

# Laying the Tracks for Soft Skill Development at TransNamib



An analysis of TransNamib employee soft skills

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# Laying the Tracks for Soft Skill Development at TransNamib

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## **ABSTRACT**

This project aided TransNamib Holdings Limited in identifying areas for soft skill improvement and offered recommendations for soft skill development techniques. The team conducted interviews, used job shadowing, and completed a cycle of Instructional Rounds with employees from five separate TransNamib locations in Windhoek, Namibia. The data revealed communication, motivation, and soft skill education as areas for improvement. The team recommended an incentives program, a modified Instructional Rounds process, and a mentor program to aid in the development of TransNamib's soft skills.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Introduction and Background

“We [TransNamib] are the transport of Namibia.” This sentiment from a TransNamib Holdings Limited employee is a reflection of the pride employees have in their company as well as the impact that the company can have on Namibia. TransNamib, the sole railway company in Namibia, is in a unique geographical position to connect Namibia’s bordering landlocked countries of the southern African continent to the Atlantic Ocean. Through its access to Namibia’s main port, Walvis Bay, TransNamib has the opportunity to help establish Namibia as the gateway to trade for the lower continent. Figure 1 below displays the locations of Walvis Bay, Namibia, and the rest of the southern continent.



Figure 1: Map of Namibia in Relation to Southern Africa (Maps, 2017 with overlay)

Over the past decade, TransNamib has faced financial hardships. As a parastatal company, TransNamib struggles to make company-wide changes. To fulfill its potential and become this facilitator of progress, the company needs to make improvements. These improvements must come from employees and occur within the rail operations sector of TransNamib. This sector is responsible for the movement of all the bulk freight in Namibia which generates 88% of the company’s revenue. It is composed of a hierarchy of managers that oversee supervisors, and general employees who report to these supervisors. The working relationships within this employee structure are key to the success of the sector. The supervisors and managers are responsible for monitoring their employees as well as motivating them, ensuring clear communication, and providing leadership. To fulfill TransNamib’s potential, these employees need well-developed soft skills to create improvement within the rail operations sector at TransNamib.

Soft skills are interpersonal skills that assist the possessor when working with other employees. Good soft skills include effective communication, an ability to motivate oneself, as

well as an ability to recognize emotional states. At TransNamib, these skills are necessary for employees to develop because teamwork is crucial when working in the rail sector. TransNamib, the project sponsor, tasked the project team with identifying areas for soft skill improvements.

## **Methodology**

The goal of this project was to identify areas for soft skill improvement and offer recommendations on possible soft skill development techniques for the TransNamib rail operations sector's managers and supervisors by conducting a detailed analysis of current daily practices. To accomplish this goal, the project team constructed the following objectives:

1. Gain trust and build relationships with employees
2. Understand current practices and viewpoints of employees pertaining to soft skills
3. Observe TransNamib's employee's soft skills first-hand
4. Work alongside employees to identify areas for soft skill improvement.

To achieve these objectives, the project team utilized three techniques to collect data from stakeholders: interviewing, job shadowing, and Instructional Rounds. The use of three methods allowed for the cross reference of data in a process called triangulation. Since there are many stakeholders associated with TransNamib, to better focus the research the team concentrated on internal stakeholders. The first step was to categorize employees involved in the project into five stakeholder groups based on their office location: head office, marshaling yard, Goodshed, train station, and WinCon. Most interactions with employees occurred at the head office and the marshaling yard, as these office locations house the bulk of the rail operations sector employees. The project members worked with employees from the Goodshed, train station, and WinCon to gain a more holistic view of the company.

This study first conducted 23 semi-structured interviews with employees across all stakeholder groups. The purpose of this method was to accomplish objectives one and two. The first step was to begin building relationships with employees, while gaining a baseline understanding of current practices and viewpoints of employees at TransNamib. The interviews were semi-structured. Each interview began with an oral history followed by varying questions to learn about specific themes. This approach was intended to create a comfortable and conversational environment for the interviewee. It also allowed the interviewer to vary questions based on an employee's background and position. The project group inquired about soft skills, training, and company morale. Once completed, the final step was to code the interview data. Coding is a method that organizes the data by turning qualitative answers into quantitative data.

After interviews, the team selected interviewees to job shadow. This technique provided an immersive work experience, while building relationships with employees. This addressed objectives one, two and three. This method planned for four main job shadows with employees from the marshaling yard and Goodshed, but produced an opportunity to observe additional employees at these locations. The job shadowing technique did not include taking notes, so after each job shadow, the team discussed, recorded, and coded these observations for analysis. The project group looked for examples in job shadowing that matched behaviors described in

interviewing. Through this method, the team could start to qualitatively substantiate the information presented by interviewees.

Instructional Rounds added further support for the data collected from the other two methods. Instructional Rounds is an internal review process that allows employees to observe their peers. After observing, Instructional Rounds participants examine their observations and identify areas of improvement. This was followed by a discussion on the strategies to accomplish this improvement. Instructional Rounds allowed the team to work alongside employees to identify areas for soft skill improvement, achieving objectives one, three, and four. Participants in Instructional Rounds observed a TransNamib *Mondays @3* meeting, an interdepartmental meeting between managers and supervisors. The purpose of this step was to further corroborate previous findings in interviewing and job shadowing, deeming results accurate and dependable when data aligned in all three collection methods.

## **Results:**

Following the completion of interviewing, job shadowing, and Instructional Rounds, the next step was to review the data, and identify similar conclusions throughout all three methods. The project team grouped these similar observations into three categories: communication, motivation, and soft skill education.

When studying communication, the team observed three types of employee interactions: employee-to-employee interactions, interdepartmental interactions, and Instructional Rounds interactions. After reviewing interview notes relating to employee-to-employee interactions, the team found that some employees bypass their supervisors due to poor relationships. Data from job shadowing reinforced this claim as a supervisor discussed employees bypassing supervisors, and expressing the importance of preventing this. Finally, Instructional Rounds participants observed a lack in employee-to-employee communication when two employees working on the same project reported contradictory information. These examples support the conclusion that employee-to-employee communication needs improvement.

