Research Article

Training Design and Workplace Productivity in Zambia's Outsourcing Sector

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About Article

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effect of training design on workplace productivity within customer service and Information Technology (IT) outsourcing enterprises in Zambia, sectors that are increasingly important in the globalised economy. For this study, our focus will be on ISON Ltd and FSI Outsourcing. As organisations strive to maintain competitiveness through skilled human capital, effective training programs have become essential for equipping employees with practical skills aligned to organisational goals. The primary objective of this research was to understand how training design effects the application of acquired skills in job roles and to identify key elements that contribute to improved employee performance and overall organisational success. Guided by a pragmatic philosophical orientation, the study employed a convergent mixed-methods strategy, combining quantitative data from structured questionnaires with qualitative data obtained through semi-structured interviews. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse quantitative data, while qualitative responses were examined thematically. This methodological approach allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the study. The results reveal that well designed training programs have a significant impact on workplace productivity. The study revealed a strong correlation of 0.7 between training relevance and individual productivity. Additionally, job specific challenge alignment and productivity was at 0.75 revealing a strong relationship. Key design factors such as alignment with the specific job requirements, realistic practical lessons and enough time for learning were found to enhance knowledge retention and skills application. Employees reported that training which addressed actual work challenges and involved their input during the design phase was more effective. The study concludes that training design significantly influences both employee productivity and organisational success. It recommends that organisations should actively involve employees in the development of training initiatives and incorporate simulation, hands-on exercises, and real-life scenarios to reinforce learning. These findings here show the practical guidance that Zambian enterprises should follow to achieve training success and return on investment.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In today's changing business environment, training and development has become an important tool for improvement or enhancing employee skills, improving performance and maintaining a competitive edge. Organisations that encourage continuous learning are more adaptable, innovative, and better equipped to meet customer demands. ISON Zambia Limited and FSI Outsourcing, are two leading companies in the outsourcing industry and the two organisations invest heavily in training. Despite these heavy investments in time and money needed to conduct these trainings, the questions remain about the true impact of these investments on productivity and long-term organisational growth. This study seeks to understand the impact of the effectiveness of training at ISON and FSI, aiming to assess whether such initiatives translate into tangible performance improvements.

Training bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and workplace application. Scholars such as Noe (2020) and Armstrong and Taylor (2017) emphasise that effective training enhances individual capabilities and drives overall organisational success. For ISON and FSI, aligning training goals with business strategies is key to boosting productivity. A training program's success depends on its ability to integrate with existing organisational culture and processes. When training is tied to performance indicators and allows for practical application, it leads to greater employee competence and confidence (Saks & Burke, 2020).

1.1. Problem Statement

Training and development is important for enhancing the workplace productivity through upskilling and learning especially in the outsourcing industry were operational efficiency differently affects the overall business outcomes. However, despite these investments, there continues to be a gap between training programs conducted and improvements in skills application and productivity of the organisations. A check on the Internal performance reviews from both companies showed that on average 40% of employees struggle to apply newly acquired skills such as handling irate customers or using new Customer Relation Management tools in real work scenarios. Additionally, 50% of team leaders have raised concerns about the employees ability to retain and implement training content over time, particularly when under pressure during peak operational hours. For example, most employees continue to struggle with data handling protocols while others were found to be using outdated methods when processing customer information which led to errors despite attending a three-day training on the same matters. Similarly, at FSI Outsourcing, trained call center agents were observed to by passing newly introduced troubleshooting procedures, choosing the for informal solutions that compromise consistency and service quality. The core problem, therefore, lies not in the absence of training, but in the ineffectiveness of current training program design and delivery methods in producing measurable improvements in job performance.

