) 67% were males while (9) 33% were females. This suggests that there was an appropriate gender representation among officers in the Kenya Red Cross Society as shown in table 2.

Respondents Characteristics

As discussed and assessed by McClelland in the early 1970s, competencies, or individual characteristics, were recognized as significant predictors of employee performance and success, equally as important as an individual's academic aptitude and knowledge content as indicated by tests scores or results (Lucia & Lepsinger, 1999; Mullins 2002). Therefore, preliminary information was sort on the characteristics of the respondents. The questions aimed to elicit responses which showed the parameters of the respondents and the organization they work for. The data gathered on respondents included: their gender, age range and the academic qualifications. The findings are discussed in the subsequent sections.

Table 2: Gender of the Respondents

Category	Frequency	Percent
Male	18	67
Female	9	33
Total	27	100

All the age ranges captured for in study were represented (see table 3) with the age range of "31 - 40 years" having the highest representation at 37%, followed by "up to 30 years" at 31%, the age range "41-50 years" had a representation of 18%, while age range "of over 50 years" had the lowest representation at 14%.

Table 3: Age of the Respondents

Age Range	Frequency	Percent
Up to 30 years	8	31
31-40 years	10	37
41-50 years	5	18
Over 50 years	4	14
Total	27	100

The respondents' educational background also varied from a Secondary School Education, that is, KCSE to University Education. It is clear from table 4 that holders of bachelor's degree were the majority with 67% and KCSE had the lowest representation with 7%.

Table 4: Academic Qualifications

Category	Frequency	Percent
KCSE	02	07
Certificate	03	11
Diploma	06	22
Bachelor	13	47
Others	04	13
Total	27	100

Length of period in humanitarian operations

The study sought to find out the length of period that the respondents had served in the current position. Respondents were requested to indicate how long they had served in current position. This is because experience is necessary since one is exposed to work environment and there able to understand the way flow of inventory in humanitarian relief supply chain. As employees spend more time with an organisation, they become accustomed to its practices and are bound to give reports that reflect it well. On the other hand, relatively new employees tend to be more idealistic their views and opinions may perhaps indicate their level of expectations. The results were analyzed and tabulated in table 5

Table 5: Length of Period in the Service

Category	Frequency	Percent
Up to 5 years	19	70
6 -10 years	5	19
Over 10 years	3	11
Total	27	100

This question sought the period the respondents have worked for their organization. From the findings, 11% of the respondents had worked in those organizations for over 10 years; 19% between 6-10 years and 70% up to 5 years. The findings on this section suggest that there is high level of staff turnover. This gives food for thought to the management as they work out reduce the turnover. However the researcher believes that gave him appropriate information as far as the phenomena under study is concerned since it cut across the board on all ranges put into consideration.

Competency Development Strategies

The study established the strategies used to develop capacities of employees. In determining training and development programs that enhance enhances acquisition of appropriate skills, knowledge and attitude and therefore employee performance, the study hypothesized that; exposure to learning experiences, formal training, performance management, and mentoring are various learning and development techniques used to elicit positive actions based on the career aspirations and ages of the participants as stated by Medcof & Rumpel, (2007). The findings are shown in table 6.

Table 6: Competency Development Strategies

Strategies	Frequency	Percent
Learning Experiences	11	39
Formal Training	05	19
Performance Management	08	26
Mentoring	03	16
Total	27	100

From table 6, it is clear that exposure to learning experiences is the leading, at 39%, competency development strategy used KRCS. This can be attributed to the nature of work it undertakes which requires first-hand experience for one to be effective. Again, from the study of the respondents' characteristics, the study established a good number, 31%, of them were relatively

young in the age range of up to 30 years, and still up to 70% relatively new (Up to 5 years) in the Society. This demanded the use of a strategy that guaranteed the acquisition of the necessary skills, knowledge and attitude.

Exposure to learning experiences was followed by Performance Management strategy at 26%, formal classroom training at 19% and mentoring at 19%. Performance management seeks to improve performance of the employees. The feedback given during a performance evaluation process identifies the employee's strengths and weaknesses, which enable the managers to plan for removing the weaknesses through various HRD interventions (Armstrong 2010).

Formal classroom training may be seen from development perspective which enhances the capabilities of an employee to be ready to perform possible future jobs as opposed to training which enhances the capabilities of an employee to perform his or her current job (Mondy 2008). Training in the society can as expressed by Mondy said to have been taken care of by other competency development strategies. Formal classroom training in most cases takes care of manager's/ administrators developmental needs. The study of the respondents' characteristics indicated that administrators were the minority, at 11%, and this can explain these findings.