Communication between stakeholder groups was the second employee interaction type. Interviewees explained that due to the physical distance between stakeholder groups, there is a disconnect between location employees. Additionally, employees lack urgency when sharing information between stakeholder groups. Job shadowing data further supported this lack in urgency. Team members observed an employee postpone a daily phone call that was intended to explain the current status of the trains to the head office. During Instructional Rounds, one employee participant observed a need for better communication between the finance department and maintenance. Through the observations from interviewing, job shadowing, and Instructional Rounds, the team determined TransNamib needed to improve its interdepartmental communication.

There were observations of positive employee communication when conducting Instructional Rounds. Though the project team intended this process for data collection, the project team was able to observe the communication between Instructional Rounds participants.

While observing these interactions, the project team found that participants effectively communicated while working together to identify areas of improvement. An analysis of all three interaction types revealed that employee-to-employee interactions, and interdepartmental employee interactions need improvement. However, Instructional Rounds helped foster good communication between employees.

The second observation grouping was motivation. During interviews, employees discussed that employee internal motivation is lacking. Of the 10 employees who related internal motivation to work ethic and attitude, 70% said improvement was needed. To resolve this lack in motivation, some employees suggested the use of incentives. Of the employees who discussed incentives, 83% of interviewees mentioned non-monetary incentives and not monetary awards. When seeking to confirm the belief that there is a lack in motivation by reviewing job shadow notes, the team found employees do not have enough work throughout the day, and do not have a goal to work towards. Though this does not directly reflect a lack in employee motivation, it makes it difficult for employees to build internal motivation. Additionally, during job shadowing, team members observed that employees proudly displayed certificates on their office walls. Instructional Rounds further reinforced the previous observations. During Instructional Rounds, teams identified employees were not prepared for the observed meeting, and did not adequately participate. In stage four of Instructional Rounds, the employee participants suggested there needs to be a more significant motivating factor that attracts employees to attend the meeting. Based on all three data collection techniques, the team concluded that employee motivation is lacking, however, incentives are valuable to employees.

The final data category was soft skill education. During interviewing, employees expressed an overwhelming interest in both training and mentoring programs. Employees want to improve their skills, and enjoyed previous TransNamib training programs. However, due to budgetary restraints, TransNamib discontinued most general training, and all soft skill training. Through interviewing, the team recognized that mentoring could be a viable substitute to training. Of the 19 interviewees who discussed mentoring, 16 said mentoring would be beneficial. While job shadowing, the team observed that in the marshaling yard, employees use an informal mentorship program. Both the mentor and mentee said they find this beneficial. Instructional Rounds further exemplified employee willingness to train. The team trained participants on how to conduct the process and these employees expressed an eagerness for learning it. These results clearly show that employees desire personal growth and that training or mentoring are viable techniques to achieve this objective.

## **Recommendations**

To address the areas needing improvement at TransNamib the group chose three suitable recommendations: an incentives program, an Instructional Rounds program for *Mondays @3*, and a one-on-one mentoring program. Incentives motivate employees. Instructional Rounds could improve interdepartmental communication and allow employees to practice their soft skills. Lastly, one-on-one mentoring can help teach TransNamib employee soft skills.

TransNamib's employees emphasized non-monetary incentives throughout interviews, and job shadowing revealed evidence of employee appreciation for incentives. The team recommends TransNamib implement a non-monetary incentives program focusing on in-person recognition and physical incentives, such as certificates of achievement. In the current work environment of TransNamib, incentives will motivate employees by providing them with a goal to attain. This program is both cost effective and easy to implement, making it a feasible recommendation for TransNamib.

The team suggests conducting Instructional Rounds at *Mondays @3* at the first meeting of each month. Instructional Rounds can have two benefits: improving employee soft skills and improving *Mondays @3*. The first benefit of Instructional Rounds is it provides the opportunity for Instructional Rounds participants to practice their soft skills. The other benefit of Instructional Rounds is participants will make recommendations for improving the *Mondays @3* meeting efficiency.

Finally, a one-on-one mentorship program can address the lack of soft skill education at TransNamib. While training could be effective, given the company's financial situation, training is not a feasible recommendation. One-on-one mentoring gives both the mentor and mentee the opportunity to practice their soft skills. TransNamib should choose mentors with well-developed soft skills so mentors can properly demonstrate and teach skills to their mentee.

## **Conclusion**

The team believes these recommendations could be a catalyst for positive change at TransNamib and hopes that the company will take these recommendations into consideration and implement them in the future. Through these recommendations, TransNamib's rail operations employees can improve their soft skills and help achieve the goal of linking southern Africa to Walvis Bay.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

After being restricted by a hundred years of German and South African rule, Namibia finally won its independence on March 21, 1990, making it one of the youngest countries in the world. As a young country, Namibia already stands to have an impact on southern African trade through its potential to grant neighboring landlocked countries easier access to the Atlantic Ocean. There is a demand for increased freight transport due to the continent's fast growing economy and these landlocked countries would benefit from access to Namibia's main port, Walvis Bay. Namibia and its surrounding countries utilize TransNamib Holdings Limited, the only railroad company in Namibia, to help transport rail freight through the southern portion of the continent (Jarvis, 2015). TransNamib would like to extend its railways into the surrounding landlocked countries. By extending the railroad, they would serve as the link between Walvis Bay and Southern Africa. To achieve this, they must overcome a few challenges.

Currently, TransNamib is struggling financially. They have been losing clients, resulting in a decrease in the company's revenue. TransNamib is a parastatal company, which means the Namibian government is the sole shareholder (M. Feldmann, personal interview, January 30, 2017). As a parastatal company, it can be challenging for TransNamib to make company-wide changes. Thus, the employees need to be the force behind change in the company. To create change, employees must be motivated to work and have the proper interpersonal skills to work together to overcome hardships.