There is a pressing need to critically examine how training programs are structured and delivered, and how they align with the actual demands of employees' roles. Understanding this relationship is essential for ensuring that training investments result in meaningful improvements in employee performance and organisational outcomes.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to understand the effect of training design on workplace productivity in outsourcing enterprises, particularly on selected customer service and IT outsourcing enterprises in Zambia. The study seeks to understand the effect of training design on workplace productivity. Through the understanding of how well formulated training programs contribute to employee productivity and organisational efficiency, the findings of this study will aim to benefit not only the enterprises under review but also the broader community.

1.3. Specific Objectives

i) To analyse the relationship between training design elements and the employee productivity in outsourcing enterprises in Zambia.

ii) To identify specific key components of training design that facilitate the effective transfer of training to workplace productivity.

iii) To identify key strategies for optimising training design to enhance workplace productivity.

1.4. Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the Kirkpatrick Four-Level Training Evaluation Model (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2016), and Adult Learning Theory, both of which provide a theoretical framework for understanding the relationships between the training design, learning transfer, and workplace productivity (Knowles *et al.*, 2018). The Training Transfer Model outlines the key factors, including learners' characteristics, environment of the workplace, and training design, that influence how acquired skills are put to practice in the workplace (Fauth & González-Martínez, 2021). The Kirkpatrick Model analyses the training effectiveness at four levels: response, learning, behaviour, and results. Adult Learning Theory on the other emphases self-directed learning, experience-based knowledge acquisition, and practical application to enhance learning transfer. These two theories underpin the conceptual framework of this study. The study identifies training design as the independent variable, learning transfer as the mediating variable, and workplace productivity as the dependent variable. Effective training design, characterised by relevant content, practical methods, and alignment with organisational goals, promotes learning transfer, enabling employees to apply skills and knowledge to their roles. Learning transfer, in turn, directly impacts workplace productivity.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1. Training Design

While training design is widely acknowledged as essential in ensuring that employees apply the skills and knowledge attained in a workplace its actual implementation falls short. According to Noe (2020) it is important that organisations design training that address practice and emulate real world scenarios or on the job requirements. In the customer service

and outsourcing industry trainings are required to meet the demands of practicality, real-world applications and quantified results. In cases where training design is not addressed at the beginning of planning, the training risks not meeting the objectives. Additionally, the learners might acquire the knowledge but not be able to replicate the skills. This suggests need for a more rigorous framework that evaluates not only the training content but also the process of design.

2.2. Training In Outsourcing Enterprises

According to Noe (2020) training programs should not only instil knowledge in the employees of an organisation but also translate to improved applications of lessons learnt. In the context of organisations like ISON Ltd and FSI this is very critical as a gap between theory and practice is not merely a training flaw but directly impacts performance and service quality . For example, customer service employees benefit from training that includes role-playing exercises and real-life scenarios, and IT professionals need hands-on training with the tools and technologies they use daily. This highlights the broader issue that many organisations adopt training methods without critically evaluating their alignment with real world Job needs which results in programs that are theoretically sound but practically insufficient. Developing practical skills also helps employees develop confidence in their abilities, which is critical for effective performance.

2.3. Effective Evaluation of Training

Training programs can be evaluated by understanding qualitative and quantitative data. The analysis of this data can help organisations comprehend its impact. Some examples of quantitative measures include test scores, key performance indicators and other performance metrics. These measures provide objective data while feedback from the employees or supervisors is regarded as qualitative and at times often subject. Combining these data sets gives the evaluator a balanced view of the quality of training programs being offered to the employees of the organisation (Noe, 2020). Regular feedback loops should be defined within the training department to ensure training programs undergo a continuous improvement. While training incorporate both quantitative and qualitative data, many organisations fail to appreciate or understand how the two interact to reflect training effectiveness. Thus, organisations must not just collect feedback but critically interrogate how these insights can be used to adapt and enhance training strategies.

