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Global training in Container Terminal Operators

HKBM 7007 Human Resources Management
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Abstract

The container terminal operators introduced in this paper have expanded globally to various container ports and play an important role in the global logistics and supply chain. To enhance the organizations' competitiveness, training is required for their global staff to match with their business development. This paper will analyze the challenges in launching global training program within these port operators and an action plan on global training is proposed to cope with the issues.

Background

Hutchison Port Holdings Limited

Hutchison Port Holdings (HPH) is a port investor, developer and operator based in Hong Kong. Its business started in 1866 with shipbuilding and repair services and later diversified into cargo and container handling services in Hong Kong. The success in the development of Hong Kong container terminals provided opportunities for HPH to expand its port network globally since the 1990s. It is now developed as one of the world's leading container terminal operators with over 20,000 employees, operating ports and terminals in 27 countries in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe, the Americas and Australasia.

PSA International Pte Ltd

PSA International (PSA) was formerly the Port of Singapore Authority which was a statutory board to manage the Port of Singapore. By 1990, the growth in container volumes handled in Singapore had turned its port into the world's largest container port. The operation of the port has been commercialized since 1997 and started to expand globally in the 1990s. Nowadays, PSA is a world leading port group with global network encompasses over 50 locations in 26 countries around the world.

Challenges

Staff training is an important tool for companies by instilling skills and standards required to the employees to patch up their performance for the organizations' development (Halawi and Haydar, 2018). By having well designed on job training programs, organizations can increase employees' motivation to learn and transfer a higher level of performance to the workplace (Huang and Jao, 2016). Structuring effective training programs for a global workforce is even more challenging for the human resources (HR) department due to linguistic diversity, cultural differences, technological infrastructure, time zone difference and local laws and regulations (Caine, 2018; HR Payroll Systems, 2015).

Scope

The world's container terminal operators have been benefited from the rise in global trading due to globalization. CK Hutchison (2020) has addressed that HPH launches training on the topic of bribery and corruption to its global staff regularly due to the increase in risk exposure in its global market, assuring that the employees are fully complied and understanding its Anti-Fraud and Anti-Bribery (AFAB) policy. However, due to culture diversity, social acceptance and local laws and regulations, to arrange identical AFAB training for its global staffs will reduce the effectiveness of the program. Therefore, several modifications have been imposed to fit regional condition. Supporting materials are available in e-Learning platforms and are translated into various language versions to ensure all regional staffs, including front-line employees, can access, understand and aware of the policy. HPH has also extended its training to suppliers located in high bribery risk areas to increase awareness of AFAB among its business stakeholders.

Multi-skilled workforce is an important factor to stay competitive in maritime business, especially digital skills that helps the business to transform into digital era (Teng, 2017). PSA (2020) mentioned that PSA is encouraging all the staffs at different levels of the organization to embrace

data and technology and launch technology related training for its global staffs, allowing them to become future-ready employees. However, staffs' knowledge in technology in different regions may vary due to their countries' wealthiness and technology infrastructure. PSA has established its own university to conduct professional training and expand its campus globally to facilitate the training needs in different region. Establishing local campus enables the training to be incorporated with local conditions and resolving differentiation issues including linguistic, cultural and time zone.

Analysis

To increase the workforce competence and maintain sustainable competitive advantage in the business, it is essential that the organization can deliver the training objectives and adequate procedures should be imposed to ensure the purposes of training are well understood by the employees (Nzeru et al., 2015). Different challenges may arise from different training objectives. Ethics and compliance training involve change on staffs' mindsets and behavior (Hauser, 2020), therefore an effective training structured by HPH will emphasis differentiation on diverse ethnicity, regional culture influence and local laws and regulations. Whereas PSA's technology training should make adjustment based on the technology development and infrastructure in different region. Furthermore, there are also common obstacles like linguistic diversity and time zone difference that the HR department must tackle with when launching global training programs.

National-specific values will influence the level of corruption, in particular, countries with collectivist value and hierarchic-elitist power structures countries tend to trigger unethical decisions in business (Bussmann and Niemeczek, 2019). HPH has made its effort in promoting corporate integrity in countries with higher exposure to bribery and corruption, to stakeholders such as suppliers, through training to maintain ethical business environment. Even though it is

difficult for a corporation to fight against corruption in a country, giant organizations like HPH can use its domestic influence to extend its education beyond business stakeholders, such as employees' family members and local communities, enhancing a culture that is more favorable for the organization to develop and operate in the future.