TransNamib has two branches: the Operations Branch and the Engineering Branch. The Operations Branch is broken down into four sectors: the rail sector, the roads sector, the passenger services sector, and the service delivery sector. The rail sector is comprised of about 300 employees and it earns 88% of the company's revenue (M. Feldmann, personal interview, January 30, 2017). For TransNamib to fulfill its potential, the managers and supervisors of the rail sector must possess well-developed soft skills.

Soft skills are personal attributes that indicate emotional intelligence and enhance one's ability to work in a team. Good soft skills include the ability to recognize emotional states, motivate oneself, think critically, and effectively communicate. Although these are the major attributes linked to soft skills, well-developed soft skills extend beyond these abilities (Soft Skills, 2017). Soft skills are not inherent; they must be developed over time. However, company

executives often overlook the need for soft skill training (Ansel, 2016). To effectively use soft skills in a work setting, employees must first practice them in a low risk environment (S. Taylor, personal interview, February 13, 2017).

At TransNamib, there is currently no soft skill training. Thus, the project team worked alongside TransNamib via a company sponsored project that focused on soft skill improvement. Michael Feldmann, Operations Executive and project liaison, proposed a study that focused on the rail operations sector due to its significance in linking southern Africa to Walvis Bay. To create this link, the rail operations sector must run efficiently, and the development of employee soft skills can significantly influence this (Soft Skills, 2017).

The goal of this project is to offer recommendations on possible soft skill development techniques for the TransNamib rail operations sector's managers and supervisors by conducting a detailed analysis of current daily practices. The project used three methods to identify areas for soft skill improvement at TransNamib. The three data collection methods were interviewing, job shadowing, and Instructional Rounds. The intention of the three methods was to reinforce the accuracy of data in a process called triangulation. Triangulation is the cross validation of multiple methods yielding similar results. Interviewing helped obtain a basic understanding of employee viewpoints while building relationships. Next, job shadowing corroborated the behaviors described in interviews by allowing for immersion into the TransNamib work environment. The last step was to conduct Instructional Rounds, a collaborative internal review process, to work directly with employees to identify possible areas for soft skill improvement. The team compared the results from the three separate methods to identify common findings, which led to areas of improvement. Through data analysis, the team identified three areas for soft skill improvements: company communication, motivation, and soft skill education. This report will provide possible recommendations to help improve TransNamib's employees' soft skills.

## CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND

TransNamib, like Namibia, has a complex history, which has influenced the company and its current culture. Though TransNamib has faced hardships in the past, the company is dedicated to continuous improvement. In this chapter, the reader will learn about TransNamib's past and present along with the company's future goals and culture. The chapter focuses on the Operation Branch's rail sector since it plays a vital role in the success of the company and its future goals. The rail sector must overcome company challenges. To accomplish this, its managers and supervisors must have well developed soft skills. Next, this report will explain soft skills and their importance in the workplace. Additionally, the reader will learn about Instructional Rounds, which is one approach to analyzing employees' soft skills. This chapter then outlines soft skill training, and finally both the mentoring process and incentives programs and their benefits.

### 2.1 TransNamib

This section provides a brief history of Namibia's rail industry and TransNamib's founding. Additionally, it outlines the company's future goals as well as TransNamib's company culture. Lastly, the section describes TransNamib's Operations Branch.

#### 2.1.1 History of Namibian Rail Industry

The German colonists began constructing the Namibian railway system in 1884. By 1915 they constructed over 2,700 km of rail lines. Following Germany's defeat in WWI and the League of Nation's decision to make Namibia a South African mandate, South Africa gained control of the Namibian Rail Lines and constructed an additional 418 km of rail lines. In 1990, Namibia obtained control of the railway system from South Africa and the Namibian Administration founded TransNamib Limited. Initially, TransNamib Limited controlled all sea, air, and rail transit in Namibia. In 1998, the Namibian administrators determined TransNamib Limited did not have the financial stability to run all three of these entities. Thus, under the *National Transport Services Holding Company Act* TransNamib Limited became TransNamib Holdings Limited. The *Act* restricted TransNamib Holdings Limited to primarily rail transport (Dierks, 2004).

TransNamib devotes the majority of its resources to freight transport. Bulk freight and containerized goods contribute 88% to the company's annual revenue. Bulk freight is the only service showing financial growth in the past two years (Feldmann, 2014/2015). As shown in Figure 2, the rail lines are comprised of a single track which traverses the country. According to internal TransNamib reports, the track has severe degradation due to its age. The track degradation causes speed limitations on the trains, which contributes to the 13% late arrivals rate (Feldmann, 2017).

