Pre-Employment Training and Testing as a Recruitment and Retention Strategy

Ryan Caster
St. John Fisher College

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Pre-Employment Training and Testing as a Recruitment and Retention Strategy

Abstract
This study assesses the effectiveness of implementing a pre-employment training program as a selective hiring strategy to improve quality recruitment and increase employee retention. Does such a program effectively weed out poor performers and retain the most highly skilled applicants? In order to assess a local organization's pre-employment program, a mailer survey instrument was sent to 120 employees of the organization, both past and present. Two focus groups, one comprised of employees and the other consisting of trainers/supervisors, were also facilitated to glean personal knowledge. The end results indicate many positives regarding instituting a pre-employment training program and recruiting highly skilled, better prepared personnel. A direct link to improving retention rates did not surface, due to the low sample population and the relative freshness of the program - not enough applicants have yet gone through the program to have stayed with the company long enough for their attrition rates to yet have significant numbers. Further research studying retention rates of these groups of applicants must be conducted, perhaps with multiple organizations involved.

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Pre-Employment Training and Testing as a Recruitment and Retention Strategy

By

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Of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Master of Science

May 2002
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Abstract

This study assesses the effectiveness of implementing a pre-employment training program as a selective hiring strategy to improve quality recruitment and increase employee retention. Does such a program effectively weed out poor performers and retain the most highly skilled applicants?

In order to assess a local organization's pre-employment program, a mailer survey instrument was sent to 120 employees of the organization, both past and present. Two focus groups, one comprised of employees and the other consisting of trainers/supervisors, were also facilitated to glean personal knowledge.

The end results indicate many positives regarding instituting a pre-employment training program and recruiting highly skilled, better prepared personnel. A direct link to improving retention rates did not surface, due to the low sample population and the relative freshness of the program—not enough applicants have yet gone through the program to have stayed with the company long enough for their attrition rates to yet have significant numbers. Further research studying retention rates of these groups of applicants must be conducted, perhaps with multiple organizations involved.
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Chapter One

Introduction

Finding a good employee is one thing, keeping them is another. Recruitment and retention strategies have increasingly become a focus in the current market trend of decreasing company loyalty resulting in employees more frequently job-hopping. Employers spend a lot to train new hires, only to have them leave shortly thereafter. Some companies are now looking for ways to train and test potential hires before a decision is made. Pre-employment training is a new concept to the field of recruitment and selective hiring, but it comes with the important benefit of the ability for employers and potential employees to assess each other and determine if there is an appropriate job match before any job decisions are made. A "right fit" will potentially stay with the company for a longer time, while a "bad fit" will be recognized as incompatible. A direct result of a "bad fit" employee leaving the organization is an increased rate of turnover for the company.

Turnover is constantly being battled by HR professionals in businesses of all types and sizes. A high rate of turnover indicates a large percentage of time and money being invested in re-inventing the wheel with
repetitive job training for every fresh face that walks in the door. A better method of selective hiring is needed in order to bring on board as competent a staff as possible. Companies need the right people to do the job. Businesses have several factors for success, including financial, physical, and the human factor (McEachern, 1994). The human factor is by far the most critical to overall success and quite possibly the hardest to come by and replicate in any significant quantity. The nature of implementing a pre-employment training program suggests a pro-active view taken by HRD professionals in recruiting qualified, quality applicants and keeping them. The employee’s abilities are put to test prior to the actual hiring decision.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to collect and examine data that will, in part, assist with a validation study of a pre-employment training program for the Cerebral Palsy Association of Rochester, New York (hereafter referred to as CPA). CPA is highly committed to pre-employment training, and links the program to their strategic plan by recruiting and retaining quality staff.

This paper presents a five-part discussion. Chapter One introduces the study and offers background information. Chapter Two outlines a review of related literature that
establishes the framework for this study. Chapter Three describes the methodology employed to conduct the study, the target population and sample assessed, the survey instrument, and the analysis techniques utilized. Chapter Four presents the findings of the data and the results of the analysis. Finally, Chapter Five discusses the findings and the implications of the research results, and provides recommendations for future research to further enhance the study in this area.
Chapter Two

Review of Related Literature

Is there a tangible benefit to training potential applicants for a position before extending them a job offer? And if that job offer is accepted, is the employee retained for a longer period of time on average? This study examines these questions and hopes to provide some substantive answers. The value of human capital is being realized by organizations. Specifically, this chapter offers a review of related literature concerning the questions at hand. This chapter will examine both the training that occurs prior to employment and also testing used to determine the success of the training and the fit of the potential hire.

Training

Pre-employment training is a relatively new concept in recruiting and retaining qualified, skilled employees. It is a pro-active method used in hiring competent workers and also in combating turnover. A successful pre-employment training program can ensure a good fit for both the corporation and the potential employee. The training program will go beyond the realm of simply imparting new skills and/or knowledges. It will serve to confirm mutual expectations between the company and the individual.
Candidates will meet senior management and learn about the organization and its policies, practices, and programs. The program will include classroom training as well as hands-on, on-the-job training relevant to the position. Health care providers will learn to care for patients with disabilities, and engineers will learn new software programs.