2.4. Relevance of Training Content

One of the key determinants of a training programs effectiveness is the training content. Almusfar (2024) argues that training programs should be able to address the skills and knowledge that the employer needs for the employee to be able to acquire or perform when on the job. This requires that training programs are customised to the needs of client services, systems in the organisation and demand for specific technical roles. Poor engagement content or materials may result in poor attention to subject and poor retention of knowledge by the participants. For examples employees in customer service

will greatly benefit from training that involve role playing and scenarios. While technical roles such as IT would greatly benefit from hands on training.

2.5. Leadership in Training

Leadership in organisations plays a critical role in the reinforcing and supporting of training activities. Studies have also shown that leaders that champion employee development and support a culture of learning greatly enhance effectiveness of training activities (Kim & Park, 2020). Additionally, this support translates to training efficacy of programs. Leaders are able to promote training activities by participating in training sessions, providing feedback on the application of these training and any visible change in behaviour of their subordinates after attending a training. However, such leadership remains inconsistent and limiting the potential impact on training effectiveness. According to Yaghi and Bates (2021), training is influenced by peer cooperation, support from supervisors and encouragement to put learned skills to practice. Consequently, managers and supervisors should create a sound and supportive environment for their subordinates. This will encourage application of what is learnt in training. Without organisational support, even the best-designed training programs may fail to have a significant impact on workplace productivity.

2.6. Return on Training Investment

Return on Training Investment (ROI) plays a crucial role in determining the value that training programs bring to an organisation. The ability to measure financial and operational benefits ensures that training efforts align with business objectives and deliver meaningful improvements (Phillips *et al.*, 2024). Organisations that invest in employee development must justify expenditures by demonstrating tangible outcomes.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research adopted a concurrent mixed-methods research design. In this research design, the researcher did the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data which was followed by the analysis and comparing the results to understand whether they confirmed or disconfirmed each other. The analysis helped the researcher understand the factors that influenced training design and how they could be addressed in the contexts of the two organisations. This also helped the researcher gain understanding from the breadth offered by quantitative and that offered by qualitative. Through the integration of both data types of the study was able to give a comprehensive understanding of the factors involved in training design and that the conclusions were reflective of the perspectives with the two organisations, (Creswell & Chely, 2018).

Stratified sampling was used to capture the different job positions, and their department are captured proportionately to represent the sample. This helped capture the views and perspectives of different employees sitting in different job grades, departments, technical and customer service jobs. The researcher also exercised personal judgement in selecting participants of specific relevance to the research objectives (Black, 2020). This was also used to attain in-depth insight in factors influencing training in the workplace.

3.1. Population

The population for this study will include all employees of ISON Zambia Limited and FSI Outsourcing Zambia who have participated in training programs over the past year.

The researcher adopted Yamane's sampling formula to arrive at a sample size of 170 employees from a total of 350 employees. The Yamane formular is easy to calculate, minimises sampling bias and efficient for large populations. This sample size was considered adequate to represent the general employee population and give a generalisation at the end of the study.

Formular: $n = N/(1+ N(e)^2)$

Where,

    n = the required sample size

    N = population size

    e = level of precision

3.2. Procedures for Data Collection and tools

In-depth interviews were used for qualitative surveys while a research survey was used for quantitative data. The in-depth interviews allowed the researcher to gain more details in experiences, view or perceptions from the employee on factors influencing training design and workplace productivity. The research survey was used to collect efficiently from a large sample to allow the study to identify patterns, measure relationships, variables and other findings that can be generalised for the entire organisation.

3.3. Data Analysis

Quantitative data was analysed through descriptive statistics. Some of the descriptive statistics used include mean, Pearson correlation, and frequency distributions. These were used to summarise the characteristics from demographics and perceptions. Thematic analysis was used on the qualitative data that was collected from interviews. This involved coding data that enabled the researcher to identify themes and patterns that related to the training experiences of the interviewees. The themes are then organised to provide a coherent narrative that complements the quantitative findings.

The qualitative data from the interviews was analysed using thematic analysis. This involves coding the data to identify key themes and patterns related to training design experiences, challenges, and facilitators. The themes are then organised to provide a coherent narrative that complements the quantitative findings.

