

Training and Development Framework to Improve the Maintenance Workers' Productivity in the Sri Lankan Hotel Sector

Nadeeshan Satharasinghe

Sithro Garment Finishing Company Limited, Ekala

Nirodha Gayani Fernando

Department of Building Economics, University of Moratuwa

Pournima Sridarran

Department of Building Economics, University of Moratuwa

Abstract

The hospitality industry and hotels in particular, have witnessed increasing competition for high service quality and customer satisfaction. Sri Lankan hotel industry faces a range of difficulties due to lack of productivity of the maintenance workers. Training and Development (T&D) is one of the foremost part of human resource management which can influence to improve productivity of maintenance workers. Accordingly, the aim of this research is develop a T&D framework to improve the maintenance workers productivity in the hotel industry. Case study was selected as the most suitable research method for this study. The reasons being, the study needed to focus on in-depth decisions and behavioural attitudes of individuals and groups within and between organisations. Case study findings revealed that, organisations conceived a positive impression on the importance of systematic implementation of T&D to improve the productivity of the maintenance staff. However, the organisations found themselves confronted by some barriers on implementing such systematic processes. As a result, the importance of adapting such systematic processes and the benefits they may bring into the organisation remain unidentified by the organisations.

Keywords: Training and Development, Productivity, Maintenance workers

1. Introduction

Hospitality is one of the world's oldest professions, and it continues to be figured by its history. At the same time it is changing quite momentarily in response to changing requirements and expectations of consumers (Crick and Spencer, 2010). Consequently, maintenance of hospitality buildings became difficult and active as the performance of the engineering systems is subjected to insightful user's requirements (Chan *et al.*, 2001). Maintenance performance is generally hard to quantify (Groote, 1995). However, productivity and dependability are significantly dependent upon human factors and this is chiefly apparent in relation to maintainability and maintenance works (Winterton, 1981). Unfortunately, most of the Sri Lankan hotels are facing a range of difficulties due to unskilled maintenance workers.

2. Rationale

Literature on Training and Development (T&D) is comparatively new in the context of hotel sector. Based on case studies conducted by Yang (2010) in Renaissance Shanghai Yuyuan Hotel, China, and Ameerq and Hanif (2013) in the hotel sector of the Lahore, Pakistan, employees' perception towards the organisation and the work performance is significantly affected by the training and development. However, Yang's (2010) study reveals that, the expected outcome of the training is not achieved most of the times. Further, Sharma and Choudhary (2011) stated that, due to economic and budgetary constraints the hotels are tempted to cut down training programmes. Abovementioned facts proved that the training and development needs an effective implementation method to achieve its objectives.

Numerous literatures (Ben-Daya *et al.*, 2009; Hooi, 2009; Dowling *et al.*, 1999) discussed the variety of benefits which can be achieved by the organisations and the employees. However organisations are reluctant to conduct T&D programmes due to various reasons such as cost constraints, unavailability of resource persons, lack of commitments of the employees (Sharma and Choudhary, 2011). As a result, the research problem that emerged through this study is the importance given to T&D programmes by the organisations and the maintenance workers are not sufficient enough to achieve the benefits of T&D.

Further, Worker's productivity can be affected by several factors such as unclear instructions, lack of knowledge, delay arrival of materials, lack of equipment, working environment, frequent damage of equipment, glare, ergonomic issues, argument with workers, lack of supervision (Attar et al., 2012; Yates, 2014). Based on a research rating conducted by Mahamid et al., (2013) the most important factor affecting general labour productivity is lack of labour experience. Researchers suggested training and motivation as a solution to improve labour experience (Attar et al., 2012, Mahamid et al., 2013).

Training and Development (T&D) is one of the processes of developing and unleashing capabilities of the Human Resources which can influence to improve productivity of maintenance workers (Swanson, 2001). Therefore, this study aims to develop a T&D framework to improve the productivity of the maintenance workers of the hotel sector by providing a suitable process to conduct the T&D programmes.

3. Literature review

3.1 Maintenance of hotel buildings

Maintenance is the effort in connection with different technical and administrative actions to keep a physical asset, or restore it to a condition where it can perform a required function (Chan *et al.*, 2001). The importance of maintenance in the hotels is critical as they are active, complex and costly buildings to function. There are different uses of spaces that have unusual schedules and consumption, comprising guest rooms, restaurants, health club, function rooms, retail stores, laundry, swimming pool, etc. in hotels (Chan *et al.*, 2001). The process of Maintenance Management in a hotel is often a shared responsibility, although it may be allocated directly to the maintenance department (Lockyer, 2013). Lack of maintenance can very quickly impact the appearance, efficiency and guest satisfaction in a hotel. The ability of management to maintain a property is often closely related to the profitability of the hotel (Lockyer, 2013).