Pre-employment training is a recruitment tool used mainly for job groups which entail specific skills and competencies, such as the health care field and human services. Studies have shown that these such fields benefit best during training when job-specific skills are identified, resulting in training better specifically tailored to the individual (Bassi, Benson & Cheney; 1996). Skill standards need to be identified relevant to the position. Skill standards are performance specifications that identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities that an employee needs to perform a job (Bassi, Benson & Cheney; 1996).

Specific programs obviously must be designed to match differing company needs and expected outcomes, but the programs should inherently possess a few common characteristics. A typical pre-employment training program
schedule would consist of most or all of the following items:

- Orientation to the company including work schedule, expectations, and benefits
- Plant/office/facilities tour
- Team building, interpersonal skills, work ethic
- Job specific training, both in-class and on-site
- A testing/assessment phase, to determine successful or unsuccessful transfer of skills

(Seamster, 2001).

A direct relationship occurs between pre-employment training and a focused recruitment and retention strategy. According to an HR Focus survey done in 2000, the key issues that HR departments focused on in 2001 include retention and training, respectively, as the top two critical issues cited (HR Focus, 2001). Pre-employment training is clearly part of an organization's pro-active retention strategy.

Pre-employment training should be treated exactly like any regular training program with regard to necessary successful transfer of skills. Research shows that training will yield positive returns if trained employees are allowed to effectively put to use new skills and/or
knowledge taught (Rothwell & Kazanas, 1994). To add to the importance of successful training, studies have also shown a positive training result if the training done is aligned strategically with the overall goals and business objectives of the organization as a whole (Rothwell & Kazanas, 1994; Broad & Newstrom, 1992).

Evaluation

Research has also been conducted on evaluating training’s success, most notably by Donald Kirkpatrick, who proposed his famous four-level evaluation model in 1959. Kirkpatrick’s model (or versions thereof) is still used today in evaluating training programs.

Exhibit I. Kirkpatrick’s 4-Level Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>Initial Reaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>Transfer of Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>Results</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first level is the reaction stage, which serves to measure how participants feel and respond to the various aspects of a training program. The second level is the learning stage, which measures knowledge acquired, skills
gained, or attitudes changed during the program. The third level is a behavior measurement, the extent in which participants transfer their new skills and change on-the-job behavior because of training. Lastly, the fourth and highest level of evaluation is results—the measure of final outcomes that occurred due to training, which include (but are not limited to) higher productivity, greater profits, reduced costs, and decreased turnover. In order to be graded positively for the top third and fourth levels, it is necessary to have successful transfer of training and a successful alignment of training improving the overall function of the organization (Kirkpatrick, 1998).

Kirkpatrick’s model is still widely used today as a type of measure used to determine overall HRD performance in an organization. A showing of improved results for a company effectively scores a four on the Kirkpatrick evaluation model, which is what the result of a successful pre-employment training can achieve.

While pre-employment training is certainly not a mutually exclusive component of a recruitment/retention strategy, it is certainly an essential component that occurs non-traditionally because it happens pre-hire and should lead to continuing development programs for the
employee post-hiring, to help ensure that a good recruit stays with the organization for the long-term.

Testing

Testing traditionally occurs at the end of any training program, primarily for the main purpose of ensuring validity and successful transfer of skills or knowledge learned during the training. Usually, a potential hire is tested at the end of the pre-employment training program as well and, determinate on the result of both the trainer’s evaluation and test results, the potential hire is either dismissed before being hired or asked to stay on as a new recruit for the organization. Old methods of hiring often fall short of recruiting an excellent staff, due mainly to the shortcomings of the job interview, vague and inaccurate reference checks, and the need to “find a warm body” to fill a vacancy. Hiring mistakes can prove costly and time-consuming. A recruiter needs more objective feedback about a candidate before extending the job offer. Pre-employment training and testing can offer a solid guide to hiring a candidate with true skills, as opposed to just taking a chance on a candidate who “looks good on paper,” but does not possess useful, practical skills.
Flynn's Studies

This section examines some works by Gillian Flynn, editor at Personnel Journal. She has taken a look at various programs at the pre-employment stage, and has also conducted studies on recruitment initiatives and retention rates. She found that pre-employment initiatives are indeed effective tools of a good recruitment strategy. "Pre-employment testing plays a major part of ensuring retention. Screening out those who will not succeed with the company saves time and money" (Flynn, 1994).

Pre-employment training is most often followed by testing in order to determine successful transfer of training objectives. This combination is used as a predictor of a potential employee fit. A successful pre-employment training program, one that delivers specified training objectives in conjunction with a valid pre-employment test, can serve as a strong predictor as to the fit of the candidate. Flynn assesses that pre-employment tests are effective tools for predicting the work behaviors, preferences, and chances of success of job candidates. "There are recruitment professionals who believe that many unqualified applicants would successfully pass through the screening process based on what they put in their resumes if tests are not used to determine the
veracity of the information they provide" (Flynn, 1995). Basically, pre-employment training and testing serve to insure that a potential hire does actually possess the skills and abilities needed to be successful in their position. It is better to determine the fit before the hire; it is far less easy to dismiss an already-hired employee after it has been demonstrated that he or she does not possess the required skills and abilities to perform in the position. Flynn’s work helps to show that, with pre-employment testing, HR departments can contribute to their companies’ bottom line by improving the organization’s retention rate, its productivity and its ability to recruit the most qualified applicants.