3.4. Ethical Consideration

As noted by Parveen and Showkat (2017), research ethics in this study were upheld to ensure that the researcher does what is morally and legally right in research. Therefore, the researcher first obtained approval from the University of Zambia Ethics Committee to carry out the study. After approval, other ethical considerations were also facilitated during the data collection process. Notably, informed consent was achieved by giving an introductory letter to respondents before data collection. The letter asked for permission from study participants in addition to ensuring informed consent, confidentiality of their submissions and protection of their rights. Compliance with all ethical considerations was maintained throughout the study to ensure integrity.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 1 shows that 38% of the participants strongly agree that the training was relevant while 27% agreed that the training was useful in their day-to-day job activities. However, a notable portion (26%) remained neutral, suggesting that while the training met expectations for most, it may not have fully engaged or resonated with most of the participants. Secondly a 9% expressed dissatisfaction, indicating minimal but still important areas for improvement. This distribution highlights moderate achievement in training relevance while pointing to opportunities for refinement particularly in addressing the neutral group's needs to enhance engagement and ensuring the concerns of the dissatisfied participants are investigated and resolved.
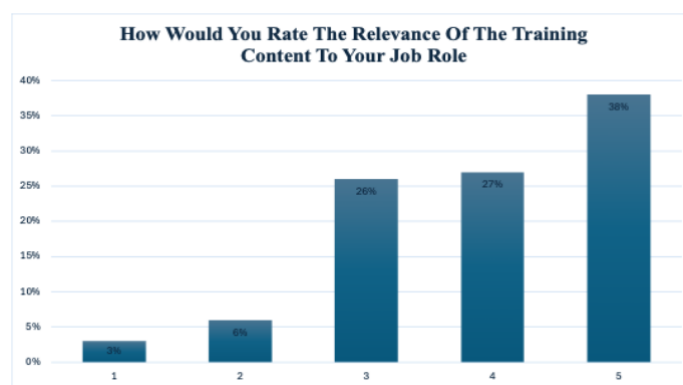

Figure 1. The Relevance of the Training Content to Job Role.

Figure 2 clearly indicates that the training delivery methods were highly effective for most participants, with 77% rating them as either effective (36%) or highly effective (41%). This strong positive response suggests that the instructional approaches, materials, and engagement strategies used in the training successfully met learners' needs. However, the 15% neutral rating reveals room for improvement, potentially in areas like content pacing, practical application, or personalisation to better engage this segment. The 15% may not have applied the skills due to training not being aligned to job needs and so the mismatch. While the minority of the employees 7.6% were completely dissatisfied with the training delivery method, their feedback is valuable in identifying areas of improvement which may be related to the clarity of instructions or opportunities for interactions. The finding represents the current effective training methods and areas of improvement, particularly in tailoring the trainings to meet the needs of all employees. This will ensure that all employees get maximum value and satisfaction in the training experience.