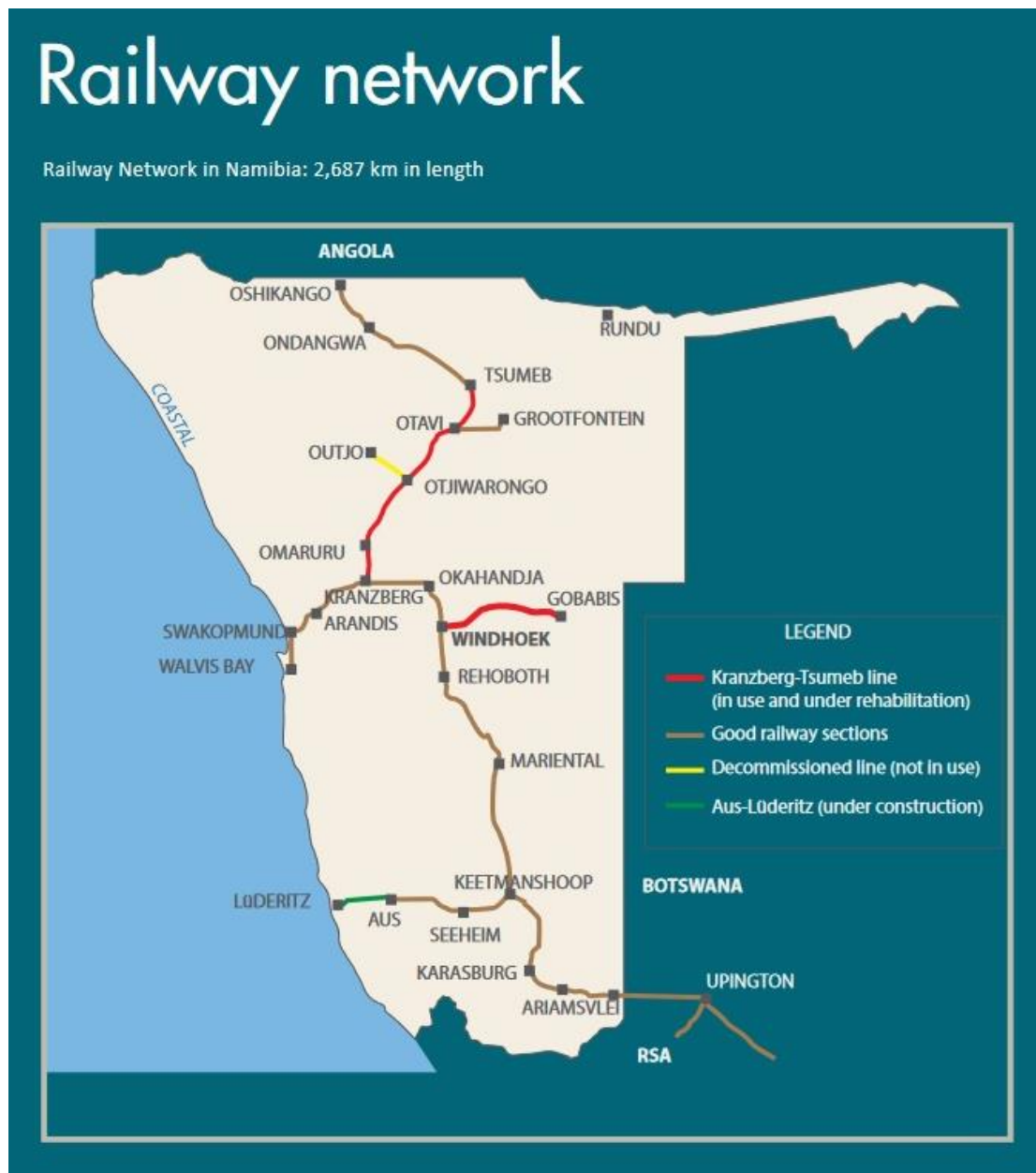


Figure 2: Map of Namibia with TransNamib Rail Lines (TransNamib, 2013)

TransNamib is a parastatal company, which means the government is the only shareholder. While the Namibian government owns TransNamib, the company operates as a private business controlling its own budget. TransNamib regularly requests more monetary support from the Namibian government. For example, TransNamib requires government subsidization to continue with passenger services (M. Feldmann, personal interview, January 30, 2017).

#### 2.1.2. TransNamib Future Goals

TransNamib has the opportunity to help further develop the lower African continent. Second to Asia, Africa is the fastest developing continent. A TransNamib business brochure says, “Every year [in Namibia], new mines are opening and major manufacturing companies require more enhanced distribution and logistics channels, which we are able to assist with” (Jarvis, 2015). The company can capitalize on this development and advance along with Namibia.

TransNamib can achieve this due to its exclusive access to Walvis Bay, one of the most important ports on the western coast of Africa. South Africa, Namibia’s most important trading partner, relies on TransNamib to transport goods from Walvis Bay and from Namibian companies (Simonis Storm Securities, 2006). Currently, approximately 37% of all Namibian exports travel through Walvis Bay. TransNamib transports 12% of all Namibian exports via rail. The company transports imports such as equipment and resources for mining, to Namibian mines.

As Africa continues to develop, Walvis Bay will become increasingly more prominent (Jarvis, 2015). TransNamib is in a unique position to be a major factor in the advancement of the rest of the lower continent. Botswana and Namibia have already reached an agreement to create the Trans-Kalahari Railroad through Gobabis in Namibia which would link Botswana’s vast coal deposits to Walvis Bay (Feuilherade, 2014). Additionally, TransNamib looks to extend the railway to Katima Mulilo in the Caprivi Strip to access the copper belt of Zambia and Zimbabwe, connecting the landlocked countries of southern Africa with the coast and to trade with the rest of the world (Ash, 2015).

### 2.1.3 TransNamib Company Culture

TransNamib's culture is relaxed and friendly. Some of the employees have been working together for 35 years, and have extensive relationships with each other. This creates a comfortable work environment in TransNamib, but it presents challenges too. After working with the company for five years, employees are usually promoted putting them in a position where the corporate culture expects them to oversee their peers. This can be challenging because it can be difficult to distinguish between friendships and working relationships.

Another challenge is that TransNamib is a diverse company with workers from many regions of Namibia with varying backgrounds. There are 14 main tribes in Namibia and people from different tribes do not usually form personal relationships (M. Feldmann, personal interview, February 16, 2017). Additionally, each tribe in Namibia has its own language, thus when working, TransNamib employees utilize a common language. Although employees sometimes use English, Afrikaans is the language most often spoken at TransNamib because many employees are more fluent in it (M. Feldmann, personal interview, March 13, 2017).

TransNamib's method of communication is mainly informal, as most employees do not have consistent access to email or computers throughout the day. Word of mouth is the most common and easiest form of communication among general employees. In the mornings, some employees have a "Toolbox Chat," which is a casual talk before work about what they need to accomplish that day. Other types of communication include walkie-talkies and cell phones. At the management levels, employees use WhatsApp and email as formal forms of communication (M. Feldmann, personal interview, February 16, 2017).

