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A Research Report On Strategic Approach To Training And Development: A Study Undertaken At Pantaloons (Abfrl)

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Abstract:

Human Resource is one of the key elements in an organisation. That is why training and development (T&D), also called learning and development (L&D) absolute necessary and plays an important role in improving employee capability, skills and knowledge, to meet organizational goals effectively. This study primarily explores the effectiveness of training programs in terms of improving skills, enhancing performance, and aligning with organizational needs and identify Barriers which hindering Training and Development process at Pantaloons Sodepur. Key findings from the study indicate that a strategic approach to T&D significantly improves productivity and cost-utility factors for the organization. Employees are recognized as the most valuable assets, and their continuous development is essential for organizational success. Training initiatives are well-received, with high levels of satisfaction and perceived benefits among participants, reinforcing the importance of aligning individual growth with organizational objectives. Despite the overall effectiveness of current Training and Development programs, challenges like time constraints were identified. The study underscores the need for flexible training schedules and engaging content to overcome these barriers. Additionally, a balanced approach that integrates both cognitive and behavioural training methods was found to be most effective in enhancing employee capabilities and motivation. Our study support and answer our research question that the implementation of training and development as a strategic tool in human resource management increase organizational performance. Recommendations include increasing physical training and introducing managerial promotional training to further support employee development and career advancement. In conclusion, the study demonstrates that T&D is a crucial element of HRM practices at Pantaloons, contributing to sustained competitive advantage and long-term organizational success. Addressing identified barriers and aligning training programs with strategic objectives will further optimize the effectiveness and impact of T&D initiatives.

Keywords: Human Resource Management, Training and Development, Productivity, Barriers. Employee Capability.

Introduction:

The rapid evolution of industries, coupled with advancements in technology and globalization, has elevated the importance of training and development as strategic tools for enhancing organizational performance and sustaining competitive advantage. Training and development not only empower employees with the necessary skills and knowledge but also align workforce capabilities with organizational goals, fostering innovation and growth. This research report delves into the training and development strategies employed at Pantaloons, a leading fashion retail brand under the umbrella of Aditya Birla Fashion and Retail Ltd. (ABFRL). The study

aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of how strategic training initiatives contribute to employee growth, productivity enhancement, and overall organizational success.

Pantaloons, established in 1997, has emerged as a prominent player in the Indian fashion retail industry, catering to a diverse customer base with its wide range of apparel, accessories, and lifestyle products. Initially founded as a small garment manufacturer, the brand underwent significant transformation under the leadership of the Future Group, followed by its acquisition by ABFRL in 2012. Today, Pantaloons operates as part of one of India's largest and most successful fashion conglomerates, recognized for its innovative practices, customer-centric approach, and commitment to delivering quality and affordability. With a network of over 344 stores across 170 cities, Pantaloons has successfully integrated traditional and modern training methodologies to meet the dynamic demands of its workforce and market.

ABFRL, a division of the Aditya Birla Group, is a key player in the Indian fashion and lifestyle industry, boasting a diverse portfolio that includes renowned brands like Louis Philippe, Van Heusen, Allen Solly, and Peter England. The company's strategic approach to training and development reflects its emphasis on sustainability, innovation, and adaptability. By leveraging its extensive retail network and technological advancements, ABFRL has positioned itself as a leader in the competitive fashion industry, setting benchmarks for excellence in employee training and organizational growth.

Training and development at Pantaloons incorporate a blend of traditional and modern approaches to cater to the diverse needs of its employees. Traditional training methods, such as classroom-based instruction and instructor-led sessions, provide a structured framework for learning and are particularly effective for foundational skill development. However, the brand's adoption of modern training techniques, including e-learning modules, virtual reality (VR) simulations, and personalized learning platforms, has significantly enhanced the effectiveness and accessibility of its training programs. These modern methods not only accommodate diverse learning styles but also enable real-time feedback and continuous improvement, ensuring that employees remain equipped to navigate the challenges of a dynamic retail environment.

Pantaloons' commitment to training and development is further evidenced by its strategic focus on evaluation and feedback. Assessing the effectiveness of training programs is crucial to understanding their impact on employee performance and organizational outcomes. The evaluation process at Pantaloons encompasses multiple dimensions, including:

1. **Reaction:** Gathering immediate feedback from participants to gauge their satisfaction and perceptions of the training.
2. **Learning:** Measuring the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competencies through tests, quizzes, and skill demonstrations.
3. **Behavior:** Observing changes in on-the-job behavior and the application of newly acquired skills.
4. **Results:** Analyzing the broader impact of training on organizational objectives, such as improved productivity, enhanced performance metrics, and customer satisfaction.
5. **Return on Investment (ROI):** Calculating the financial benefits of training relative to its costs, ensuring alignment with business goals.

Despite the significant advantages of training and development, organizations like Pantaloons face challenges in designing and implementing effective programs. Common limitations include high costs, time constraints, resistance to change, and difficulties in measuring training outcomes. Pantaloons addresses these challenges through careful planning, resource allocation, and the integration of innovative technologies. For instance, its e-learning platforms reduce operational costs and enable flexible, self-paced learning, while data analytics and artificial intelligence (AI) tools provide insights into training effectiveness and employee engagement.