Figure 3 shows that there is good application of training knowledge, with a combined 65% of respondents indicating that they always apply what they have learned. This shows that apart from retention the skills and knowledge attained from trainings is job required tasks and duties. However, it is also clear that the 20% of participants only apply skills "sometimes" suggesting that some concepts may require improvements. The
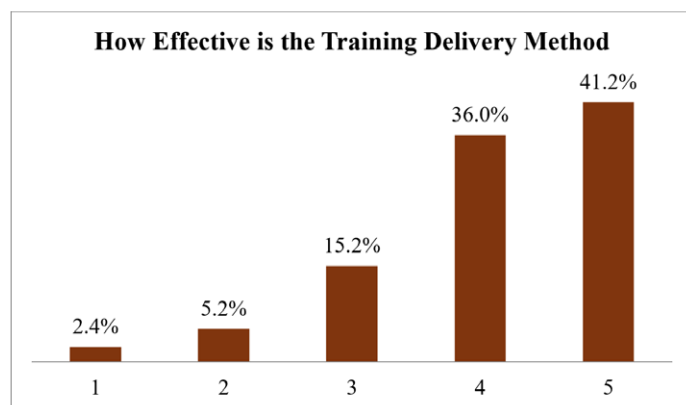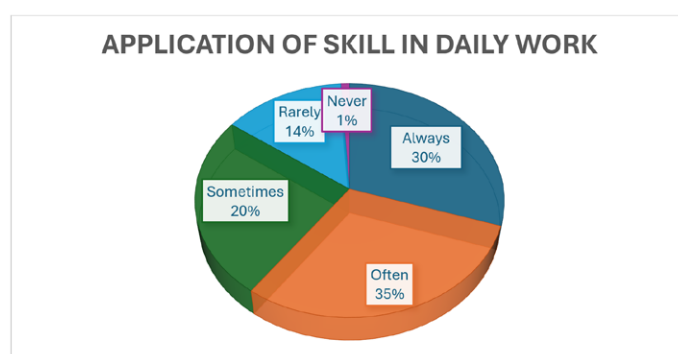
Figure 2. Effectiveness in the Training Delivery Method

Figure 3. Application of Skills in Daily Work

other 15% who rarely apply or don't apply the training at all highlights an opportunity to investigate potential obstacles, whether related to content relevance, workplace support, or individual adaptation challenges. These findings confirm the training's practical value while identifying specific areas where follow-up support, job aids, or managerial reinforcement could help bridge the application gap for the remaining 35% of learners. The moderate implementation rates validate the training's effectiveness in transferring usable skills, with room to make this application more universal across all participants. Table 1 shows the correlation analysis revealing significant relationships between training design elements and workplace productivity outcomes. The correlations between training relevance and individual productivity emerged as strong (r=0.71) while job-specific challenge alignment and productivity was at (r=0.75) and frequency of skill application with productivity gains (r=0.77). The findings show that training programs are most effective when the address the daily job requirements

of employees. Furthermore, the addition of practical learning scenarios or exercises showed moderate correlations with individuals at 0.63 and team productivity at 0.58, reinforcing that practical learning does influence or contribute positively to performance improvement. Training cannot be generic if it must influence productivity but instead has to reflect real world scenarios. The varying strength of correlations provides actionable insights for training optimization. The strong link 0.75 between training that addresses job challenges and productivity suggests that needs assessment should precede program design to identify precise skill gaps. The delivery methods (r=0.69) implies that while presentation format matters, content relevance matters more. On the other hand, the 0.82 correlation between individual and team productivity shows that effective training creates multiplier effects, that is when individuals improve, teams benefit disproportionately. However, the moderate correlation for the practical exercises 0.63 together with frequent qualitative requires for more simulations implying that this may be an area of improvement in the training programs.

Table 1. Correlation Analysis

Variable	Relevance Rating	Delivery Method Rating	Practical Exercise Rating	Job Challenges Rating	Apply Skill Frequency	Individual Productivity	Team Productivity
Relevance Rating (How relevant is the training content to your job)	1	0.72	0.65	0.78	0.68	0.71	0.64
Delivery Method Rating (Effectiveness of training Delivery)	0.72	1	0.61	0.7	0.65	0.69	0.6
Practical Exercise Rating (Includes real life scenarios)	0.65	0.61	1	0.67	0.59	0.63	0.58
Job Challenges Rating (addresses Job challenges)	0.78	0.7	0.67	1	0.73	0.75	0.68
Apply Skill Frequency (How often do you apply training Skills)	0.68	0.65	0.59	0.73	1	0.77	0.7
Individual Productivity (impact on Your Productivity)	0.71	0.69	0.63	0.75	0.77	1	0.82
Team Productivity (Impact on team Productivity)	0.64	0.6	0.58	0.68	0.7	0.82	1

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This discussion is made with reference to the study objectives and other studies that have been done on the effect of training design on workplace productivity.