An important drawback of pre-employment tests this researcher discovered unfortunately relates to its outcome -- some pre-employment tests can be considered unlawful if they have (generate) a statistically substantial negative impact (Flynn, 1999). Specifically, a test is considered unlawful if it significantly excludes a protected category, such as minorities and women. Studies reveal that a pre-employment test has a significant negative impact if its candidate selection rate for protected individuals is less than 80% of the rate of a group with the highest rate of candidate selection (Flynn, 1999).
Pre-Employment Interviews

Often, in conjunction with both pre-employment training and testing, an interview session is conducted prior to the hiring decision. A pre-employment interview routinely takes place after any pre-employment training and testing, and academic research has successfully shown the combination to be more effective in predicting job performance than a stand-alone selection interview (Roth & Campion, 2001; Mayfield, 1964; Waldron, 1974). One study validated a combination of pre-employment testing combined with a panel of interviewers. "The interview predicted job performance and promotions while the pre-employment tests predicted training success and job performance. The panel interview also showed incremental validity over and above the pre-employment tests for job performance" (Roth & Campion, 2001).

By contrast, research suggests that unstructured job interviews and references/recommendations are not very accurate methods of predicting job performance (Terpstra, 1996). "One caveat with references, of course, is that many employers seem reluctant these days to supply much information about former employees due to legal concerns" (Terpstra, 1996). That specific important and relevant
information withheld by former employers would most likely be revealed by a pre-employment program.

Using pre-employment training and testing can translate to higher retention, which in turn directly impacts the bottom line. Employee turnover is expensive. According to the US Department of Labor, a business enterprise spends about 33% of a new recruit's annual salary to replace a lost employee (White, 1995). According to research done by California-based Saratoga Institute, the average replacement cost of an exempt professional is about $6,500 — so each turnover prevented is money saved (Flynn, 1994). Employee turnover can be minimized by carefully screening and selecting employees, a process costing an organization far less than replacing lost hires. It also translates into getting the best person for the job by ensuring a good fit, which means higher productivity.

Conclusion

This chapter served as a summary of past works and related literature regarding pre-employment training and of recruitment and retention of employees. Past literature seems to suggest a positive effect of pre-employment training as a recruitment tool (e.g., Flynn, 1994 et al.; Roth & Campion, 2001; Broad & Newstrom, 1992).
Next, Chapter 3 will go on to describe the methodology used to conduct the study. The survey will be introduced, the population sample identified, and analysis techniques discussed.
Chapter Three
Methodology

This chapter discusses the methodology used to conduct this study. Methodology includes the population studied and the data analysis techniques chosen and used for the study. The population will be identified, the survey instrument will be described, and data collection and analysis techniques discussed.

Population

The target population of the survey included employees of CPA from the past several years, located in the greater Rochester area. This population is comprised of employees who were employed with CPA prior to any existing pre-employment training program, as well as employees who went through the program after its implementation and were either offered a position or weren’t presented with any employment offer. A list of 120 such employees was obtained through the Human Resources department of CPA. The entire population of health-care provider level employees was included in the survey portion of the study. Survey participants include both potential employees who did not make it through the pre-employment period of training as well as employees who successfully completed the pre-employment training.
Sample

Two focus groups were also formed to examine and discuss the research issue, as well as to gain first-hand observations concerning the pre-employment training program. The first focus group consisted of a small panel of 4 current UCPA employees. This group was randomly selected from an available list of employees who received the organization’s pre-employment training. The second focus group consisted of a random mix of 10 trainers and supervisors, all of which are personally involved in the pre-employment training process, representing various functions and levels the organization.

Qualitative statements and critical incidents were recorded by the facilitator of the focus groups.

Data Collection

A combination of quantitative and qualitative data were collected and assessed for use in this study. Data was collected in two ways—through survey instrument and focus group sessions. The data collection of the study consists of interviewing relevant employees of CPA, through both mail surveys and focus groups.

Instrument

Mail surveys were sent to 120 former and current employees of the Cerebral Palsy Association. Mail surveys,
however, are less convenient than on-line surveys, and although made less laborious with the inclusion of self-addressed stamped envelopes, the response rate is only expected to be 15-25% (McCullough, 1998; Cleland, 1996).

The mail survey instrument (see Appendix B) consists of 17 open-and-closed (objective and write-in) questions and statements, which yielded both qualitative and quantitative responses. The survey instrument itself consists of two sections. The first section, questions 1–8, focuses on demographic information, including gender, previous work experience, education attained, current employment status with CPA, and involvement, if any, in the pre-employment training program. The demographic information is included to attempt to determine any correlation among like groups of individuals, and also to gather a sense of the response sample. The second section, questions 9–17, gathers information used to assess the pre-employment training program. These questions are rated on an ordinal scale with space to include comments, as shown below in Exhibit II.
Exhibit II. Rating Scale

<p>| | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments:

Focus Group

Two focus groups were facilitated to acquire first-hand experiences of employees, and to have responses recorded as qualitative data.