Multinational companies incorporate in e-Learning platforms for globally workforce as it can provide training in geographically dispersed areas and across time zones, reducing cost and travelling time and achievable in any convenient hours (Wong and Sixl-Daniell, 2015). Similar to these multinational organizations, HPH has provided support to the AFAB training via its e-Learning platform. However, it is also essential for the company to evaluate the effectiveness of such arrangement as online training is difficult to monitor, and whether ethical decision-making ability can be successfully delivered without face-to-face interacting (Weber, 2015). The company should also ensure that every category of its workforce, including ageing, blue-collar and workforce located in developing regions, has the technical knowledge and support to get access to the e-Learning platform (Fleming, Becker and Newton, 2017). By organizing a program with a mixture of online and face-to-face training might solve part of the limitation arise from e-Learning platform.

Establishing corporate university is a powerful strategic tool by offering educational courses that can align with the company's strategic objectives in the complex global business environment (Fedorova et al., 2017). Furthermore, corporate university provides a place for employees to share their knowledge among themselves formally or informally, and integrating externally acquired knowledge with existing working experience, to build a knowledge network inside and outside the company (Chen, Xu and Zhai, 2019). Through this knowledge management approach, PSA can build innovation capability (Asalla, Hamsal and Budiastuti, 2019) to encourage its employees to

create new value for the business in the digital era. However, besides the difficulties in promoting the shift of mindsets to adopt digital transformation at workplace, differentiation in the availability of technology platform and infrastructure can bring extra challenges to launch technology training globally. The expansion of PSA's corporate university campus to different countries allow the institution to conduct relevant courses by incorporating regional conditions and align with the strategic goal of the company. However, not many organizations can afford their own educational institution as it is a costly strategic development of HR with long payback period and bound with high direct and opportunity costs (Parshakov and Shakina, 2018). Furthermore, it might not be an effective investment to set up a campus in every country that the company has expanded to. By forming partnership with local universities and educational institutions, the company can still achieve its training objectives in areas where no corporate university campus is located.

Recommendation

After Doran (1981) introduced the idea of writing management's goals and objectives in a S.M.A.R.T way, this acronym is also widely used in preparing a strategic action plan. Therefore, to develop a SMART training action plan in multinational company needs to be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timely. A 24-month top-down action plan on a global staff training program is proposed in the following to achieve an effective training aligning with the organization's strategic goal.

Goal: Launch global training program to enhance the organization's competitiveness					
Objectives: Instill the workforce with required skills and standards to patch with business development					
Short-term (1st to 6th month)					
Target	Activities	Timeline	Person(s) responsible	Resource requirements	Outcome
Set the business goal and identify the required skills and standards	• Determine the business goal that needs to achieve within two years; • Setting target KPIs to comply with the business goal; • Decide the functional departments involve in the plan • Identify the skills / standards and workforce required; • Distinguish the skill and standard required by each level of employees; and • Locate the regional staffs that require training.	2 months	• C-suite leaders; • Regional leaders; • Functional department heads / managers; and • HR leader.	• Time for strategic decision-making meetings; • Time to forecast the future skills and workforce required; and • Time to assess the current workforce capacity	• Set business target for departments to achieve; • Understanding of current and potential work capacity; and • Evaluate the gap differences in skills required and current capability

Short-term (1st to 6th month) (continued)					
Target	Activities	Timeline	Person(s) responsible	Resource requirements	Outcome
Construct applicable training program	• Determine the course structure of the training; • Format of the training in different region (face-to-face or online, internal or collaborate with external parties, etc.); • Assess the applicability of such training in different region; • Modify the course content according to regional differentiation, e.g. social acceptance, culture background, linguistic diversity, infrastructure availability, etc.; • Decide the necessity to extend the training to business stakeholders in different region; and • Assess the resources and technology required to support the training.	2 months	• Functional department managers; • HR managers; • Regional person-in-charged; • External trainers / educational institutions (if required), and • IT managers.	• Time to decide the course content and communicate with external training partners (if required); • Time to evaluate the format and content of training that can best fit to every region; • Cost to engage third parties (if required); and • Cost to provide supporting resources and technology.	• Ensure the training is relevant to the skills required for future needs; • Ensure the course is applicable and achievable in different region; and • Adequate qualified trainers are available to conduct the training.