As the only train company in Namibia, there is little competition which creates a lack of urgency in the company. Furthermore, with constant support from the Namibian government there is little business incentive (M. Feldmann, personal interview, January 30, 2017). Within TransNamib, many employees are not willing to make important decisions. Rather, they defer the decision to the executive board. Since TransNamib is a parastatal company, the government selection of executive board members is often politically motivated. For positions below the board, one internal interview committee determines promotions within TransNamib (M. Feldmann, personal interview, March 13, 2017).

TransNamib has a rigid set of procedures which are not conducive to change. The company laid off almost one thousand workers in the past five years because it could not adapt to

a new economic climate (M. Feldmann, personal interview, January 30, 2017). Johan Piek, a consultant for TransNamib, said "Decisions were made after extensive, exhaustive discussions and often not implemented. Nobody was prepared to take the risk." (Ash, 2015). The quote speaks to TransNamib's resistance to change. Moreover, it implies that discussion alone is not enough to implement improvements.

#### 2.1.4 Operations Branch

TransNamib has two branches, Operations and Engineering. The Operations Branch focuses on four key functions: rail operations, road operations, passenger services, and service delivery. Operations is responsible for keeping its sectors aligned with TransNamib's business objectives and providing sufficient service to the company's customers. Figure 3 depicts TransNamib's branches and the composition of the Operations Branch.

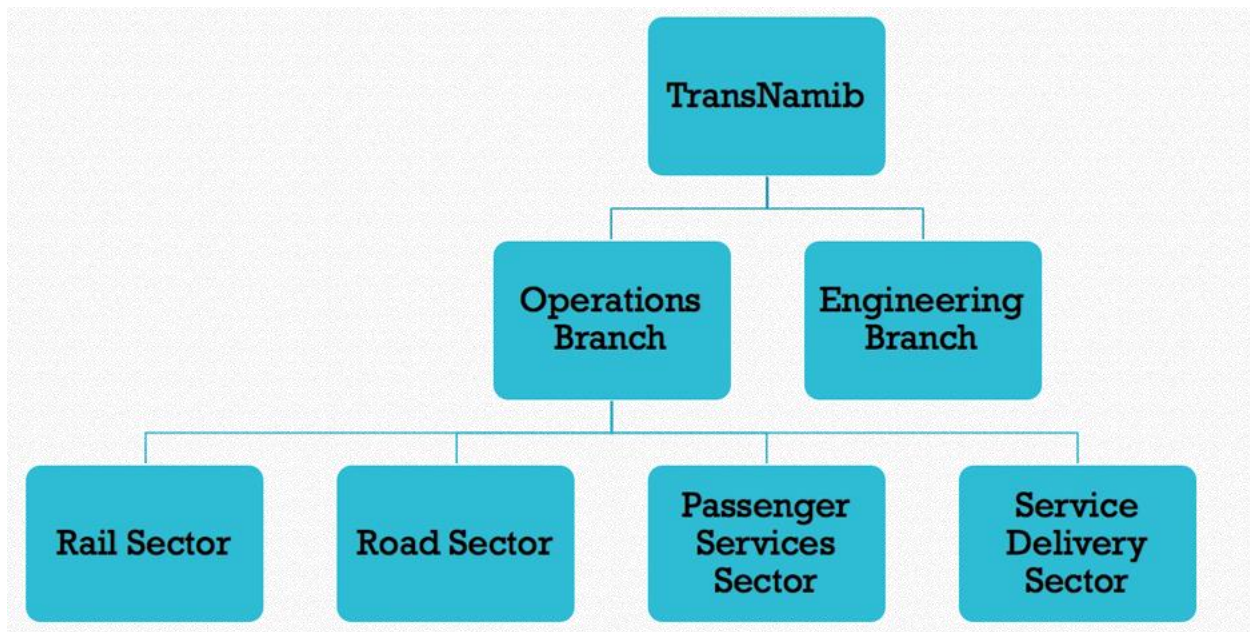


Figure 3: TransNamib Department Structure

Figure 4 displays the locations of four TransNamib facilities within Windhoek. Point A is the head office of TransNamib. This is where the executives and the majority of managers of all sectors are located. Point B is the marshaling yard. This is where the majority of rail operations employees are located. They load the trains, which leave from the marshaling yard. Point C is the

train station. The train station is where many passenger service employees work and where passengers can board the trains. Point D is the Goods and Services Yard also known as the Goodshed. The Windhoek section of Service and Delivery operates at this location. Another TransNamib location in Windhoek is WinCon, TransNamib's container yard. WinCon is not shown on the map because it is approximately six kilometers from the marshaling yard.



Figure 4: TransNamib Locations in Windhoek (Google Maps, 2017 with overlay)

The rail operations sector controls the rail line and trains. It is responsible for the train schedule and delivery service. This sector employs approximately 300 people. According to TransNamib's 2015-2016 annual report, TransNamib locomotives carry 1,654,777 tons of bulk freight, which accounts for 88% of the overall company revenue (Michael Feldmann, 2015/2016). Since most of TransNamib's profits stem from the rail operations sector, this sector is the most vital part of the company's success.

After moving freight by train, TransNamib's road operations sector can unload and deliver freight containers. This process is challenging, as the equipment needed to unload freight is in poor condition. These challenges slow down the delivery service significantly. In the 2015-2016 financial year, the road operations sector lost road contracts due to late and unreliable delivery services. Slow delivery hurts the revenue earned by road operations and makes the sector unsuccessful (Michael Feldmann, 2015/2016).

The service delivery sector of TransNamib offers ground delivery for packages. Michael Feldmann, a TransNamib executive, compared the Service Delivery sector's responsibilities to those of United Parcel Service (UPS). This sector focuses on the delivery of smaller items, not freight containers. TransNamib's service delivery had an 83% success rate of delivering goods on time from April through June of 2015 (Michael Feldmann, 2015/2016). The sector's equipment and technology plays a role in the failure to reliably deliver goods in sufficient time. TransNamib has made some improvements to equipment, but continuing improvements are necessary. The company has already lost service delivery contracts in South Africa and if the sector does not make improvements, service delivery may be removed altogether.