The research also explores the role of Pantaloons within the broader context of the Indian retail industry. As one of the fastest-growing retail markets globally, India's retail sector is characterized by diverse consumer demographics, rapid urbanization, and increasing disposable incomes. The shift from unorganized to organized retail, coupled with the rise of e-commerce, has transformed the industry, presenting both opportunities and challenges for retailers like Pantaloons. The brand's strategic training initiatives are pivotal in equipping its workforce to adapt to these changes and deliver exceptional customer experiences.

Pantaloons operates within the lifestyle retail segment, offering a comprehensive range of clothing, accessories, footwear, and home decor. This segment targets aspirational consumers seeking stylish and affordable products, making it highly competitive. To maintain its leadership position, Pantaloons has embraced an omnichannel approach, integrating online and offline platforms to enhance customer engagement and expand market reach. The success of this strategy relies heavily on a well-trained and adaptable workforce capable of leveraging these channels effectively.

The history of Pantaloons and its evolution under ABFRL provides valuable insights into the strategic importance of training and development. Since its inception, the brand has undergone several transformative

phases, including its acquisition by ABFRL, rebranding efforts, and expansion into e-commerce. These milestones highlight the brand's ability to adapt to changing market trends and consumer preferences. The introduction of its online platform in 2015 marked a significant step toward embracing digital transformation, further underscoring the need for continuous employee training to navigate the complexities of a hybrid retail model.

In conclusion, this research report aims to provide a detailed analysis of the strategic approach to training and development at Pantaloons, examining its impact on employee performance, organizational goals, and market competitiveness. By exploring the integration of traditional and modern training methods, the evaluation of training effectiveness, and the challenges faced in implementation, the study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how strategic training initiatives drive success in the dynamic and evolving retail industry. Pantaloons' commitment to innovation, adaptability, and customer-centricity serves as a testament to the transformative power of training and development in achieving long-term organizational growth and sustainability.

Literature Review:

Human resources are vital to an organization's success. Even with the presence of machinery, capital, and raw materials, achieving company goals is impossible without capable individuals to manage these resources effectively (Uddin, M. J. 2012). Therefore, it is crucial for those in managerial positions to have the necessary skills and competencies. Companies can foster these abilities in their employees through training and development programs. These initiatives are important for several reasons. Firstly, they enhance the quality of the workforce by concentrating on specific areas, thereby increasing employee proficiency. Secondly, training and development programs improve work quality by ensuring employees stay current with new technologies and knowledge. Lastly, these programs make employees' work more efficient and precise (Uddin, M. J. 2012).

Training is a structured learning process designed to provide employees with key competencies, including skills, abilities and knowledge (Milhem, W. 2014, Lepak, D., & Gowan, M. 2010). This involves skill enhancement, compliance with regulations, and attitude formation (Berber, N., & Lekovic, B. 2018). As an important element of HR development, training has extensive involvement, such as brining up human capital (Dowling, P. 2013; Berber, N., & Lekovic, B. 2018). It also motivates them to perform their roles more systematically and successfully (Lepak, D., & Gowan, M. 2010) and can enhance organizational performance as a whole (Berber, N., & Lekovic, B. 2018).

Development can be expressed as learning experience aimed at long-term growth, preparing employees and workers for diverse duty & responsibilities (Lepak, D., & Gowan, M. 2010). For an organisation training and development both are very essential, as they are crucial for growth and competitiveness in a challenging business landscape (Kloutsiniotis, P. V., & Mihail, D. M. 2017). Despite their benefits, training and development activities are sometimes viewed as unnecessary expenses. This perception occurs because some companies do not assess the effectiveness of these initiatives, often implementing them solely to meet government requirements (Brahmana, R. K. 2018; Tharenou, P. 2007).

Numerous researchers already investigated the Human capital theory thoroughly. According to various studies, improved education as well as training enhance employee's productivity within companies, resulting in higher individual incomes and enhanced organizational performance (Marginson, S. 2017). The performance of companies is typically assessed based on profit and growth, with higher figures indicating effective management (Nikandrou, I. 2008; Selvam, M. 2016). Moreover, in the future increased profit and growth serve as indicators to potential investors of the company to generate significant returns (Al-Matari, E. M. 2014).

Human capital theory posits that the returns for individuals or organizations depend on their investments in human resources (Sweetland, S. R. 1996). Companies invest in employees through various means, such as providing mental and physical health benefits, and offering learning and development programs for specific job roles. Increasing education level and job-specific learning and development are crucial investments in human capital development (Sweetland, S. R. 1996). These efforts not only enhance employees' knowledge and skills but also strengthen the company's competitive advantage (Noe, R. A. 2010).

Study by Majeed, A. 2017 shows Training and development are essential for the productivity, efficiency, and overall effectiveness of organizations in the banking sector of Pakistan. They play an important role in human resource management, contributing to both employee and organizational growth.

Training and development initiatives are known to enhance employee skills, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour (Rowland, C. 2017), thereby increasing the level of engagement in work and positively impacting

both employee and company performance (Abugre, J. B. 2020). However, their impact on organizational performance can vary. While training helps employees detect errors in reporting, it can also influence accounting practices, sometimes leading to more cautious profit reporting (McKenzie, D., & Woodruff, C. 2014).