4.1. Analysis of the relationship between training design and employee productivity

According to Noe (2017), a well-designed training program integrates clear objectives, relevant content and experiential learning methods that align with the practical demands of employees' roles. Having these well-designed training programs will ensure that employees are productive in executing their jobs and ultimately achieving the company goals. As shown in figure 1, 2 and 3 of the study, participants do undertake training programs that are aimed at improving work productivity. These programs are aimed at ensuring work productivity. One of the key study informants said that

"the factors which influence transfer of learning to work productivity are the type of training design, the delivery method as well as the work environment"

These study findings as shown above are coherent with the study by Arulsamy *et al.* (2023), who note that the implementation of employee training as well as employee development programs serves as a means for both the business and its employees to achieve a wide range of objectives.

The objectives go beyond just enhancing employee morale, they also create a sense of morale, sense of security, employee engagement and developing abilities required to perform the requirements of the job. It is also important for organisations to use systematic methodologies in evaluating the performance of employees especially that the outcomes are influenced by human attributes, organisational dynamics, environmental conditions, motivational factors and other key factors such as relevance of training, training objectives, use of scenario-based training or practice do determine the impact of training on productivity. When training programs are tailored to align with the practical needs of the job of employees, they are more likely to bridge the gap between learning and workplace productivity. The method of delivery of the training in-person, hybrid, practice or supportive work environment can affect how well skills and knowledge are returned on the job.

4.2. Specific components of training design that facilitate the effective transfer of skills to the workplace productivity

As highlighted, employee training significantly correlates with enhanced job performance (Aruoren *et al.*, 2023). Furthermore, job satisfaction, denoting the extent of contentment and fulfilment derived from one's work, has been established as a critical predictor of employee performance. Accordingly, the study as shown in figure 3, found that training design has a significant effect on work productivity. Organisations that invest in continuous learning experience have higher employee satisfaction and lower turnover rates.

Employees who perceive training as valuable are more likely to remain committed to their employers, reducing the costs associated with recruitment and onboarding which influence the transfers of learning to work productivity (Allen &

O'Neill, 2015). Arulsamy *et al.*, (2023) notes that optimising skills transfer in the workplace requires a strategic approach beyond just delivering training programs. Skills transfer is the on-the-job application of skills learned in training. Therefore, organisations should provide a safe and encouraging atmosphere where employees feel comfortable exploring and applying their newly acquired skills (Noe, 2017).

The study findings as shown in figure 3 indicate that the study participants apply the skills and knowledge acquired from training in their daily practical work situations. This resulted in improved individual and company productivity. Judge *et al.* (2017) advises that practical learning, pictures, relevant content plays a significant role in applying skills and knowledge acquired from training to the job. A well-designed training program integrates clear objectives, relevant content and experiential learning methods that align with the practical demands of employees' roles. Training design is a critical factor in bridging the gap between learning and workplace productivity, as it ensures that training outcomes are directly applicable to organisational goals (Noe, 2017).

4.3. Strategies for optimising training design to enhance workplace productivity

Arulsamy *et al.* (2023), notes that the identification of appropriate learning opportunities for employees is crucial for organisations to have a competitive advantage in the contemporary global market. These strategies among others are vital for ensuring the training design is aligned with workplace needs and enhancing productivity. Accordingly, the study findings indicate that some of the challenges faced when applying training skills to job include system failure, time constraints, lack of resources, irrelevant trainings and insufficient support. Among these, the most common challenge is time constraints followed by lack of resources and then irrelevant trainings. It can therefore be recommended that addressing these challenges would help improve training design, ensuring alignment with workplace needs and enhancing productivity.