TransNamib offers passenger services by train. While passenger services does not generate significant revenue for TransNamib, the company continues to run passenger trains due to its social responsibilities. TransNamib attempts to provide the safest and cheapest means of travel through Namibia. Ticket sales declined from 2014 to 2015 by 12% (Michael Feldmann, 2015/2016). To compensate for the loss of revenue, trains carrying passengers will also haul freight. These trains travel slowly due to the size of the railroad tracks and weight from freight. Figure 5 shows the composition of the Operations Branch's revenue.

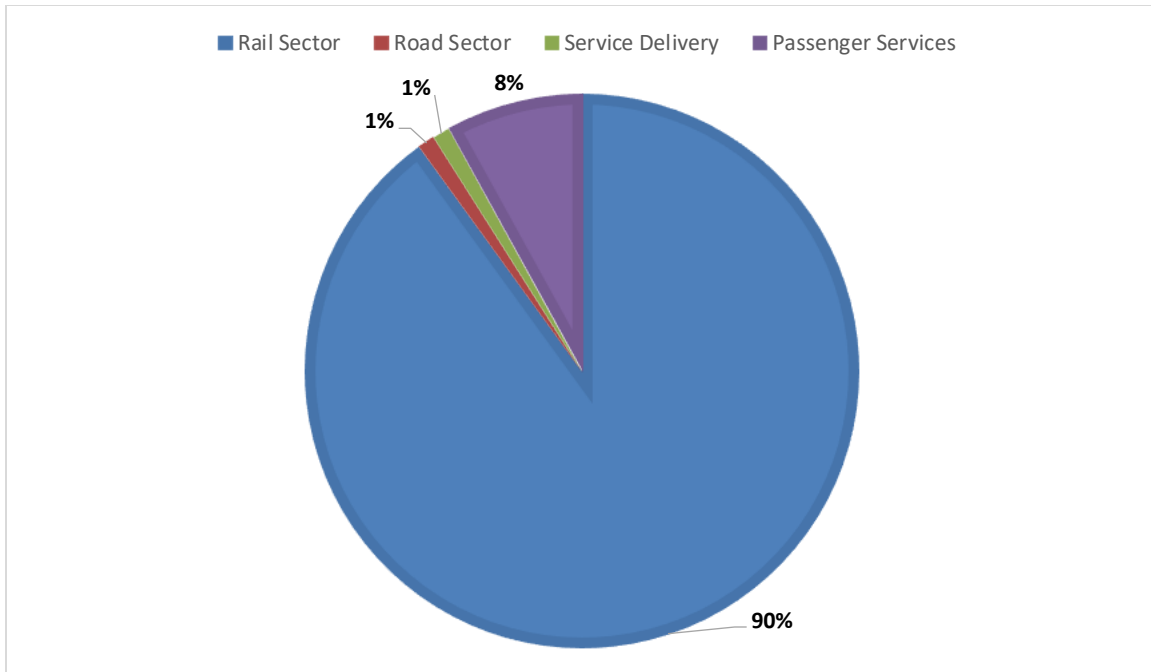


Figure 5: TransNamib Operations Branch Sector Revenue by Percentage (Feldmann, 2016)

TransNamib's Operations Branch faces many challenges. Road operations and delivery services need the most improvements in order to become profitable sectors. The passenger services sector is currently generating revenue, but ticket sales have declined indicating this sector needs improvements as well. Rail operations is the heart of both the Operations Branch and TransNamib. Since this sector produces the majority of the company's revenue, TransNamib needs to sustain and improve it.

## 2.2 Rail Operations

This section discusses the organization of the rail sector employees and then explains the sector's challenges.

### 2.2.1 Rail Operations Systems

TransNamib has a rigid organizational structure that runs on procedures. The structure of TransNamib begins with its chief executive officer and his board of executives. Each member of the board of executives oversees a different branch of TransNamib. Within the branches, there are managers who oversee supervisors (Feldmann, 2017). The supervisors oversee a variety of different general employees.

The Paterson System is a pay grade scale used at TransNamib. Each level of employment has an assigned letter and number indicating their grade. An A1 grade is the lowest on the scale and is an entry-level position at TransNamib. As the grade increases so does the responsibility associated with the position (Diamond, 2014). At TransNamib B4 grade is the beginning of the supervisory level. Figure 6 depicts the positions within rail operations at TransNamib. The bubbles on the left hand side indicate the Paterson Grades for each position.