Several studies have highlighted key factors affecting training and development and their impact on performance. These factors include various training formats such as project-based learning, the establishment of development centres, and international assignments (Berber, N., & Lekovic, B. 2018). Additionally, the quality and appropriateness of assignments play a critical role (David, O. A. 2015), along with the alignment of training programs to meet specific organizational needs, thereby supporting sustainable performance (Jayawarna et al., 2007; Ji et al., 2012). However, the effectiveness of training and development efforts is also influenced by cultural, institutional, and organizational factors (Nikandrou, I. 2008), organizational size, whether small, medium, or large (Berber, N., & Lekovic, B. 2018), and the role of corporate governance in ensuring that training investments yield meaningful returns (Brahmana, R. K. 2018).

However, the effectiveness of training duration becomes evident when employees receive additional mentoring, which significantly enhances their performance compared to those undergoing general or standard training alone (McKenzie, D., & Woodruff, C. 2014). Furthermore, the allocation of resources towards training and development reflects a commitment to ensuring quality training (Lopez-Cabralez, A. 2009) and organizational dedication (Huerta, M. E. 2006). The investment in training costs plays a pivotal role in maximizing performance achievements (Kraiger, K. 2003).

Objectives of the Study:

There are three objectives of our study, such as

1. To study Training and Development as an instrument in Human Resource Management.
2. To examine the Training and Development activities in ABFRL and barriers which hindering the process.
3. To analyse the impact of Strategic Approach to Training and Development in ABFRL.

Methodology:

Study Design:

Here we gathered quantifiable data to analyse the sample. This is a Quantitative study complemented with Descriptive Research.

Variables:

Dependent Variable:

Employee Performance Improvement: This variable measures the change in employee performance as a result of the training and development initiatives implemented at Pantaloons.

Independent Variable:

Training Need Analysis, Training Design and Delivery of the Training are the independent variables for the study.

Sample Size:

The sample size is 17 for the study.

Sampling Strategy:

The study embraced seventeen pantaloons' employees in the store. Purposive sampling method (Non-random Sampling) was used for data collection.

Tools:

A self-made questionnaire was used for data collection. Questionnaire is important for any types of research. Questions are designed and asked to respondents to extract specific information. It serves two basic purposes:

- (1) collect the appropriate data
- (2) make data comparable and amenable to analysis.

Dichotomous Scale and 5 Point Likert Scale were used to understand the perspective of Training and Development as an instrument in Human Resource Management and the impact of Strategic Approach in it.

Findings and Results:

All 17 respondents acknowledge the use of the cognitive approach in training within the organization and additionally, 5 of these respondents also recognize the presence of the behavioural approach, this result suggests that while the cognitive approach is universally recognized and possibly the primary method of training, there is also a subset of employees who experience and acknowledge the importance of behavioural training.

The result indicates that 100% of the respondents report the use of on-the-job training, while none report the use of off-the-job training. This suggests that the organization predominantly relies on practical, hands-on training conducted in the actual work environment to develop employee skills and knowledge.

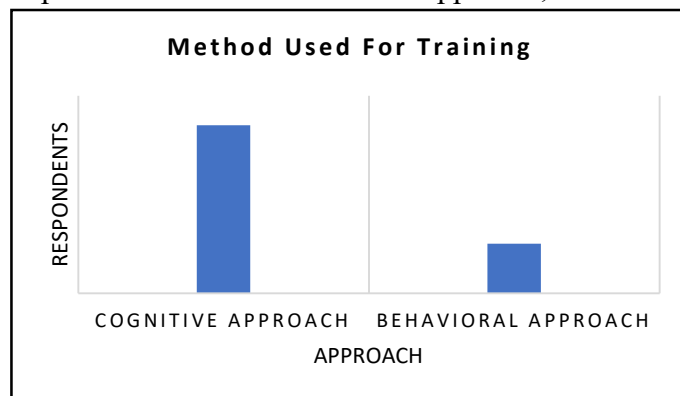


Fig 1: Training method used for training of employees

Fig: 2 shows varying perceptions among employees about the purpose and nature of training. the majority of employees (79.42%) associate training with the acquisition of knowledge and skills (41.18%) and learning (38.24%), while a smaller percentage focus on enhancement and information sharing.

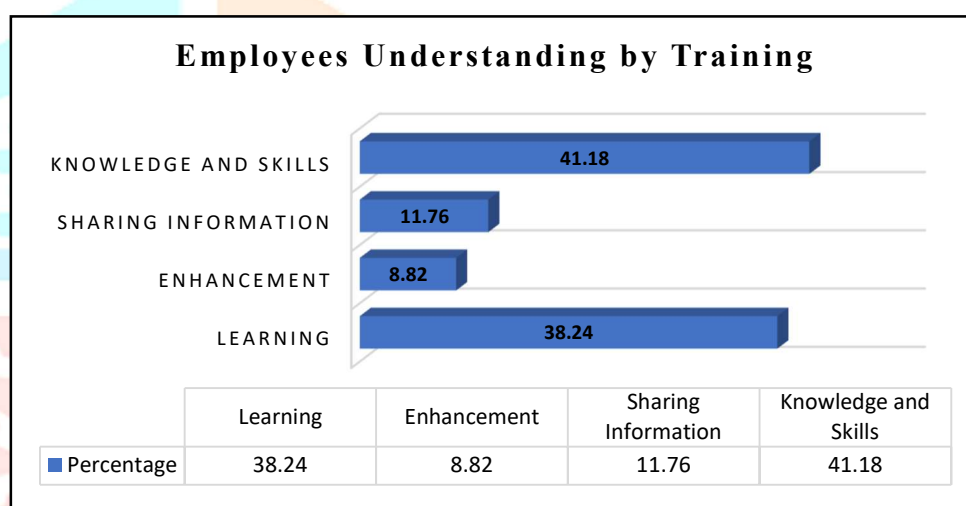


Fig 2: Understanding of the employees regarding training

The result indicates everyone who attends the training program enjoys it or finds it beneficial. It implies that there are no dissenting opinions or negative experiences among the participants regarding the program.