The first group consisted of a random selection of 10 currently-employed CPA personnel employed as either supervisors and/or trainers in regards to the pre-employment training program. Eight open-ended questions were presented to the group (see Appendix C: Focus Group Questions).

The second group consisted of four currently-employed staff of CPA, all graduates of the pre-employment program and asked to stay as hires after the program. The same set of eight questions were presented to the second group.

Qualitative data from both focus groups were held entirely confidential, with no acknowledgment of individual responses being reported.
The focus group questions pertained to perceived success/failure of the pre-employment training program, observations regarding the training environment, the screening process for potential hires, consumer response to the training, differences in training groups, reasons for termination, and specific things to change vs. specific things to continue.

Extant Data

Existing extant data, including retention data, incident report statistics, test scores of applicants, and dismissal reports (provided by CPA) was collected and examined. This data was collated and compared with the assessment of the program. Statistical Analysis Software (SAS) was used to analyze the data.

Data Analysis

Instrument

Survey data was collated from returned survey instruments and recorded into Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet format (see Appendix F). Basic descriptive statistical formulas, including mean, median, and mode, were calculated to determine average response per question and also to check the normalcy of distribution of responses.

Statistical t-tests were also chosen to analyze the data. The t-tests are used to determine if the scores of
two groups differ on a single variable. For instance, to determine whether writing ability differs among students in two classrooms, a t-test could be used (http://colostate.edu). The t-tests were used to compare the pre-employment training assessment questions between the two distinct groups of current employee vs. employee (employed or termed) prior to the onset of the pre-employment training program.

In addition to the above, more advanced SAS software was used in a principle component analysis procedure which served to group the assessment questions into three main groups, or factors. Factor analysis is a powerful statistical tool used to capture constructs (similar factors) within a group of questions by reducing data. The factor analysis test explores which variables in a data set are most related to each other. In a carefully constructed survey, for example, factor analysis can yield information on patterns of responses, not simply data on a single response. Larger tendencies may then be interpreted, indicating behavior trends rather than simply responses to specific questions.

After separating and identifying three main factors from the nine assessment questions, t-tests were used to compare factor scores between the two separate (trained and
untrained) groups. The main goal was to expose major differences between the two groups.

Chi-square tests were also used to note if there were any severe differences between any two demographic groups, and to check for equal representation of two demographics; like representation between male vs. female or low education vs. high education.

Focus Group

Minutes of both focus groups were recorded and condensed, using a content analysis procedure, focusing in on frequency of concept to be used as qualitative data. In conceptual analysis, a concept is chosen for examination, and the analysis involves quantifying and tallying its presence. Frequency was determined by the researcher to be relevant if the same concept occurred in three occasions.

According to Colorado State University Research Guide, coding for implicit terms and deciding a level of implication is complicated by the need to base judgments on a somewhat subjective system; the smaller scope of this research study limits the weight of the qualitative data and utilizes the statements as back-up for the hard data (www.http://writing.colostate.edu). Qualitative statements from both groups of employees, as well as trainers and
supervisors, were tallied and coded, and used to support or contradict the hard data (see Appendix F).

Extant Data

Existing extant data provided by CPA was collected for the research. CPA provided agency-wide attrition summaries and retention reports for the previous two years (see Appendix E). Retention and attrition rates were compared between the two years, and then compared to current rates in order to show a rise or a fall in retention.

Conclusion

This chapter served to describe the methodology used to conduct the study. The population was first identified. Next, the survey instrument and data collection techniques were presented and discussed. Lastly, the analytical procedures used to glean results from the hard data were identified. In Chapter 4, the results of the survey will be presented.
Chapter Four

Study Summary

The purpose of this study is to assess a pre-employment training program and determine whether there is a relationship existing between pre-employment training and improved recruitment and retention. An answer is sought for the question of whether or not the implementation of a pre-employment training program will improve an organization's employee retention rate. In this chapter, data results will be presented from the various analysis techniques described in the previous chapter.

Results

The target population of the survey included employees of CPA from the past three years, located in the greater Rochester area. A list of 120 such employees was obtained through the Human Resources Department of CPA. The discussion of the results is organized around two principal outcomes: 1) the factor analysis of the surveys, focusing on the differences between the two main groups of employees identified in the demographics (specifically looking for any difference in the answers given between participants of pre-employment training and those who did not receive pre-employment training); and 2) the summarized qualitative comments from the two focus groups concerning the pre-
employment training program. Also present in the discussion is any recognized and/or significant relation to retention of employees.

**Instrument Results**

Out of the 120 mailed surveys, a total of 28 responses were received, resulting in a response rate of 23%. The actual survey instrument (see Appendix B) consisted of 17 questions divided into two sections. Section A of the survey included questions 1–8 and was primarily demographic. Section B of the survey included questions 9–17 and was used to assess the pre-employment training program of UCPA. The survey instrument included comment space in addition to an ordinal scale, and therefore provided qualitative statements in addition to quantitative answers.