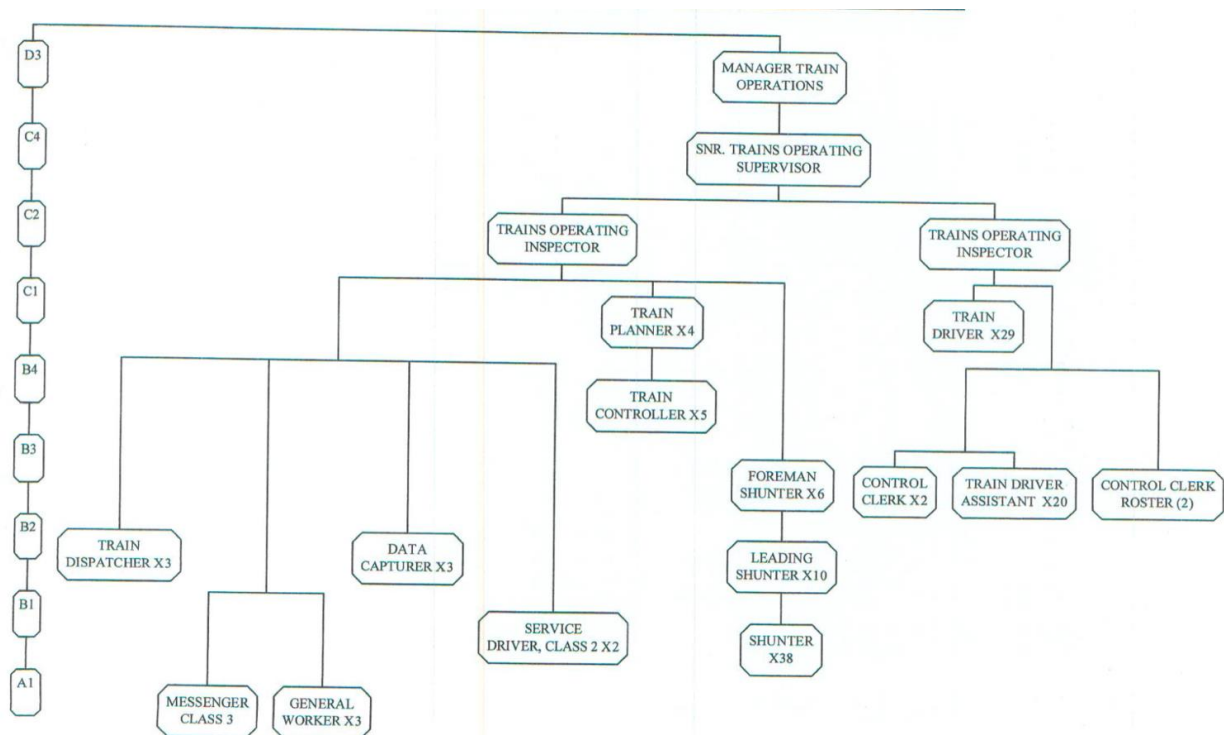


Figure 6: Rail Operations Employee Structure (Feldmann, 2017)

### 2.2.2 Rail Operations Challenges

The rail operations sector is the most successful sector of TransNamib, but has the potential to improve. Currently, the sector struggles with late train arrivals, overtime pay, and the employee age demographics. These challenges must be addressed before TransNamib can connect southern Africa to Walvis Bay.

Late train arrivals were a persistent issue throughout the 2016 quarterly reports. From October to December of 2016 the most common reasons for late arrivals were shunting, locomotives, and crosspoint, as shown in Figure 7 (Feldmann, 2016).

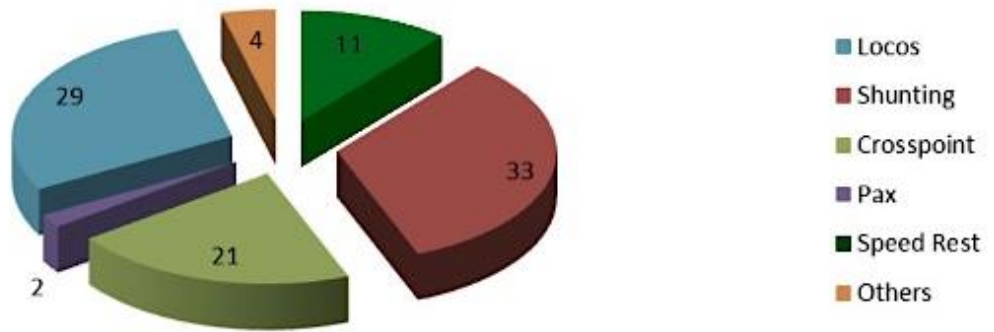


Figure 7: Reasons for Late Train Arrivals in Percentages (Feldmann, 2016)

Shunting is the process of connecting requested wagons to a train so the correct freight can be delivered. During this process, a shunting team must move wagons on and off the main track to reach the desired wagons. This process is time consuming, and often causes late train departures. Locomotive failure is another cause of late train arrivals, and is not uncommon at TransNamib. The average daily use of locomotives decreased from 40 to 36 between the second and third financial quarter of the 2016-2017 financial year. This decrease was due to train failures and resulted in a reduction of freight and passenger transport. The reduction of daily transport decreases TransNamib's revenue. Crosspoints are the final reason for late train arrival as they can cause train derailments. As seen in Figure 8, a crosspoint is the point where one track becomes two tracks moving in different directions. The track can shift between either direction, but a train will derail when the track is not aligned.



Figure 8: TransNamib Crosspoint

Another challenge the rail operation sector must overcome is overtime pay. The rail operations sector generates more overtime than any other sector because of the need for constant repairs to the locomotives and the track. Though this work is necessary, with the current economic state of TransNamib, the company cannot sustain paying employee overtime.

The final concern of the rail operations sector is the overwhelming number of employees approaching retirement. In TransNamib's last three quarterly reports Michael Feldmann stated, "...some current key staff members are going to retire soon- this will continue for the next few years. The loss of knowledge and know-how could bring serious problems to the company..." (Feldmann, 2017). As younger employees do not possess the same level of knowledge as those retiring, TransNamib will need lose valuable knowledge and experience unless it is shared with younger employees.

Combating the challenges of the rail operations sector would be beneficial to TransNamib. The rail operations sector generates the majority of the company revenue, and overcoming these challenges will increase company revenue.

## **2.3 Soft Skills**

Previously, when employers sought new hires, they focused on technical skills related to the job's specific discipline, however, they are now seeking professionals with developed soft skills. (Bancino, 2007). Soft skills are in part, defined as having emotional intelligence, but soft skills extend beyond emotions. Soft skills encompass being able to effectively communicate and listen, adapt to change, make decisions, work effectively in a team, and think critically to solve problems. Additionally, soft skills include good time management capabilities and internal motivation (Soft Skills, 2017).

"Increased global competition and the changing nature of most technical jobs have made soft skills more than simply a 'nice to have' requirement when hiring new employees. These skills are a 'must have'" (Bancino, 2007). Globalization and an increase in competition are forces which drive business leaders' demand for managers and supervisors to have well developed soft skills. To become a manager or supervisor, it is important for candidates to show a proficiency in communication, interpersonal skills, teamwork, and leadership. In 2007, a survey of over 250 technical leaders identified a lack of soft skills as the top reason for project failures. "When nontechnical skills are developed to complement technical skills, personal

productivity, collaboration and synergy are increased.” Additionally, customer satisfaction will increase if employees are personable and patient when working with them (Bancino, 2007).