Fig:3 suggests that 64.71% of respondents believe that the organization identifies the training needs of its employees, while 35.29% do not.

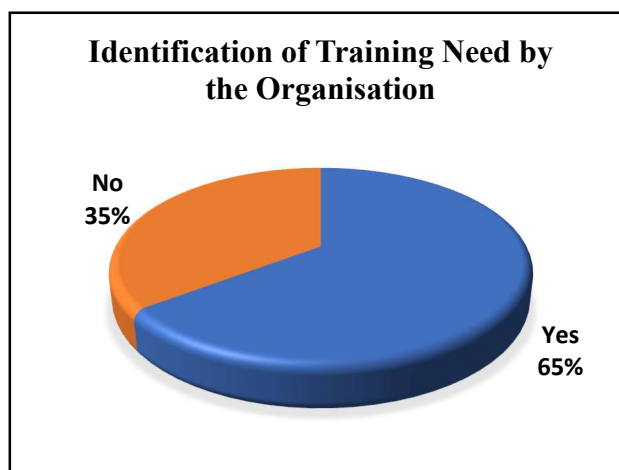


Fig 3: Shows percentage of responds in Identification of training need by the organisation

The result from importance of the training program shows unanimous response (100%), which indicates the training program is crucial for both newcomers and current employees demonstrates a universal recognition of the value and necessity of training within the organization.

The results in Figure 4 indicate that a vast majority of employees (94.12%) feel that their skillsets have improved after participating in the training program and that this improvement has positively impacted their performance. This suggests that the training programs are largely effective and well-received, leading to enhanced capabilities and better job performance among employees. The small percentage (5.88%) who did not feel an improvement may indicate areas where the training could be refined or tailored to better meet the needs of all employees.

Whereas Figure 5 depicts that 64.71% of respondents believe that the training is aligned with the organization's needs, while 35.29% do not. This suggests that while a majority of employees feel that the training programs are relevant and effectively tailored to support the organization's objectives, a significant minority believe there is a misalignment.

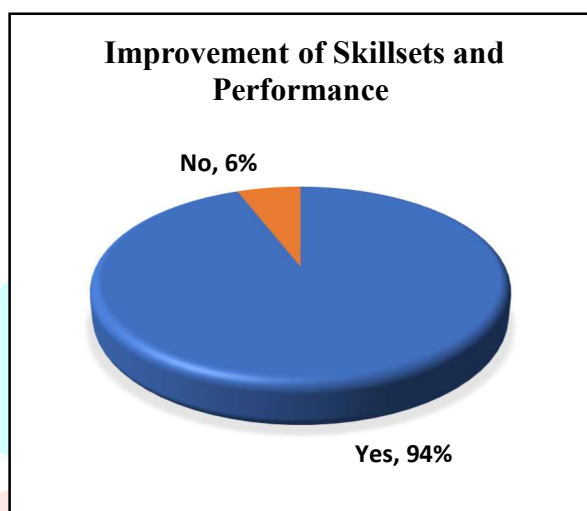


Fig 4: Thinking of respondents regarding improve in performance as well as skill set

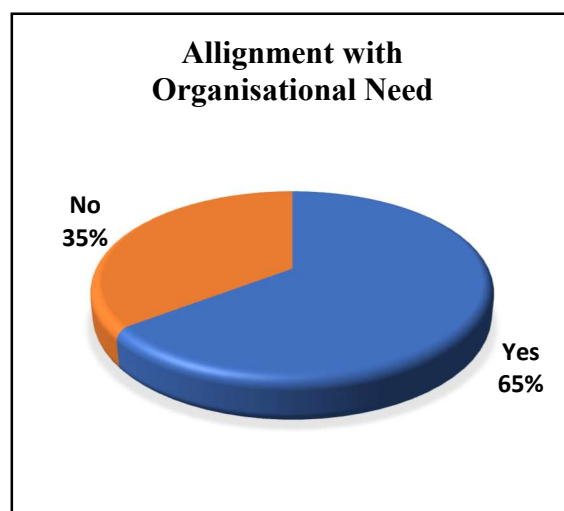


Fig 5: Percentage of alignment of training program with organization's need

The below outcome of figure 6 indicates that 47.06% of respondents feel that their top managers take feedback, while 52.94% feel that they do not. This suggests a nearly even split, with a slight majority perceiving a lack of receptiveness to feedback from top management.



Fig 6: Indicate the percentage of feedback taken from top managers

The result shows (100%) among respondents that training programs should continue in the future highlights a strong collective endorsement for ongoing training initiatives within the organization.

The overwhelming majority of respondents (94.12% when combining "Strongly Agreed" and "Agreed") (Fig:7) believe that the organization considers training as a part of its organizational strategy. This indicates a strong consensus that training is perceived as an integral element of the organization's strategic planning and

development efforts. Only a small percentage (5.88%) disagrees with this view, and no respondents are neutral or strongly disagree. This suggests that the organization's commitment to incorporating training into its strategic framework is widely recognized and appreciated by its employees, with minimal dissent.

