

Value of Training Needs Assessment

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Introduction

A training needs assessment is a systematic investigation of the difference between the capabilities an organization requires and the capabilities its employees currently demonstrate. Its value is not limited to deciding whether a course should be delivered. A sound assessment helps management determine whether a performance problem is actually caused by a lack of knowledge or skill, identify the employees and tasks most affected, establish priorities, and select interventions that support the organization's strategy. This prevents money and time from being spent on the wrong people, the wrong content, or a problem that training cannot solve. In a company such as Maersk, where customer experience employees coordinate across functions, systems, countries, and time zones, the assessment must connect individual learning needs with the wider goal of providing reliable, responsive, and commercially informed service (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2025; International Labour Organization, 2015; Salas et al., 2012).

Why Training Needs Assessment Creates Organizational Value

The first value of a training needs assessment is diagnostic accuracy. Poor performance may arise from inadequate knowledge, but it may also result from unclear procedures, weak technology, excessive workload, conflicting incentives, poor supervision, missing information, or an organizational structure that prevents employees from acting effectively. Training is appropriate when employees need to learn or practice a capability; it is ineffective when the underlying barrier is outside their control. An assessment therefore protects the training budget by distinguishing trainable gaps from non-training problems. It also establishes a baseline against which later improvement can be measured. Without a baseline, a company may record attendance and course-completion rates yet remain unable to demonstrate whether employees became more competent or whether business performance improved (Salas et al., 2012; Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2025).

A second benefit is strategic alignment. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development explains that learning needs analysis should begin with current and future organizational capability requirements and should be an ongoing process rather than a rigid annual exercise. This distinction is important because jobs change as technology, customer expectations, regulation, and business models change. The International Labour Organization similarly treats skills anticipation as a systematic effort to identify present and future workforce demands. For Maersk, this means that a needs assessment should not only address current service errors or knowledge gaps. It should also

anticipate capabilities required by digital customer platforms, integrated logistics services, data-based decision-making, cross-functional coordination, risk awareness, and continuous process improvement. The result is a more defensible learning plan because every priority can be traced to a business requirement (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2025; International Labour Organization, 2015; International Labour Organization, 2017).

A Three-Level Diagnostic Framework

The original needs-assessment model can be strengthened by treating organizational, task, and person analysis as connected levels rather than separate checklists. Evidence should move from the broad business context to the work itself and then to the employees who perform it. Using only one level can create misleading conclusions. For example, managers may request communication training because customers complain about slow responses, while a task analysis may show that the real problem is delayed access to shipment information. Conversely, a new system may be available and procedures may be clear, but a person analysis may reveal that employees lack confidence in explaining exceptions to customers. The three levels therefore produce a more complete explanation of the performance gap (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2025; Salas et al., 2012).

Organizational Analysis

Organizational analysis identifies the strategic reason for training and the conditions that will support or obstruct it. Maersk's human-resource and learning specialists should consult operational leaders, customer experience managers, quality teams, subject-matter experts, and employees to clarify the outcomes the business is trying to achieve. Relevant questions include whether the priority is faster case resolution, more accurate documentation, stronger customer retention, safer handling of sensitive information, better use of digital tools, improved collaboration, or preparation for a new service model. The analysis should review performance indicators, customer feedback, quality audits, process changes, incident reports, workforce plans, and regulatory obligations. It should also examine whether supervisors have time to coach employees and whether systems, policies, and incentives reinforce the behaviors expected after training. If the work environment contradicts the learning objective, even a well-designed program will have limited effect (Salas et al., 2012; A.P. Moller – Maersk, 2025).

Task and Workflow Analysis

Task analysis breaks a job into duties, decisions, knowledge requirements, and performance standards. For a Maersk customer experience or CARE-type role, the analysis should examine the complete workflow rather than an isolated job description. Employees may need to understand customer onboarding, shipment milestones, documentation, exception management, digital channels, claims or dispute processes, internal escalation routes, and the commercial context of the customer's

business. Current Maersk customer-experience vacancies emphasize end-to-end case ownership, customer relationship management, cross-functional collaboration, compliance with procedures, and continuous improvement. These responsibilities indicate that effective performance depends on both technical process knowledge and interpersonal judgment. Observations, interviews with experienced performers, analysis of common errors, system data, and critical-incident reviews can reveal which steps are difficult, which mistakes create the greatest risk, and which behaviors distinguish acceptable from excellent performance (A.P. Moller – Maersk, 2025; Salas et al., 2012).