One of the study key informants said that:

"Being included in the day-to-day preparation of the training, exposure to different training techniques and support from manager is one of the ways of improving training design, ensuring alignment with workplace needs and enhancing productivity"

According to the study finding, engagement of employees in training and development initiatives has been found to enhance their capabilities and subsequently improve their task performance, leading to increased employee effectiveness. The discovery aligns with Abdulkhaleq's (2024) proposition regarding the objective of assisting training, which is to develop a learning tool aimed at acquiring specialised knowledge and abilities for a particular occupation or task. As another recommendation, Arulsamy *et al.* (2023) argues that to enhance employee training and development, as well as improve performance and service delivery, it is recommended that management involve the participation of employees in training and development initiatives.

By implementing comprehensive competencies and a well-defined framework during the process of employee training and development, the likelihood of individuals effectively fulfilling

the organisation's mission and fostering a culture of learning as a strategic objective is enhanced. When organisations allocate the necessary resources for job performance, individuals experience job satisfaction and increased productivity, ultimately contributing to the overall success of the organisation (Jehanzeb & Bashir, 2019).

To enhance workplace productivity and organisational performance, training design must be strategically optimized through several key approaches. First, needs assessment and alignment of training content with organisational goals is critical. This ensures that the training addresses actual skill gaps and supports the business strategy. Second, learner-centered design that incorporates adult learning principles such as self-directed learning, relevance to job roles, and practical application can significantly increase engagement and retention. Third, the integration of blended learning models, combining face-to-face instruction with e-learning, enhances flexibility and supports diverse learning preferences, thereby improving learning outcomes (Kraiger & Smith-Jentsch, 2022). Fourth, ongoing feedback mechanisms and real-time performance support tools should be embedded within the training to reinforce learning and allow for continuous improvement (Arulsamy *et al.*, 2023). Fifth, post-training transfer strategies, such as coaching, mentoring, and follow-up sessions, are essential to ensure that newly acquired skills are applied effectively in the workplace, leading to tangible performance improvements. These strategies, supported by the findings illustrated in Figures 1 and 2 and Table 1, underscore the importance of a well-structured and targeted training design in fostering both workplace productivity and organisational growth.

In improving workplace productivity and organisational performance the designing of training programs must take several approaches. The training needs assessment must align with training content and overall organisational objectives. This ensures that the trainings programs address skills gaps and support the organisations objectives. Secondly, it's important to have a learner cantered approach to design that incorporates adult learning techniques that include, self-directed learning, relevance of training to job and scenario-based learning activities all of which can increase engagement. Thirdly blended learning models combining face to face interaction with e-learning enhances flexibility and supports diverse learning preferences (Kraiger & Smith-Jentsch, 2022). Last but not the least post training strategies such as coaching, mentoring and follow up sessions are all important in ensuring all acquired skills and knowledge are applied to the job. These strategies are supported by the findings shown in Figures 1 and 2 and Table 1, it outlines the importance of a well-structured and targeted training design in fostering both workplace productivity and organisational growth.

6. CONCLUSION

Having well-designed training programs ensures that employees are productive in executing their jobs and ultimately achieving the company goals. The training design plays an important role in ensuring that employees effectively put to practice the knowledge and skills acquired during training to their workplace tasks, thereby enhancing productivity. Therefore, it can be concluded that training design has a significant effect on workplace productivity. The training design ensures that organisations have a productive work force and have a competitive advantage in the contemporary global market.

RECOMMENDATIONS

• Organisations should allocate more time and resources towards appropriate learning opportunities for employees. This is crucial for them to have a competitive advantage in the contemporary global market.

• To ensure effective training programs and enhanced service delivery, employees should be included in the day-to-day preparation and development of training initiatives.

• Organisations should implement comprehensive competencies and well-defined frameworks during the process of employee training and development.

• Training programs should be designed to align with employees' specific job requirements. Ensuring that training content is relevant to employees' roles enhances their ability to apply newly acquired skills effectively, which translates to workplace productivity.

• Organisations should adopt simulation training techniques, hands-on practice, and allocate enough time for learning. Providing employees with scenarios or practice in a controlled environment helps reinforce knowledge retention, build confidence, and improve service delivery.

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