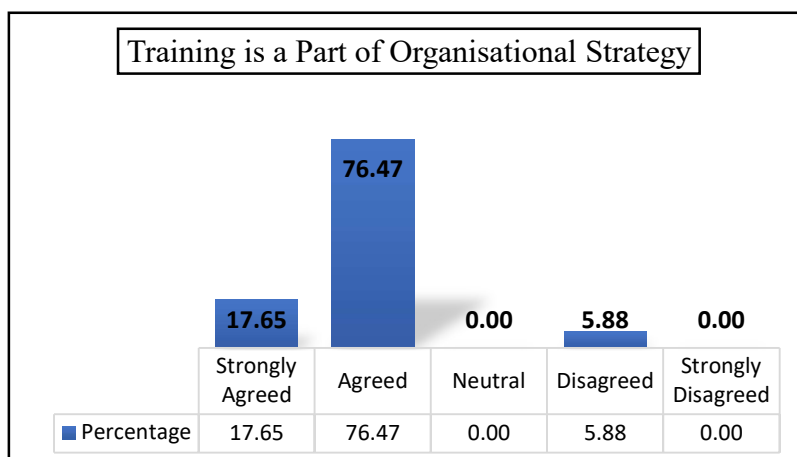


Fig 7: The organisation consider training as a part of organizational strategy

The results in Fig:8 indicate that a majority of respondents strongly agree (52.94%) and agree (23.53%) that training is helpful in enhancing the productivity and performance of employees. An additional 23.53% remain neutral on this statement. This strong agreement underscores the perceived value of training as a crucial tool for improving work outcomes and supporting organizational goals by equipping employees with the skills and knowledge needed to perform effectively.

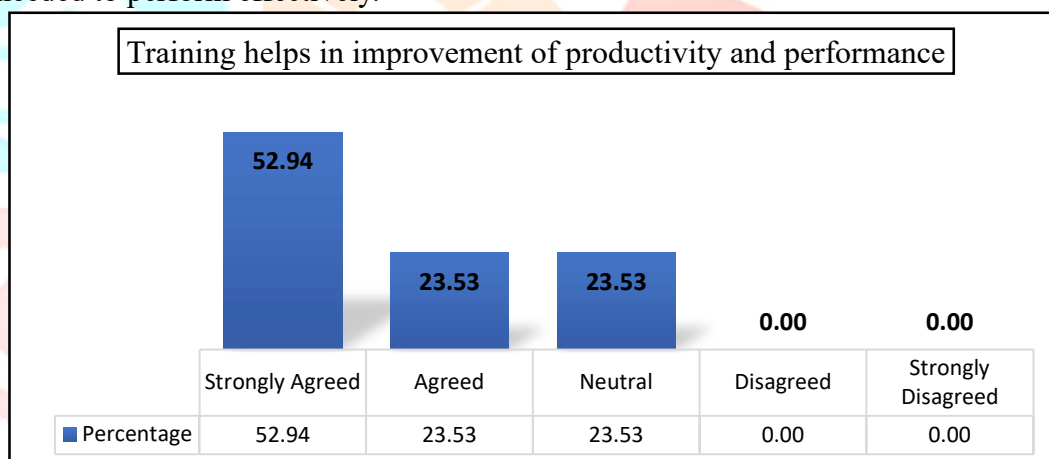


Fig 8: Training is helpful in enhancing productivity and performance of an employee.

The results (Fig: 9) depict a mixed perception regarding whether training can enhance the relationship between employees and employers. A combined 41.17% of respondents agree that training can contribute positively to improving the relationship between employees and employers. The majority of respondents remain neutral on this statement, indicating a lack of strong opinion either way. a small percentage (5.88%) disagree with the idea that training can enhance the relationship between employees and employers.

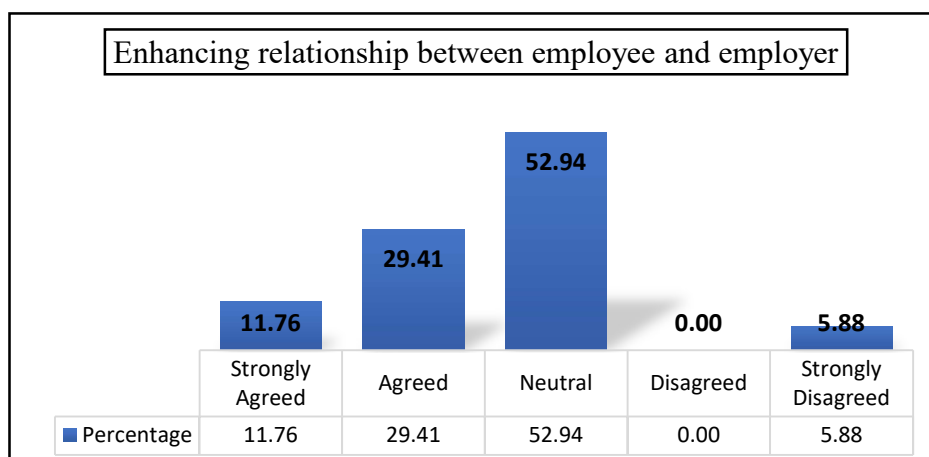


Fig 9: Training contribute to enhancing the relationship between employees and employers

Figure 10 shows a combined 76.47% of respondents believe that training boosts employee motivation. A minority of respondents remain neutral on this statement, indicating a lack of strong opinion. Whereas a very few respondents disagree with the idea that training improves employee motivation.