Person and Performance Analysis

Person analysis identifies who requires development and what each individual or group needs to improve. It should not be used merely to label employees as strong or weak. A fair assessment combines several forms of evidence, such as work samples, quality scores, knowledge checks, simulations, customer feedback, manager observations, self-assessments, and employee discussions. This approach reduces the risk of relying on a single subjective opinion. It can also distinguish between a new employee who lacks basic process knowledge, an experienced employee who needs a refresher after a system change, and a high performer who is ready for advanced problem-solving or mentoring responsibilities. Employees should be informed about the purpose of the assessment and how the information will be used. When the process is transparent and developmental rather than punitive, employees are more likely to disclose genuine difficulties and participate actively in designing solutions (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2025; Salas et al., 2012).

Converting Identified Gaps into SMART Learning Objectives

The assessment becomes actionable when evidence is translated into specific learning objectives. SMART objectives are useful because they define what the employee must be able to do, the conditions under which the behavior should occur, the standard of acceptable performance, and the time frame for achievement. A vague objective such as “improve customer service” does not provide enough direction for instructional design or evaluation. A stronger objective might require a customer experience employee to diagnose and route a defined set of shipment exceptions using the correct system and escalation path with at least 95 percent accuracy by the end of supervised practice. Another objective might require the employee to conduct a simulated difficult-customer conversation while accurately explaining available options, documenting the interaction, and meeting an agreed quality rubric (Salas et al., 2012).

SMART objectives also improve motivation and coordination because employees, trainers, and managers share the same definition of success. However, objectives should not be reduced to narrow numerical targets that encourage superficial compliance. A speed target, for example, may damage accuracy or empathy if it is not balanced with quality measures. Objectives should therefore

represent the complete performance standard, including technical accuracy, customer impact, regulatory requirements, collaboration, and professional judgment. The needs assessment provides the evidence for choosing these measures, while managers ensure that recognition and performance systems do not reward behavior that conflicts with the training (Salas et al., 2012).

Designing Learning Activities for Maersk Customer Experience Work

Learning activities should be selected according to the nature of the gap rather than according to convenience. Short digital modules may be appropriate for factual updates, terminology, or system navigation. Demonstrations and guided practice are more suitable for procedures. Case analysis, role-playing, and simulations are valuable when employees must diagnose ambiguous situations, communicate with customers, or coordinate with other departments. Job shadowing and mentoring can expose less-experienced employees to expert reasoning that is difficult to capture in a manual. Maersk's current learning-and-development recruitment materials emphasize onboarding, process refreshers, digital learning, capability building, stakeholder alignment, and adapting content to the audience and business context. These priorities support a blended design in which employees learn essential information, practice realistic tasks, receive feedback, and apply the capability in their normal work (A.P. Moller – Maersk, 2025; A.P. Moller – Maersk, n.d.; Salas et al., 2012).

Practice Built Around Customer and Operational Risk

For customer experience teams, scenarios should reproduce the decisions employees actually face. A case might involve conflicting shipment information, a delayed document, a customer escalation, a compliance restriction, or a failure that requires coordination across operations and commercial teams. The learner should be required to identify the issue, locate reliable information, explain the situation clearly, choose an escalation route, document the case, and consider the customer's broader business needs. This creates a stronger link between training and performance than a lecture alone. Scenarios should vary in complexity and should include both routine and unusual cases. Immediate, specific feedback allows employees to understand not only whether an answer was correct but why a decision was appropriate and how it affected the customer and the organization (A.P. Moller – Maersk, 2025; Salas et al., 2012).

Transfer, Reinforcement, and Manager Support

Learning is valuable only when it transfers to the workplace. Transfer is more likely when employees have opportunities to use the new capability soon after training, managers provide coaching, job aids are available, and workplace procedures support the desired behavior. A practical plan might combine formal instruction with supervised cases, weekly coaching, peer discussion, and a short follow-up

assessment after several weeks. Managers should review selected cases and recognize correct application rather than merely course completion. Skill matrices can show which employees are qualified for particular tasks and where refresher training is required. The learning team should also revise materials when systems or procedures change. This makes training a continuing capability process rather than a one-time event that becomes outdated (Salas et al., 2012; A.P. Moller – Maersk, n.d.).