The principal components analysis procedure used on the raw assessment data isolated three unique factors in the questions (see Appendix F, Tables I–III). Factor One questions assessed the training design and the format of the pre-employment training program. Factor Two assessed the realistic and practical preparation for direct care after having received the training. Factor Three questions measured individual skill attainment and motivation and gauged interpersonal skills.
Using scores derived from these three factors, t-tests were used (see Appendix F, Table III) to examine whether or not responses from the retained group (those offered positions and agreed to stay based on successful completion of the pre-employment training program) differed from those of the dismissed group (voluntarily or involuntarily terminated prior to completion of pre-employment training). t-test results came out principally non-significant in relation to those two groups.

**Exhibit III: t-test Results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Not currently employed (n=11)</th>
<th>Currently employed (n=17)</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Std Dev</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Std Dev</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor1</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor2</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor3</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>.48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: significant results highlighted in blue

The t-test (see Exhibit III: t-test Results) did produce significant results, however, when comparing the differences in the two other groups—those employees having begun employment after the implementation of the pre-employment training program (hence having received the
training) and those who joined the CPA prior to the program’s implementation (and therefore not subject to training until after gaining employment). The assessment questions related to Factor Two (questions 10, 15, and 17), assessing realistic and practical preparation for direct care after having received the pre-employment training, differentiated the most and produced the most significant results between those two populations. The $t$-test value in this case is a 3.24, with a $p$ value of 0.003. This is a strong indication of the practical strength of the program and lends support to the position that what is needed to successfully perform the job is what is being taught during the training program. This is an indicator of strong validation for the program. The group who were pre-trained felt the subject matter taught prepared them adequately. Qualitative data corroborates this finding; employee comments reflect that employees felt prepared and confident after the pre-employment training.

As far as demographic differences in the two groups, a chi-square test resulted in looking at a fairly well-matched group going in, considering the limited set of demos. A total of eight men and 20 women responded to the survey. Women and men were similarly represented, and
length of education was equivalent, for example. Again, limited sample size was a concern in this test.

Focus Group Results

Upon completion of gathering qualitative comments, using a content analysis procedure, frequency of concept was focused onto be used as qualitative data (see Appendix D: Summarized Focus Group Data). A congruence was looked for in order to determine which comments were agreed upon between the trainers/supervisors and the trainees. The same set of questions was posed to each of the two groups. These congruent statements were held with the most validity.

Qualitative data collected clearly indicate that certain aspects of the training program are perceived as strongly positive by both sides. Common agreements existed in expressing the need for more hands-on care as opposed to lecture-based training. A similar stance was taken in expressing an effective group size of no less than five and no more than ten. Attention to personal care was also emphasized multiple times by both sides.

One notable finding was a request by the trainers to become more involved in the initial selection and recruitment of potential hires. The trainers seem confident in the ability to spot strong recruits.
Extant Data Results

According to retention data as well as analysis of trainer/supervisor comments (see Appendices D and F), retention rates have remained fairly constant in some areas and have actually increased in others (see Appendix E), which have been consistent with prior figures in the period just before program implementation. So although turnover is still existent, according to one comment by a program supervisor, "...the employees staying longer...are of better quality." This perhaps indicates that the better employees are staying with their position while the lower performers are slowly being weeded out of the system. A trainer corroborates, saying "We are better at weeding out people who are not fit for the job." (see Appendix E).

Consumer response post training-program implementation has been shown to be positive, and incident reports have been down as well. Employees and trainers report a better comfort level on-site with new hires. The cohorts themselves are extremely positive, very involved with each other and most cohorts were reported to have celebrated after the training was over and after being offered a job.

Perhaps the most important congruence however, was a general positive feeling for the pre-employment training program as a whole, as noted numerous times by both
trainers/supervisors and trainees. This is indicative of high levels of buy-in to the program on both sides.

Conclusion

This chapter served to present the data gathered using the methods outlined in Chapter Three. Both quantitative and qualitative data were discussed, with the data shown in Appendices D through F. Survey response rate was indicated, and significant t-test results were presented.

Chapter Five will go on to discuss the interpretations of the results of the data gathered, followed by the researcher’s recommendations of future action for CPA.
Chapter Five

Summary and Recommendations

As noted above, the purpose of this study is to assess a pre-employment training program and determine a relation between pre-employment training and improved recruitment and retention. This chapter will serve to address the data presented in the preceding chapter and attempt to correlate the findings with the review of literature in chapter two. Lastly, recommendations for further research of the topic are discussed.

Summary

Pre-employment training is a pro-active move in the HR game of selective hiring and quality recruitment and retention. According to an HR Focus survey done in 2000, the key issues that HR departments focused on in 2001 included retention and training, respectively, as the top two critical issues cited (HR Focus, 2001). Pre-employment training is clearly part of an organization’s pro-active retention strategy.

While indicating strong levels of success and high levels of support and showing significant differences in pre-program employees compared to hires after program implementation, there existed no direct evidence to show a decrease in retention rates for the organization as a
whole. New recruits however, are shown to come out of training to be better prepared for their job tasks than their predecessors who lacked training prior to employment, and are recognized by their trainers and also by end consumers to be higher quality performers. Thus, an initial short-term success of quality recruitment has been obtained through the existence of pre-employment training as selective hiring, but future studies done further down the road must be used to determine an actual improvement in retention rates.