3.2 Maintenance worker's productivity in hotel sector

With increasing awareness that maintenance creates added value to the business process; organisations are treating maintenance as an integral part of their business. For many asset-intensive industries, the maintenance costs are significant portion of the operational cost (Ben-Daya *et al.*, 2009). Since maintenance activities are multidisciplinary in nature with a large number of inputs and outputs, the performance of Maintenance productivity needs to be measured and considered holistically with an integrated approach (Ben-Daya *et al.*, 2009).

The productivity of people is typically measured as the ratio of real to estimated resources. In the maintenance perspective, it determines downtime period and resources. The first lowers profits and the second raises costs. In both cases, they influence profitability adversely (Narayan, 2012). Productivity and dependability are crucially reliant on human factors and this is predominantly apparent regarding maintainability and maintenance work (Winterton, 1981). Effective human resource management is one of the most important considerations in creating and maintaining a competitive advantage for a hotel. Indeed, it can improve the productivity of the workers in many ways (O'Fallon and Rutherford, 2011). Furthermore, Training and Development (T&D) is one of the foremost part of human resource management which can influence to improve productivity of maintenance workers.

3.3 Importance of Training and Development for the maintenance workers

Organisational training is usually viewed as a public advantage to the point that employees discover it challenging to even regard as transferring any new acquired skills in training to their working surroundings (Hassi and Storti, 2009). T&D today is increasing recognition as a way of expanding skills, enhancing productivity and class of work, and building employee loyalty to the firm. Most importantly, it is a tool for increasing entity and organisational performance to achieve business results (Hooi, 2009). Training aims to develop current work skills and actions, whereas development aims to increase abilities in relative to some future position or job, usually a managerial one (Dowling *et al.*, 1999). When the organisation invests in improving the knowledge and skills of its employees, the investment is returned in the form of more productive and effective employees (York, 2009). Managing workforce of hospitality related company is somewhat different from other businesses. Hospitality businesses supply series of services and so employees should take in to account individual favourite of each customer. Therefore effective training is the basic element of success in the hotel industry (Amirtharaj *et al.*, 2011).

Organisations also get benefits through T&D programmes along with the employees in many ways. Figure 1 shows the employee benefits and organisational benefits of T&D programmes.

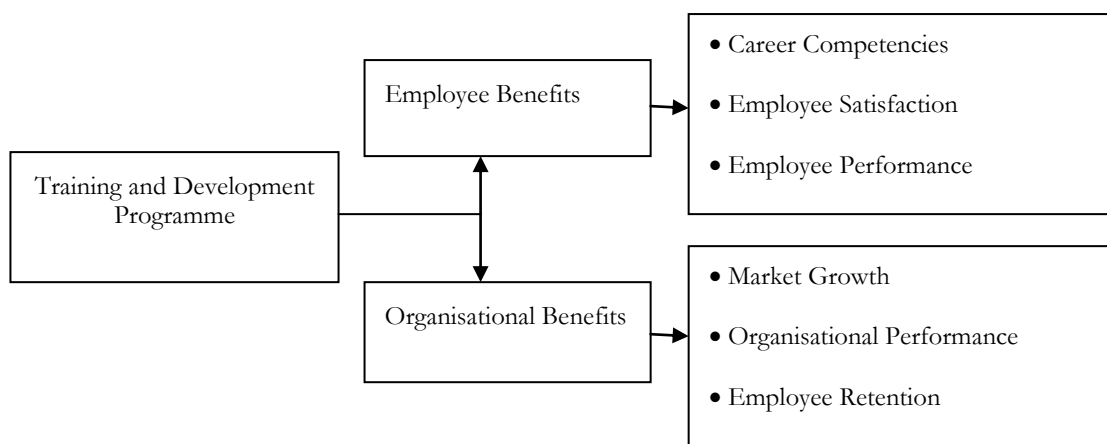


Figure 1: Employee and organisational benefits of T&D

Source: Jehanzeb and Bashir, 2013

4. Research method

Case study was adopted as the most suitable research method for this study as it provides an in depth understanding about the subject being studied not usually offered by other qualitative methodologies (Hancock, 1998). Furthermore, Yin (2009) stated that, the use of the case study methodology is appropriate when organisational and managerial issues need to be examined. As such, semi-structured interviews were considered as ideal because it draws more elaborative and persistent answers from the respondents to the raised questions. Being so, the interviews were carried out among Human Resources Managers in the hotel industry and content analysis was conducted to analyse the interviews. Further, to achieve the data triangulation a questionnaire survey was conducted to rate each important and satisfaction aspects of the maintenance workers about training and development.