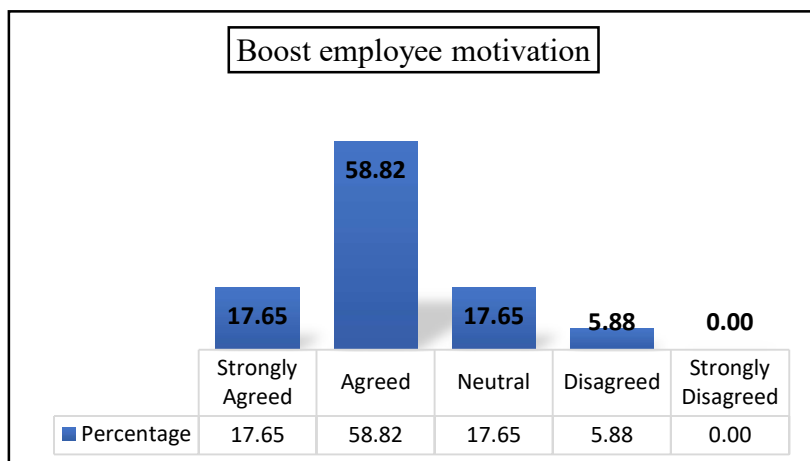


Fig 10: Training boost employee motivation levels

The results (Fig: 11) suggest a majority (76.47%) believe training programs can enhance employee accountability and authority in decision-making. However, a notable minority (17.65%) disagrees. This highlights mixed perceptions on whether training effectively empowers employees to take responsibility and make authoritative decisions, indicating potential areas for further improvement or clarification in training outcomes.

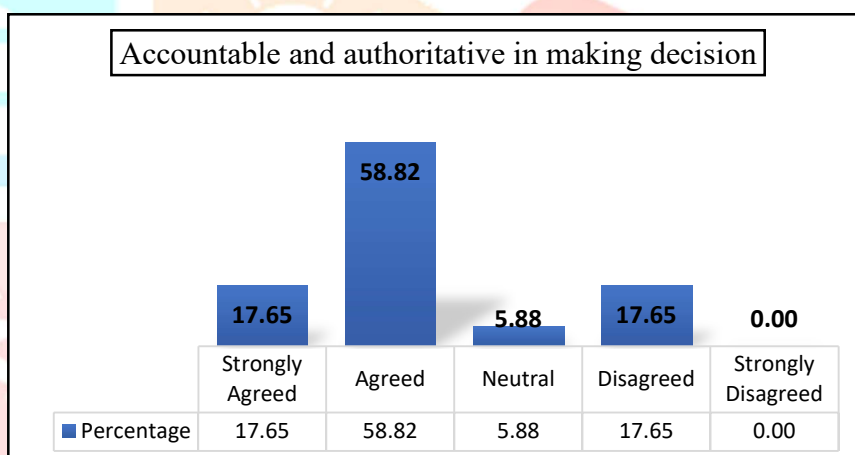


Fig 11: Training program enable the employees to be accountable and authoritative in making decision.

Fig: 12 show a majority (76.47%) agree that the training method focuses on developing teamwork and leadership skills. However, a notable minority (17.65%) either disagree or are neutral.

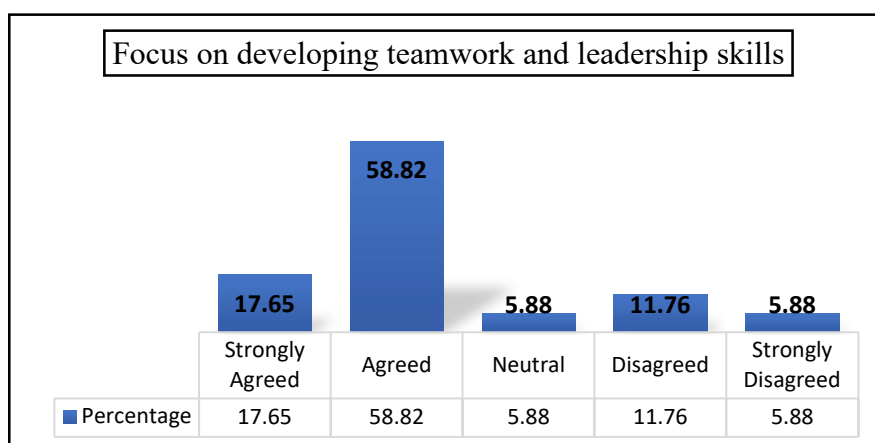


Fig 12: Depicts training method focus on developing team work and leadership skills

The outcome shows (Fig: 13) mixed perceptions regarding whether employees who utilize their training are prioritized for new assignments: 58.82% either agree or strongly agree, suggesting a significant portion

believes in the link between training utilization and assignment prioritization. However, 35.29% remain neutral, possibly indicating uncertainty or lack of clarity on how training impacts assignment prioritization.