Research almost unanimously indicates that formal training programs serve to increase employee productivity (Machan, 1991; Tyler, 2000; Bassi, Benson, Cheney, 1996). A pre-employment training program could be effectively formalized to differing areas of industry, but also could remain an integral tool in assessing the fit between employer and employee. Scoring a four on a Kirkpatrick evaluation model, pre-employment training is a powerful front-line strategy to get a better workforce. Literature points toward an increase in attention towards retention and training (HR Focus, 2001), pre-employment training programs seem to address both issues. Yet, further research needs to be done in order to determine overall effectiveness in improving retention.
According to Flynn (1995, 1999), successful pre-employment training is indicative of success on the job, and pre-employment testing plays a major part of ensuring retention. Employees who are better prepared to handle their job are more likely to stay with the organization.

Recommendations

While the results of the study seem to indicate a positive relation between the pre-employment training program and the goal of recruiting and retaining quality personnel, additional research is definitely needed to fully support this indication. Retention and turnover prevention techniques can often be costly and time-consuming, but implementing a pre-employment training program would seem like a good choice for a front-line tactic. The benefits of such a program could far outweigh the negatives of trying to weed out recruits after hiring has occurred for most any organization. Again, and taking the relative freshness of the concept into account, a more extensive body of research must be built to fully confirm the indications.

Methods such as focus groups and employee interviews should also still be used to allow specific thoughts to surface, thus showing what is truly considered important versus what is truly not considered important.
Broader, web-based surveys should certainly take the place of a limited mailer survey in order to produce a much larger sample population, and corresponding “control” populations should be isolated in order to properly compare groups who received pre-training and groups who have not. Any organization implementing any pre-employment training could submit answers to an Internet survey via hypertext link to a central website. The need to streamline and pinpoint training exists for financial and competitive reasons, but a universally “safe” location for training could serve the multiple functions of providing necessary competences, recruiting quality personnel, and improving company retention all at once.

Conclusion

The value of human capital is being realized by organizations, and therefore companies are showing an increased interest in keeping trained and skilled employees. While the importance of proper skills training is less prevalent in non-technical fields like retail and food service, pre-employment training can be effectively utilized across the board in varying degrees as an effective, pro-active strategy in recruiting and retaining the best employee possible for the position. Research has supported the usefulness of pre-employment training, and I
personally advocate the use of such a program whether on a small or large scale, to improve the quality of the employee and the length of time he or she remains with the organization.
References


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HR Magazine, 45(1), 74-80.


Writing@CSU. (2001). Resources for writers and teachers.
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Appendix A

Survey Invitation Letter
Date

Dear Sir or Madam:

The Cerebral Palsy Association of the Rochester Area is undergoing an assessment of its pre-employment training program used for selection and recruitment for new potential hires. A Master of Science degree candidate currently enrolled in the Graduate Human Resources Development Program at St. John Fisher College is conducting this project in conjunction with the CPA.

This study is being conducted as an Applied Research course requirement. Upon completion, a report of the findings will be produced and presented to peers, professionals in the field of HR, St. John Fisher College faculty, and staff of the CPA. The focus of this study is to provide data to validate the effectiveness of pre-employment training in the recruitment and selection process.

As a participant in the pre-employment training process, your feedback is extremely important. Please complete the enclosed survey in which you will evaluate the process. This activity will take approximately twenty to thirty minutes to complete. Upon completion of the survey, please place it in the provided return postage-paid envelope addressed to Ryan Caster, seal the envelope and mail.

Your identity will be kept fully confidential unless otherwise specified by you in writing. All information collected in this study will be grouped ensuring individual response anonymity. Your participation in this study authorizes your consent. This study has been reviewed and approved by St. John Fisher College’s Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact Ryan Caster at (716) 242-2026.

Thank you in advance for agreeing to be part of this important study.

Regards,

Ryan Caster
GHRD 590
Applied Research
St. John Fisher College
Rochester, New York
Appendix B

Survey Instrument
Assessment of Pre-Employment Training Program for the Cerebral Palsy
Association of the Rochester Area

Please fill in circles completely (example: O) corresponding to the question, or write in your answer where appropriate.

Section A: Demographic Information

1. Gender:
   O Male
   O Female

2. Previous work experience:
   O Health Care
   O Nursing
   O Human Services
   O None of the above fields

3. Length of previous work experience:
   O Less than 1 year
   O 1-2 years
   O 2-4 years
   O Over 4 years

4. Highest level of education completed:
   O GED
   O High school
   O 2-year degree
   O 4-year degree
   O Post-graduate

5. Are you currently employed by CPA?
   O Yes
   O No
6. If you are currently employed by CPA, how long have you been employed by CPA?
   O 0-3 months
   O 4-6 months
   O 7-9 months
   O 11-12 months
   O Over 1 year
   O Not currently employed by CPA

7. If you are currently employed by CPA, in what month/year did you complete the pre-employment training process?

8. If you are not currently employed by CPA, were you voluntarily or involuntarily dismissed?

Section B: Pre-employment Training Assessment Information

Please circle the number that most closely matches your response to the statement. Where appropriate, please add your comments. Circle only one number.