Three Sri Lankan hotels were taken as cases for this study. All of them are three star hotels with less than 30 maintenance staff. Descriptions of the cases are presented in the Table 1.

Table 1: Profile of the cases

Cases	Hotel A	Hotel B	Hotel C
Type	3 Star Hotel	3 Star Hotel	3 Star Hotel
Description	Land area 36 acres, 105 guest rooms, bar, restaurant (à la carte), restaurant (buffet), Garden, terrace, outdoor pool	Land area 32 acres, 125 guest rooms, bar, restaurant, gym, shopping arcade, seafood restaurant, swimming pool, night club	Land area 27 acres, 116 sumptuous rooms, a Presidential suite and 6 suites, medical facilities, restaurant, bar, exhibition hall, conference rooms, banqueting
Type of customers/ occupants	Business guests and guest for functions such as weddings, meetings etc.	Business guests and guest for various functions like conferences	Tenant employees and their clients
Maintenance Staff	26 workers with one maintenance engineer and two maintenance supervisors	23 workers with one maintenance engineer, one assistant engineer and three supervisors	27 workers with two maintenance engineers and four supervisors

5. Research findings and discussion

Collected data were analysed under four different themes as shown in Figure 2.

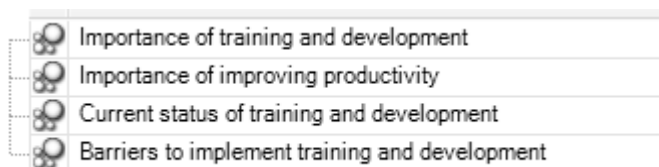


Figure 2: Coding structure of research themes

5.1. Importance of T&D in hotel sector

Nature of T&D programmes differ from industry to industry. However, all the industries need to train and develop their employees to stay ahead of the competition of their own industry. According to the findings, all the interviewees understood the importance of T&D. Human Resource Manager (HRM) of 'Hotel A' emphasised that, *'Training programs helps to improve the productivity and efficiency of an employee. Since it saves time we can assign the employee for another task in his idling time'*. This statement proves that T&D programmes are value additions and have a positive relationship with the organisational success. Further, HRM of 'Hotel B' stated that, *'Training and development can motivate the employees towards their work'*. Choo and Bowley (2007) also proved the same statement from their study.

Even though the top management agreed that T&D is important for the development of the staff, the questionnaire survey which was carried out among hotel maintenance workers proved that the workers are not 100% aware about the importance of the T&D programmes. Figure 3 illustrates the results of the questionnaire survey on importance of T&D programmes for maintenance workers.

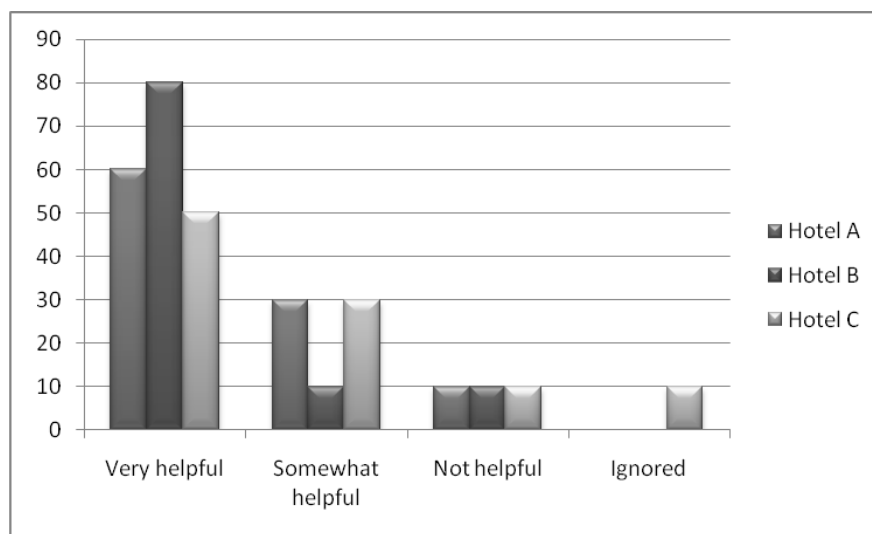


Figure 3: Importance of T&D
Note: Rated by maintenance workers

Based on the figure, majority of the workers agreed that T&D programmes are interesting and helpful. However, around 20% of the workers are not understood the importance of the T&D programmes. The top managements have to take necessary actions to improve employees' knowledge and awareness to enhance their commitment towards T&D programmes. Otherwise, the organisational and personal benefits will not be achieved through T&D programmes by both employers and employees.