The other competency development strategy under study was mentoring which scholars often look at as a longer term process, for example offering support during a career change such as induction or becoming a senior manager. The fact that there only few people who can be promoted so senior management at a given time may explain why this competency development strategy scored the lowest compared to other strategies.

What is clear from the findings is that the society has training plans and strategies. The presence of such a strategy may enhance the growth of specific skills and knowledge required to perform a job hence ensuring high employee work performance. With performance management and feedback in place, coupled with an effective training strategy; assessment of employee performance, and subsequent training, were thought to help employees understand areas where they could improve; with training programs they could harness their skills and perform better. To be able to harness long term benefits, the management should employee for training as per their needs which are established through a comprehensive training needs assessment. It should be on this basis that the Human Resource Development Department should base their agenda or plan.

Appropriateness of the Training Content to Work

Another area that the study had an interest in was the Appropriateness of the Training Content to Work. The responses are tabulated in table 7.

Table 7: Appropriateness of the Training Content to Work

Response	Frequency	Percent
Not Appropriate at all	4	15
Appropriate to a little extent	7	26
Appropriate	13	48
Very Appropriate	03	11
Total	27	100

Despite the fact that majority, 48%, of the respondents said Training Content was appropriate, a substantial number, 41%, of respondents said training content was either not appropriate at all or appropriate to a little extent. Only a paltry 11% said the training content was appropriate. This is an area that the HRD should wary of this since the presence of training programs which are

unrelated to an employee's field or are random in nature can make employees lose faith in the value of training, and they may not take future job-related programs seriously. The responses are an indication that most of the respondents felt that 'the training course did not fit their respective work situation. Any training program should be based on the job profile and requirements of the position, and the tasks that are to be done by each employee. A functional team person sent for technical training may not be able to apply it practically; training programs must correspond to the needs of the job. As noted by Storey and Sisson (1993), training represents an employer's commitment to his workforce, so poor training programs lead employees to feel a lower commitment to the employer. This could lead to low job satisfaction and result in people exiting the company.

Employees' competence and the flow of inventory

Employees' competence contribute to the development of more effective and efficient relief supply chain operations that often entail complex management activities deployed in special circumstances. The researcher sought to establish the effect of employee's competence on the flow of inventory. The results were analyzed and tabulated in table

Table 8: Employees' competence and the flow of inventory

Responses	To a great extent	Somewhat	Very little	Not at all
Understanding of procedures/ technical competence	58	27	11	4
Ability to negotiate delivery across rough terrain	62	26	8	4
Ability to make quick decisions in emergency	65	15	12	8
Knowledge to make impromptu decisions to a logistical problem	46	35	15	4
Others	57	21	14	8

Majority of the respondents (58% and above) indicated that the first three aspects of employees' competence assessed greatly affect the flow of inventory in humanitarian relief supply chain in Kenya. However majority of the respondents (54%) indicated that an employee's ability to make impromptu decisions to a logistical problem had slight effect on the flow of inventory in humanitarian relief supply chain. These results echoes earlier finding by Moe and Pathranarakul (2006), that the critical success factor for humanitarian aid supply chain management is competencies among managers and team members.

Other competencies acquired in the training process that the respondents identified include; goal-setting/results-orientation, interpersonal skills, self-knowledge integrity/honesty, communication diversity consciousness, developing others, change management, political savvy, strategic/visionary thinking, customer focus, team leadership, conflict management, more

recently emotional intelligence, social and environmental responsibility. Such skills are appropriate for Not-for-profit organizations which emphasizes on issues such as governance effectiveness, boardroom contribution, and service to community unlike profit organizations which tends to emphasize on financial responsibility and accountability more than non-profit organizations. Such competencies help them create a good relationship with the communities they work in/for.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings of the study revealed that KRCS has competency development strategies and plans in place which facilitated regular training programs. This has enabled employees to acquire skills, knowledge and attitudes that are necessary to perform their duties and responsibilities in the most effective and effective way. However, the relevance of training content to work was wanting. Following these findings the study recommends that Human Resource Development should ensure that content of training programs should be related to work since those that are unrelated to an employee's field or are random in nature can make employees lose faith in the value of training, and they may not take future job-related programs seriously. The study also established a relatively high labour turnover and therefore recommends intensification of training since appropriate training contributes positively to employee retention because it makes employees feel recognized for their strengths, and it creates possibilities to develop their qualities. At the same time provisions made for training and development activities lie at the heart of their ability to attract and retain the best employees for their organisation. Human Resource Management should also establish career progression paths so that employees can undertake appropriate training actions based on the career aspirations, age and related work needs.

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