Short-term (1st to 6th month) (continued)					
Target	Activities	Timeline	Person(s) responsible	Resource requirements	Outcome
Arrange and prepare for the training program	• Arrange the training schedule and location; • Confirm the availability of trainers; and • Prepare the required resources.	1 month	• HR managers; and • Regional person-in-charged.	• Time to arrange and prepare for the training.	• Confirm resources and technology are in place for training.
Communicate with target workforce	• Arrange briefing section to introduce the organization's business goal and the purpose of training; • Inform the training arrangement and enrolling procedures; and • Adjustment on working schedule to facilitate the training.	1 month	• Functional department managers; • Regional person-in-charged; and • HR managers.	• Time to prepare and conduct briefing section; and • Time to arrange pre-training administration and work rescheduling.	• Build the level of acceptance and motivation on training among the workforce.

Mid-term (7th to 18th month)					
Target	Activities	Timeline	Person(s) responsible	Resource requirements	Outcome
Commencement of training	• Conduct training sections for the workforce; • Arrange assessment on the training progress in every 3 months; • Adjust to the training content / methodology (if required) after evaluating the assessment; • Provide mentor arrangement to enhance learning outcome if necessary; • Periodic report to functional managers to ensure the required skills are delivered according to business target; and • Obtain feedbacks from trainers and trainees periodically.	12 months	• Internal / external trainers; • Functional department managers / supervisors; • HR managers; and • Regional person-in-charged.	• Time to attain the training sections; • Time to evaluate and adjust to training outcome; • Cost to engage third parties (if required); and • Cost to provide supporting resources and technology.	• Ensure the skills and standards can successfully deliver to the employees; and • Enhance flexibility to adjust the training if outcome is not achieved as expected.

Long-term (19th to 24th month)					
Target	Activities	Timeline	Person(s) responsible	Resource requirements	Outcome
Internship period for the implementation of skills and standards at workplace	• Arrange coaching at workplace; • Provide regional or cross-region job rotation opportunities (if possible) for employees to apply their learnings; • Assessment on the staffs' performance after training; • Provide necessary resources and technology at workplace ensure new skills and standards can be applied; and • Feedbacks from trainees on the application of new skills and standards at workplace.	3 months	• Functional department managers / supervisors; • HR managers; • Regional person-in-charged; and • IT managers.	• Time for implementing new skills and standards; • Cost on relocation of staffs; • Time for assessing the result after training; and • Cost on supporting resources and technology.	• Ensure the required skills and standards are brought to workplace to achieve business target.
Evaluation on the training program	• Conclusion by functional leaders on the impact after the training program; • Comparing results to target KPIs; • Identify the areas for improvement in the program; and • Evaluate whether the program can achieve its objective.	3 months	• C-suite leaders; • Regional leaders; • Functional department heads / managers; and • HR leader.	• Time to evaluation the overall impact / achievement after training; and • Time for evaluation meetings.	• Assess the effectiveness of the training; and • Provide a practical reference for HR to conduct training program in the future.

The proposed action plan can provide a clear direction for the related departments to set relevant and achievable training in different region and the training is being monitored and assessed throughout the whole process. However, this approach relay on strong leaders with advance insights and visions as it is difficult to provide immediate alternative training due to its size and complexity if the training objective is misjudged. Also, the return achieved after the training in different region may vary due to basic infrastructure, cultural diversity and social acceptance.

Stakeholders

The following summarized how the proposed action plan can achieve business stakeholders' expectation:

Stakeholders	Expectation	Achievement
Top executives	The trained workforce can drive the development of the organization to achieve business goal.	The employees are aware of the purpose of training and can perform according to the business target.
Regional / functional leaders / managers	The department can meet the KPIs that are set by the C-suite leaders.	Functional managers assess and monitor the whole training process to ensure the workforce is skillful to enhances performance.
HR department	The training is effective to achieve strategic goal.	Receive feedbacks and assessments from trainers, trainees and functional managers to evaluate the impact.
Trainers	Clear direction on training objectives, skills and standards that are required to be delivered in the course.	Course is structured together with functional managers and HR department to ensure the training align with business objectives.
Trainees	New skills and standards obtained from the training is achievable at workplace.	Supervisors are coaching at workplace and supported by adequate resources and technology.

Conclusion

Effective training is one of the key drivers to enhance business development. Global expansion increases the difficulty in organizing training to the entire workforce due to various diversity. Therefore, HR department in multinational companies required extra effort to communicate with regional offices and understand local conditions to construct a training that is adoptable locally. The department also needs to enhance the degree of flexibility to make any adjustment on the training due to different circumstance arise from various region to maximize the achievable outcome.

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