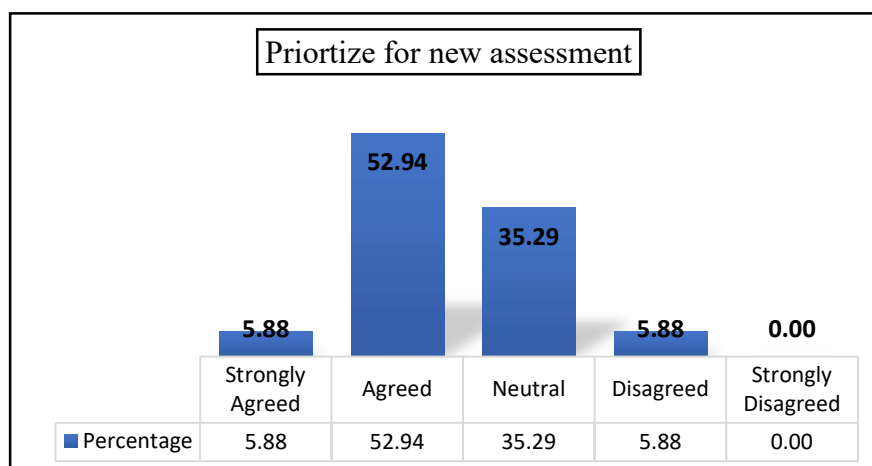


Fig 13: Employees who utilize their training are prioritized for new assignments.

The results (Fig: 14) indicate strong agreement (94.12%) that training in the organization is well planned, with 35.29% strongly agreeing and 58.82% agreeing.

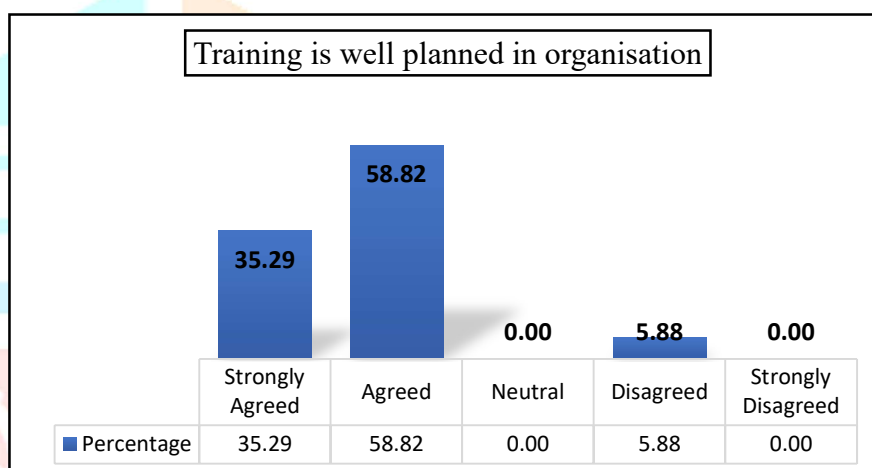


Fig 14: The training is well planned in the organization.

The results indicate (Fig: 15) several perceived barriers to training and development within the organization. The majority of respondents (65%) view time constraints as the primary obstacle to effective training and development. A significant minority (25%) feels that lack of interest poses a barrier. A small portion of our population (10%) feel that there are no significant barriers to training and development.

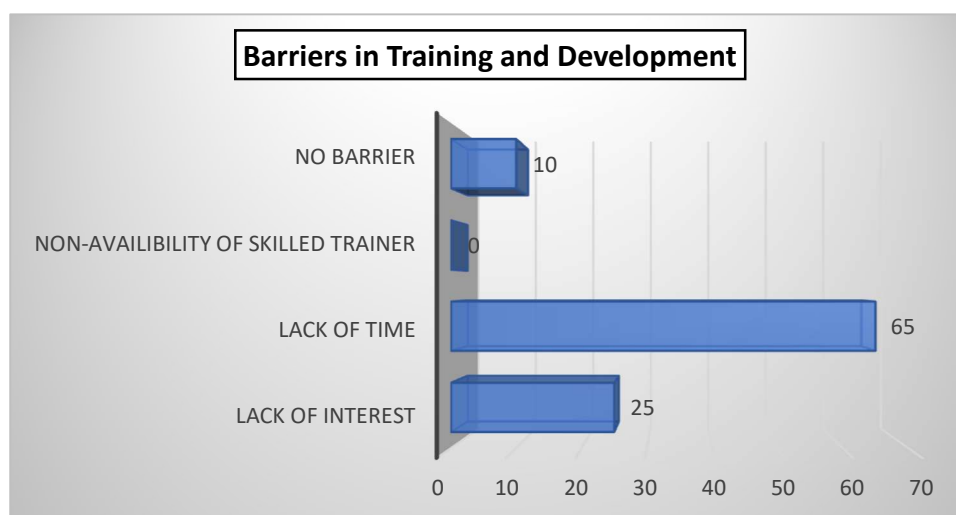


Fig 15: barriers to training and development in the organization

Figure 16 shows about 47.06% of respondents rate the training program highly, indicating satisfaction with its effectiveness in achieving its objectives. However, a majority of 52.94% rate the training program as average. Overall, the majority perceives the training program as adequate but not outstanding.



Fig 16: Level of satisfied with the effectiveness of training program

Discussion:

Based on the results the study indicates a strong recognition of the cognitive approach to training among all respondents, with a subset also acknowledging the importance of the behavioural approach. This suggests a balanced approach where theoretical understanding (cognitive) and practical skills (behavioural) are both valued. The overlap of these 5 respondents highlights that some employees benefit from a combination of both approaches, which may provide a more comprehensive and effective training program by addressing both cognitive understanding and practical application. Additionally, the exclusive use of on-the-job training highlights a preference for experiential learning within the actual work environment. This approach is beneficial as it allows employees to apply newly acquired skills directly to their roles, enhancing learning effectiveness.