5.2. Importance of improving productivity

Productivity can be defined as the percentage of the total time a worker spends on productive work (Groote, 1995). As described beforehand, T&D programmes will improve the productivity of the workers. However, importance of improving workers productivity for an organisation should be understood by the management. According to the interview results, all the HRMs are aware about the importance of improving the productivity of the employees. HRM of the 'Hotel A' stated that, *'Training and development can make a person more knowledgeable. So, the workers can develop their career and ultimately it will improve their living standard'*. Further HRM of 'Hotel C' stated that, *'Workers' productivity improvement will beneficial to the organisation as well. It will reduce the burden of the top level managers and will increase the profitability of the organisation as well'*. The opinions of both HRMs proved that, improving productivity of the workers is a value addition to the employees as well as the organisation.

5.3 Current status of training and development in the hotel industry

Findings of the study revealed that, T&D programmes for maintenance workers are not conducted regularly or sufficiently in all the selected cases. According to HRM of 'Hotel A' *"we don't conduct any regular training and development programmes for the maintenance workers due to budgetary constrain. However, we invite industry experts occasionally to share their knowledge and experience with our workers."* Furthermore, HRM of 'Hotel A' confessed that, *"the trends of T&D are improving year by year. Yet, I am not aware about new trends of T&D programmes"*. The statement confirms the unawareness of the management's lesser commitment towards workers' improvement.

Similar status has been observed in the other two cases as well. HRM of 'Hotel B' stated that, "Even though we don't conduct any regular training and development programmes, we conduct fire and safety seminars to our maintenance workers according to the requirement". However, fire safety seminars for the occupants are mandatory to ensure the fire safety of the building. It will not improve the productivity related to the maintenance job of the workers. Further, according to HRM of 'Hotel C', the hotel is in the process of regulating and scheduling of T&D programmes.

Maintenance workers were required to rate the current T&D programme of the selected cases in order to find their opinion towards the current practices. Approximately 75% of the workers found T&D programmes very helpful in the previous survey. However, majority of the maintenance workers are not satisfied with the current status of the T&D programmes in all the selected cases. Figure 4 shows the results of the survey.

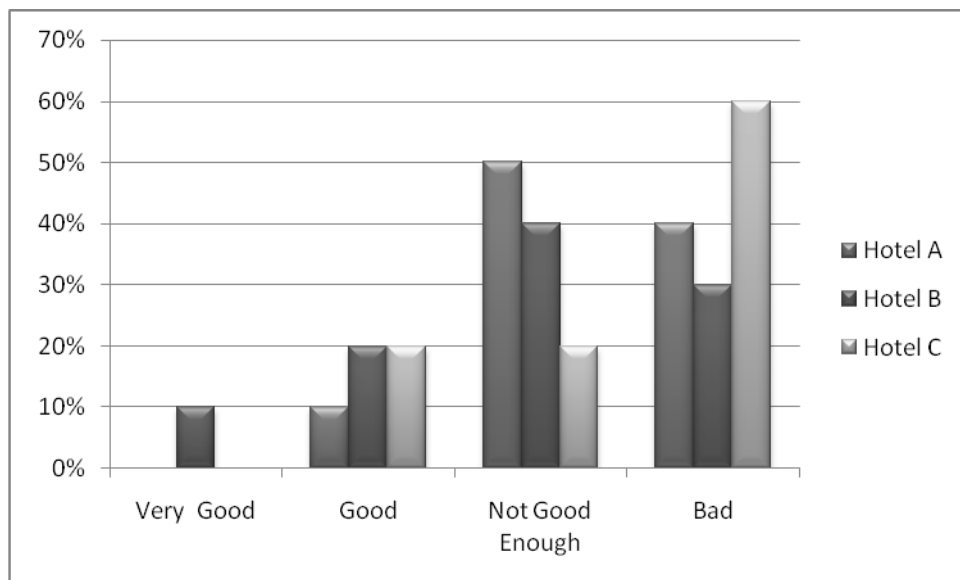


Figure 4: Current status of T&D programmes

Note: Rated by maintenance workers

5.4 Barriers to implement training and development programmes in hotel sector

Findings revealed that, none of the selected cases are conducting regular T&D programmes for maintenance staffs. Figure 5 illustrates the reasons stated by the management. According to the figure ignorance of both management and the workers is the main reason for not conducting regular T&D programmes. Moreover, organisation's unawareness, budgetary constrains and unavailability of experts to conduct training programmes are admitted as other reasons.