9. The pre-employment training program provided me with the necessary skills and abilities needed to be successful in my employment at CPA.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments:
10. This program prepared me to provide direct care to consumers at CPA.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments:


11. The length of the pre-employment training allowed me to learn enough to feel prepared to work at CPA.

<table>
<thead>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments:


12. The pre-employment training program provided me with an opportunity to get to know and work effectively with my co-workers.

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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments:


13. All expectations of me were clearly stated at the beginning of the pre-employment training program.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

14. During the pre-employment training program, I had the opportunity to demonstrate my motivation to learn the job tasks being taught to me by trainers.

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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Disagree</td>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

15. During the pre-employment training program, I had the opportunity to practice and perform job tasks showed to me by trainers.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
16. The pre-employment training program at CPA provided me with a good overview of the various CPA services and programs.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments:


17. The testing done during the pre-employment training program was a good measure of the new knowledges, skills and abilities gained during the length of the program.

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<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments:


Please use the space below for any additional comments:


Appendix C

Focus Group Questions
Focus group questions for Cerebral Palsy Association Pre-Employment Training Assessment

1) Regarding the training program, how did the outcome match up with expectations? What you expect to get vs. what you got (specifics).

2) As a successful “graduate” of the program, what were your initial expectations? How did you feel, afterwards, the training program matched up in providing knowledge, skills, and competencies that you find are required on a day-to-day basis at work?

3) Was the training environment conducive to learning? Would you like to see plans for any changes in environmental aspects (for example location of training, change of group size)?

4) How effective did you feel was the size in the group and what impact, if any, do you feel that the established size has in contributing to the effectiveness of the program?

5) How did you feel about the effectiveness of the initial screening part of the pre-employment training program? After the program was over, what are your opinions on the job placement aspect, i.e., how comfortable were you with your job offer?

6) Would you recommend, based on your experience, a pre-employment training program rather than the traditional training occurring after the hiring decision? Where do you see the benefits and where do you see possible downfalls?

7) Did you notice any change in your own personal levels of skills, knowledges, and abilities before and after the pre-employment training program?

8) (To the supervisors), In comparing a particular applicant group pre- and post-training, was there ever any noticeable difference in the group? Did you see any difference in the applicant’s attitude and/or behavior?
Appendix D

Summarized Focus Group Data
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOPIC</th>
<th>DISCUSSION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>TRAINING PROGRAM OUTCOMES VS. EXPECTATIONS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| HOW HAVE MATCHED PEOPLE BEEN PREPARED FOR JOB DUTIES| - Better in general – more training with hands-on care issues however  
- Employees not staying longer but they are of better quality  
- We are on a constant lookout for staff  
- Similar retention level to before pre-employment training  
  - Choosing to leave vs. performance issues  
  - The job here can be an interval job  
  - They go to another direct care position that possibly pays more  
- We are better at weeding out people who are not fit for the job |
| TRAINING ENVIRONMENT CONDUSIVE| - Yes, but we need more training as specifically assigned house  
- Choice is not left to employee  
  - They are assigned and must stay for 90 days  
  - They need to be clear of job preferences before they are assigned |
| ARE APPLICANTS SHOWN DAY HAB & ALL HOUSES THAT INCLUDE CONSUMERS IN THE HOUSE| Yes |
| SHOULD WE CHANGE LOCATION OF TRAINING| - Five to seven people is good  
- More off-site training before actually starting “job”  
- Personal care needs to be more emphasized  
- Med Certified vs. not med certified is quite different between houses |
| WHAT CHANGES ARE NEEDED| - Two weeks of rotation training before starting their position  
- Employees need to be more familiar with all sites  
- Employees need a better comfort level  
- This is not being done with the smaller groups that we are now getting – group size of at least seven or eight would warrant the more involved training  
- Mary-Jo will be getting more involved (maybe with rotational training) |
| SCREENING PROCESS| Are we getting the people we want? – Yes for the most part |
| APPLICANT RESPONSE| - Positive especially compared to what previous people received  
- There actually was no training before this pre-employment process  
- Two weeks good  
  - But more hands on, maybe more shadowing  
  - Maybe more practice |
| WHAT DO YOU HEAR ABOUT OUR TRAINING AS OPPOSED TO OTHER| - Friendly  
- At home  
- President/Vice President/Director knows by name face new employees in all the houses and vice versa  
- Any negative – if they had this training before then they tend to get bored  
  - Our format is new not necessarily new information for trainees  
  - The focus and priorities are ours – sometimes bored people are no longer here  
  - Our culture is presented – which is just as important and must be accepted  
  - Introduction – people, information, selection present  
  - Caring for Consumers – 6 hours course about environment, dignity, respect, assistance for consumer to live lives, emphasis on their home, their decisions about their environment  
  - Why is it the consumer’s – because they have a choice  
  - Everything is interwoven  
  - At the end they sign a chart at about what they agree to provide – a copy is put in the personal file  
  - Commitment to Caring |
| JOB RECOMMENDATIONS| Mostly come from family members or friends who have worked here |
| CONSUMER RESPONSE VS PREVIOUS TO PRE-EMPLOYMENT| - They want to know if they are going to get a certain open position in their house  
- TC gives positive feedback  
- We think it is positive |
| WHAT ARE EMPLOYEES BEFORE vs. AFTER SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE AND ABILITIES| - Yes they are better they have an increase in skills  
- Good at direct care not path oriented  
- They have a better comfort level |
| HAS THERE BEEN A DIFFERENCE IN THE VARIOUS GROUPS| - The most recent stands out  
  - Very involved with each other  
  - Very positive  
  - More cohesive  
  - More connected  
  - Very excited  
  - They all celebrated after they were offered a job |
| DIFFERENCE FROM FIRST TO LAST CLASS                   | • Screening  
|                                                 | • We are less tolerant of issues of lateness, absences  
|                                                 | • We can identify better the patterns  
|                                                 | • We excuse away less  
|                                                 | • Issues are brought forward faster  
|                                                 | • Criteria has been narrowed  
| FIRST GROUP                                      | • Good but some attendance issues  
|                                                 | • Half might not have made it if they were in a class today  
| REASON FOR TERMINATION                           | • More long term  
|                                                 | • New job  
|                                                 | • Different career path  
| ARE EMPLOYEES MORE COHESIVE NOW                  | • There are some cliques – from first groups  
|                                                 | • New groups seem to be just friendly  
| WOULD THEY CHOOSE TO WORK TOGETHER               | • Yes, because they are more familiar so they interact and support each other  
| THINGS THAT WE WOULD LIKE TO CHANGE              | • Streamline communication especially for trainers  
|                                                 | • More hands-on with consumers  
|                                                 | • Give managers/supervisors more feedback about classes  
|                                                 | • Involvement of trainers in selection process  
|                                                 | • Wider variety of trainers – we tend to use same ones  
|                                                 | • More body mechanics so we might prevent injuries  
| THINGS WE WOULD LIKE TO KEEP                      | • Level of involvement of Management Team and President  
|                                                 | • Information on treatment of consumers  
|                                                 | • Lecture training with involvement interactive balance  |
Appendix E