A significant majority of respondents (79.42%) associate training primarily with the acquisition of knowledge and skills, emphasizing its role in personal and professional development. The universal enjoyment and perceived benefits of the training programs by all participants underscore high satisfaction levels and positive experiences. This indicates that the training initiatives are well-received and effectively contribute to employee growth and capability enhancement.

While a majority (64.71%) believe that training is aligned with organizational needs, a notable minority (35.29%) feels there is a misalignment. This highlights a potential area for improvement in ensuring that training programs are closely tailored to support organizational objectives and strategic priorities. Aligning training with business goals can enhance its overall impact on organizational performance and efficiency.

The study reveals a split opinion on whether top management effectively incorporates feedback from employees regarding training programs, with 47.06% perceiving receptiveness and 52.94% indicating otherwise. Clear communication channels and proactive engagement with feedback could improve alignment between training strategies and employee expectations, fostering a more supportive organizational culture.

The unanimous agreement (100%) that training programs should continue in the future reflects strong endorsement for ongoing development initiatives within the organization. Moreover, the overwhelming consensus (94.12%) that training is integral to the organizational strategy underscores its perceived importance in driving long-term growth and performance enhancement. This alignment between training and strategic objectives suggests a cohesive approach to workforce development.

A majority of respondents (76.47%) believe that training positively impacts employee motivation, accountability, decision-making authority, teamwork, and leadership skills. However, mixed perceptions on these aspects highlight the need for continuous evaluation and improvement in training outcomes. Addressing these perceptions can lead to more targeted training interventions that effectively enhance employee capabilities and job satisfaction.

Time constraints emerge as the primary barrier (65%) to effective training and development, followed by lack of interest (25%). These barriers suggest a need for flexible training schedules and engaging, relevant content

to overcome motivational challenges. Addressing these barriers can enhance participation rates and maximize the effectiveness of training investments.

While nearly half of the respondents (47.06%) rate the training program highly in achieving its objectives, a majority (52.94%) perceive it as average. This indicates that while the training is generally effective, there is room for improvement to elevate its impact and perceived value among employees. Continuous feedback and evaluation can help refine training programs to better meet evolving organizational needs and employee expectations.

The study at Pantaloons highlights Training and Development (T&D) as a crucial instrument in Human Resource Management (HRM). The strong recognition of both cognitive and behavioural approaches to training underscores its role in equipping employees with essential skills and knowledge. This comprehensive approach supports HRM goals by enhancing employee capabilities and aligning skills with organizational needs, thereby fostering a competent workforce capable of driving organizational success.

The study identifies various T&D activities at ABFRL, predominantly focusing on on-the-job training to facilitate practical learning in the workplace. However, barriers such as time constraints and varying levels of perceived alignment with organizational goals pose challenges. These findings suggest that while T&D initiatives are robust, addressing barriers like time constraints and improving alignment with strategic objectives are critical to optimizing the effectiveness and efficiency of training investments.

The analysis reveals that a strategic approach to T&D at ABFRL positively impacts organizational outcomes. The unanimous agreement on the necessity and benefits of T&D, coupled with high satisfaction levels and perceived improvements in employee performance, supports the alternate hypothesis (H1). Strategic T&D initiatives, such as just-in-time training methods, are perceived as enhancing productivity, motivation, and overall cost-utility factors within the organization.

Recommendation from Employees:

- I. Increasing physical training in the future would benefit employees by enhancing both their learning experience and their interest in participating.
- II. Introducing managerial promotional training to guide employees and prepare them for promotions would assist ground-level employees in advancing their careers.

Conclusion:

Based on the comprehensive study conducted at Pantaloons (ABFRL), several key conclusions emerge regarding Training and Development (T&D) practices and their impact on organizational dynamics. The research highlights a strong recognition of both cognitive and behavioural approaches to training among employees, suggesting a balanced strategy that integrates theoretical understanding with practical skills. This dual approach not only enhances employee capabilities but also fosters a more comprehensive learning environment. The preference for on-the-job training underscores its effectiveness in directly applying newly acquired skills within the workplace, thereby maximizing learning outcomes.

Furthermore, the study indicates a significant association of training with the acquisition of knowledge and skills, emphasizing its pivotal role in personal and professional development. High levels of satisfaction and perceived benefits among participants reflect well-received training initiatives that contribute positively to employee growth and performance enhancement. However, challenges such as perceived misalignment with organizational goals and varying levels of receptiveness to feedback from top management highlight areas for improvement in optimizing training effectiveness and alignment with strategic objectives.

The unanimous agreement on the continuation and strategic integration of T&D programs underscores their integral role in organizational strategy, driving long-term growth and fostering a competent workforce capable of meeting evolving business needs. Positive perceptions regarding the impact of training on employee motivation, accountability, teamwork, and leadership skills reinforce its strategic importance in enhancing organizational performance and efficiency.

Addressing barriers such as time constraints and aligning training programs more closely with organizational objectives are crucial steps in further enhancing the effectiveness and perceived value of T&D efforts at ABFRL. The findings strongly support that a strategic approach to T&D improves productivity and cost-utility factors within the organization, thereby positioning T&D as a critical element in HRM practices that contributes to sustained competitive advantage and organizational success.

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