Figure 5: Reasons for not conducting regular T&D programmes

In the workers' point of view one of the reasons for their lack of commitment towards T&D is difficulty in understanding. Figure 6 shows the rating of the employees.

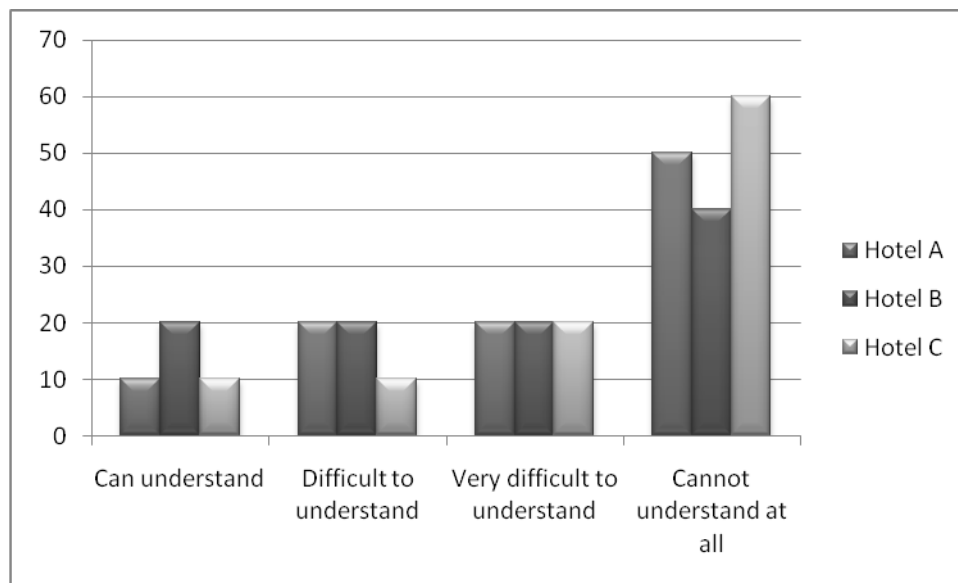


Figure 6: Level of difficulty in understanding T&D programmes

Note: Rated by maintenance workers

In accordance with the figure, around 50% of the workers are unable to understand the lectures/ discussion of the T&D programmes. One of the main reasons for this result is, most the T&D programmes are conducted in English language. Around 65% of the maintenance workers who are not well-informed in English cannot understand the content of the T&D programmes. As a consequence, organisations' resources and the time of the workers will be spoilt. Thus, organisations have to plan on the efficiency of the programme before conducting it. Before conducting T&D programmes, identifying the correct target group is the foremost job. Target groups can be divided based on experience of maintenance workers, age of the maintenance workers, educational level, availability and the category of the maintenance workers.

5.5 Training and development framework

Literature and findings revealed that, T&D will improve the productivity of the workers. However, in the Sri Lankan hotel sector T&D programmes are not conducted regularly. Many reasons expressed by the management and workers for the malpractice of T&D. As a key recommendation, a T&D framework is developed to provide a guideline for the practitioners based on the suggestions given by the respondents of the cases. Figure 7 illustrates the T&D framework.

Figure 7 includes the steps to be followed by the management during the organisation of T&D programmes and their outputs. First step is identifying the target group. During this step age, experience and educational qualifications of the workers should be taken into consideration. Second step is identifying the requirement. Requirement of the hotel management and requirement of the workers can differ according to their positions. Further, current status of the T&D of the hotel is also taken into consideration in this step. Next step is the selection of experts. During this step availability of the experts should be analysed and organisation's budget allocation to the T&D programmes should be compared with the availability of the experts. Finally T&D programme should be conducted and the feedback of the programmes should be taken from the workers for future improvement. By following these steps, all the benefits of the T&D can be achieved.