Retention Data
### Agency-Wide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Total Employees</th>
<th>Employees Hired</th>
<th>Employees Termed</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>Attrition Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 30, 2001</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>-39</td>
<td>56.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 30, 2000</td>
<td>359</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>-7</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Residential and IFSS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Total Employees</th>
<th>Employees Hired</th>
<th>Employees Termed</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>Attrition Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 30, 2001</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>-24</td>
<td>57.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 30, 2000</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>-13</td>
<td>39.0%</td>
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</table>

### Pre-employment

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Total Employees</th>
<th>Employees Hired</th>
<th>Employees Termed</th>
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<tr>
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<td>75</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>28.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 30, 2000</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

It should be noted that during the time period ending July 30, 2001, both the Residential and IFSS departments had restructured their staff, eliminating relief staff who were not being utilized and eliminating non-performers. Additionally, performance standards continue to be raised, leading to more employee terminations for performance issues.
Agency-Wide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Total Employees</th>
<th>Employees Hired</th>
<th>Employees Termed</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>Attrition Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>December 31, 2001</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>118</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 31, 2000</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>194</td>
<td></td>
<td>59.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Residential and IFSS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Total Employees</th>
<th>Employees Hired</th>
<th>Employees Termed</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>Attrition Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>December 31, 2001</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>78</td>
<td></td>
<td>41.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 31, 2000</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>140</td>
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<td>71.1%</td>
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</table>

Pre-employment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
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<th>Employees Hired</th>
<th>Employees Termed</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>Attrition Rate</th>
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<tr>
<td>December 31, 2001</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>88</td>
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<td>75</td>
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<td>47</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
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</table>

It should be noted that in 2001, Discovery was closed. This would account for 15 of the 118 employees whose employment was terminated during 2001.

Also there are significant decreases in the attrition in the Residential and IFSS departments.
Appendix F

Raw Data Tables
Table I. Raw Demographic Data

<table>
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<tr>
<th>M</th>
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Table III. *t*-test Results

The TTEST Procedure

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<th>Mean</th>
<th>Mean Std Dev</th>
<th>Mean Std Err</th>
<th>Upper CL Mean</th>
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**T-Tests**

| Variable | Method         | Variances   | DF  | t Value | Pr > |t| |
|----------|----------------|-------------|-----|---------|------|-----|
| satis    | Pooled         | Equal       | 26  | -3.24   | 0.0032 |
| satis    | Satterthwaite  | Unequal     | 19.5| -3.15   | 0.0051 |

**Equality of Variances**

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<th>Num DF</th>
<th>Den DF</th>
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Table IV: Factor Component Analysis Data

January 7, 2002  8

The FACTOR Procedure
Initial Factor Method: Principal Components
Prior Communality Estimates: ONE

Eigenvalues of the Correlation Matrix: Total = 9  Average = 1

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<th>Difference</th>
<th>Proportion</th>
<th>Cumulative</th>
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<td>1.85443323</td>
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3 factors will be retained by the MINEIGEN criterion.

Rotated Factor Pattern

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Variance Explained by Each Factor

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<td>3.0875382</td>
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Final Communality Estimates: Total = 6.981291