Adult Learning and Experiential Methods

Adult-learning principles strengthen the design because employees bring prior experience, established work habits, and immediate performance concerns to training. Adult learners are generally more engaged when they understand why the learning matters, can connect new information to experience, have some influence over their goals, and solve realistic problems. This does not mean that every learner should choose all content independently. Mandatory safety, compliance, and process requirements must still be covered. It means that trainers should respect employees as capable participants, invite them to analyze cases, and allow them to identify areas in which they need further practice. Self-assessment can be useful when combined with objective evidence because employees may either underestimate or overestimate their competence (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2015).

Experiential methods convert these principles into action. Role-playing allows employees to practice difficult conversations without risking a customer relationship. Simulations enable them to make operational decisions and experience consequences in a controlled setting. Mentoring supports individualized goals and exposes trainees to the reasoning of experienced colleagues. Collaborative case reviews help employees compare approaches and learn across functions. After each activity, structured reflection is essential: participants should identify what happened, why it happened, what principle applies, and how they will act in a real case. Maersk's professional-development materials emphasize mastering the job, continuing to develop skills and knowledge, seeking accountability, and learning through practical experience and mentorship. These elements are consistent with a workplace learning model that treats employees as partners in development while maintaining clear performance standards (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2015; A.P. Moller – Maersk, n.d.; Salas et al., 2012).

Evaluation and Continuous Improvement

Evaluation should be planned during the needs assessment rather than added after delivery. At the first level, the organization can examine whether employees found the learning relevant and whether the activity addressed the identified need. More importantly, knowledge checks, demonstrations, and simulations can determine whether learning occurred. Workplace evidence should then show whether employees applied the capability, while business indicators can reveal whether the intervention

contributed to improved results. Depending on the objective, useful indicators may include documentation accuracy, first-contact resolution, case-cycle time, quality-audit results, escalation patterns, customer feedback, error recurrence, or manager observations. Because these outcomes may be influenced by technology, staffing, workload, and process design, the organization should avoid claiming that training alone caused every change (Salas et al., 2012).

The final stage is to compare results with the original gap and decide what should happen next. If employees learned the material but workplace behavior did not change, the problem may involve manager support, opportunity to practice, or conflicting incentives. If behavior changed but customer outcomes did not improve, the organization may have selected the wrong performance measure or misunderstood the business problem. If some groups improve and others do not, the learning design may need greater differentiation. These findings should feed into the next assessment cycle. In this way, needs assessment, design, delivery, transfer, and evaluation operate as a connected system (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2025; Salas et al., 2012).

Limitations and Safeguards

A training needs assessment can itself be flawed. Managers may request training as a quick response to a visible problem without investigating its causes. Employees may hesitate to report weaknesses if they fear punishment. Data may reflect past performance while overlooking emerging skills. Standardized assessments may disadvantage employees who can perform effectively but do not test well. The process can also become too broad, generating a long list of desirable topics without prioritizing those that matter most. These risks can be reduced by using multiple evidence sources, involving employees and stakeholders, separating development from disciplinary processes where possible, reviewing future business changes, and ranking needs according to impact, urgency, risk, and feasibility (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2025; International Labour Organization, 2017).

Organizations should also recognize that not every gap requires a formal course. A revised procedure, clearer job aid, system improvement, coaching conversation, staffing change, or better access to information may be more appropriate. The central question is not “What training can be delivered?” but “What conditions and capabilities are required for successful performance?” Training should be selected only when it is part of the answer. This principle protects resources and strengthens confidence in the learning function (Salas et al., 2012; Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2025).

Conclusion

The value of a training needs assessment lies in its ability to connect organizational goals with the realities of work and the capabilities of employees. For Maersk, an effective assessment should

examine strategic priorities, customer experience workflows, individual performance evidence, future skill requirements, and the workplace conditions needed for learning to transfer. The findings should be converted into balanced SMART objectives and addressed through learning activities matched to the task, including digital instruction, realistic cases, role-playing, mentoring, guided practice, and manager-supported reinforcement. Adult-learning principles make the process more relevant and participatory, while evaluation determines whether learning has improved behavior and business outcomes (A.P. Moller – Maersk, 2025; A.P. Moller – Maersk, n.d.; Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2025; International Labour Organization, 2015; International Labour Organization, 2017; Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2015; Salas et al., 2012).

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