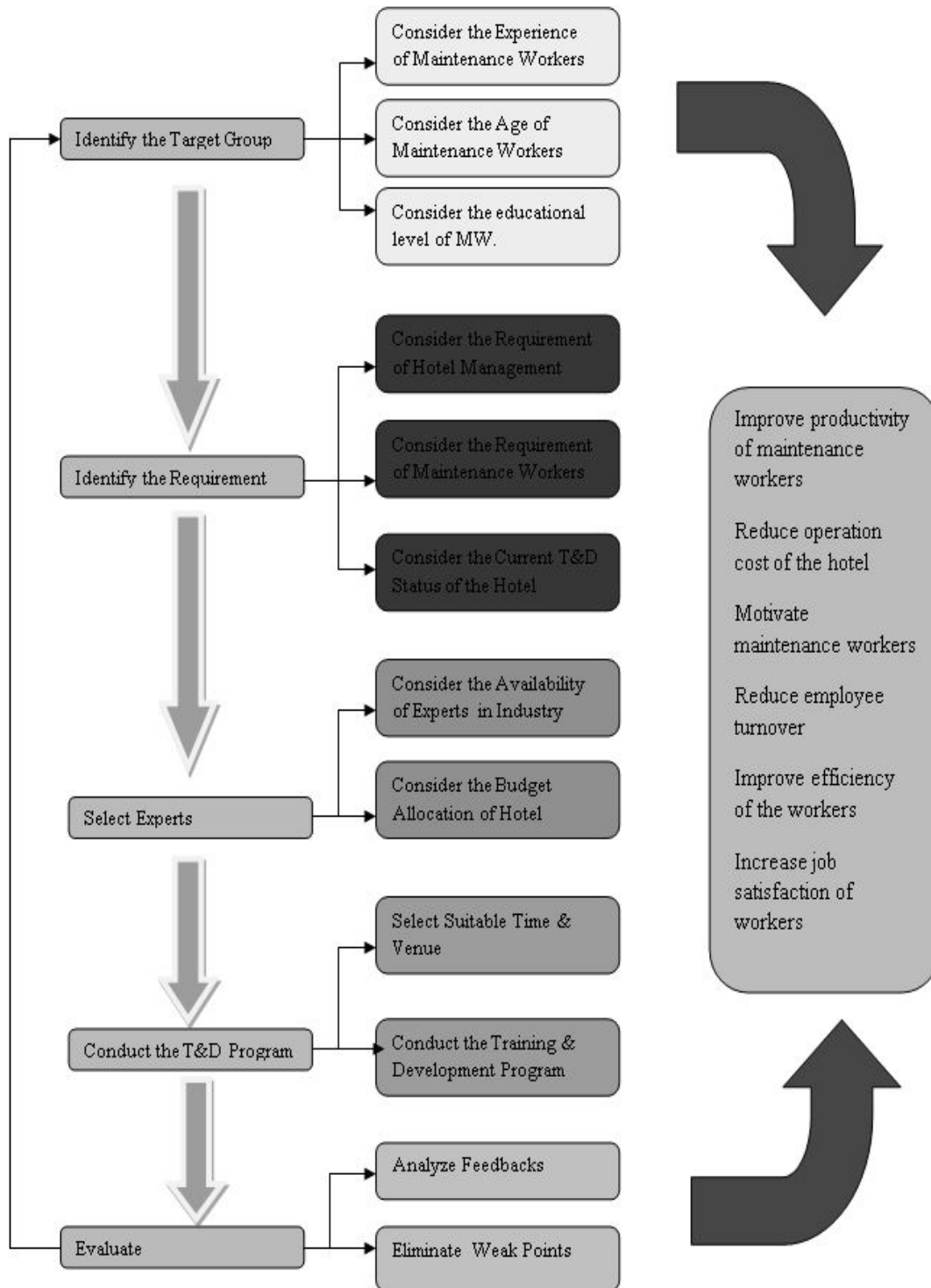


Figure 7: Training and development framework

6. Conclusions

Training and development can play a significant role within the organisation to improve productivity of the workers. According to the findings HRMs are reluctant towards conducting T&Ds. This is due to many reasons such as, budget constraints, unawareness, commitment of the workers, and constraints on getting the resource persons. Moreover, maintenance workers also not committed due to their educational level, language barriers and busy working schedules. In order to avoid the disadvantages that may result from malpractice of T&D, organisations need to adopt a systematic approach. Steps for organising T&D were identified from the literature and related with the findings to provide a T&D framework for the practitioners.

This study was limited to the hotels in a particular city of Sri Lanka. Case study samples were limited due to the scale of the study and the time constraints. Therefore this study can be continued to different work fields with a bigger set of sample.

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