Although employers have different views on the importance of soft skills versus technical skills, it is necessary for employees to continuously work to improve their soft skills. In a work setting, it is challenging for employees to determine their current state of soft skills without self-reflection. Employees should always attempt to allocate time to reflect upon and improve their soft skills so they can stand out amongst their peers and improve the overall efficiency of the company (Bancino, 2007).

## **2.4 Instructional Rounds**

When trying to improve an organization, one analytical approach is Instructional Rounds. Instructional Rounds is a systematic data collection and analysis technique used to gain a better understanding of a problem to discover potential solutions. Instructional Rounds consists of four main stages, data collection, data review, team discussions, and improvement. This process incorporates many different viewpoints, which allows for better discussion, and more continuity between different levels of a company. Instructional Rounds is also effective because it enables employees to step out of their usual work environment, and view their role from a new perspective. This can be informative to an employee and has the potential to improve their work ethic dramatically. Additionally, Instructional Rounds is effective because company employees can conduct them internally, which helps improve communication, problem-solving skills, and allows the process to be conducted at any time (Tietel, 2009).

### **2.4.1 Data Collection**

The first stage of Instructional Rounds is data collection via observation. Ideally, participants construct three or four observation teams. Each team consists of three to five people with different backgrounds and relations to the company, who will observe a set of assigned meetings, departments, or processes. The observing teams spend fifteen minutes at each assigned site watching and interacting with employees. Teammates individually record their own qualitative and quantitative, unbiased observations. It is essential that observers remain objective at all times during this stage. For example, if an observation team was observing a meeting, someone may record, “five out of ten people are using their cellphone while someone is talking.”

An observer should not record, “five out of ten people are bored of the discussion and not listening.” This observation is not objective because it includes a conclusion, which may not be true (Tietel, 2009).

In observing people, one-on-one interactions are usually better than interactions that occur during focus groups, where the observer might gather information from several different people at the same time (S. Taylor, personal interview, February 13, 2017). When observers interact with one person at a time, they are able to get opinions and information untainted by a group dynamic. In a group, it is not uncommon for one person to offer an opinion and for the rest to agree, hence the importance of one-on-one interactions (S. Taylor, personal interview, February 13, 2017).

#### 2.4.2 Data Review and Team Discussions

Data review is the next stage of Instructional Rounds and is a process done individually. During this time, each observer reviews their data to identify the five to ten most significant observations (Marzano, 2009). Participants record these significant observations and use them during the next stage of Instructional Rounds. In stage three, team discussions, teams from stage one reconvene and each member shares their significant observations. During this sharing process, teams work to create groups of similar key observations. Each team then forms categories or trends based on observation groupings. Some trends may revolve around interactions between individuals, employee mannerisms, or meeting norms. Teams then start to make conclusions about each trend’s meaning in an attempt to summarize their findings into one overarching statement (Tietel, 2009). These conclusions will play a key role in stage four of Instructional Rounds, improvement.

#### 2.4.3 Improvement

In the improvements stage, all teams conclude their discussions and form one large group. Each team makes a short presentation to the group and discusses the trends they found. Once completed, all participants take part in an open discussion regarding each trend. During this time, all individuals have an equal opportunity to add their input (Marzano, 2009). The goal of this discussion is to recognize prominent trends, determine the root cause of each trend, outline a vision for improvements, and create a plan to either improve any issues that arise, or continue

processes that are effective (Tietel, 2009). Once the group adequately discusses each trend, and creates a plan for improvement, the process of Instructional Rounds is complete.

## **2.5 Employee Soft Skill Training**

This section presents information supporting the effectiveness of soft skill training as well as the best setting to learn these skills. Then it discusses the use of practicing soft skills to master them.

### 2.5.1 Soft Skill Employee Training Studies

Research has found that training is effective at improving soft skills. A study conducted by Gopa Nayak supported this. Another study by Sage Analysts found that the best form to conduct soft skill training is through face-to-face instruction. Combined, these studies support the need for proper soft skill training and the benefits of in-person training.

Gopa Nayak conducted a study with engineering students from India to look into the effectiveness of training soft skills. He had one group go through four weeks of soft skill training classes, and one control group who received, “delayed treatment of the same program.” Both groups took a pre- and post-experimental test worth ten points. When comparing the pre- and post-test scores, the group that went through soft skill training had a mean score average increase of 2.5 points, where the control group only had an increase of about 1.25 points. Qualitatively, when answering open-ended questions about how to utilize soft skills, the engineers who went through extended training more explicitly explained how to implement soft skills, providing detailed examples of improvements they can make in their own life (Nayak, 2014).

Another study demonstrating soft skill training effectiveness is from Sage Analysts. They conducted an experiment that examined the effectiveness of face-to-face teaching versus online teaching. In the study, the examiners provided two groups with similar teaching lessons, one through online teaching and one through face-to-face classes. Prior to the lessons, instructors had each group take a pre-test. After completing the lesson, the examiners then administered each group a questionnaire, along with a post-test to assess employee motivation and soft skill understanding. Analysts first compared each group’s motivation questionnaire answers. They then calculated the difference between each group’s pre- and post-test to determine the level of improvement after the lessons. They compared the level of improvement for each group, and

found that “face-to-face trainees were significantly more driven to take the course to improve their communication skills compared to online trainees.” This means willingness to learn directly correlates to behavior change. When investigators compared the pre- and post-test scores for students who went through online training, and those who went through face-to-face training, they found, “face-to-face trainees reported higher mean score improvement compared to online trainees” (Charoensap-Kelly, 2016).

#### 2.5.2 Soft Skill Training Techniques

A simple soft skills workshop once a year is not sufficient to effectively improve individual and overall company soft skills. People must learn soft skills in a manner similar to how an athlete develops a physical skill (S. Taylor, personal interview, February 13, 2017). For example, a basketball player learns a technique by breaking it down into individual steps. Players will train the skill by themselves before moving on to practicing it with their team in a non-game situation. As they improve, the athlete uses the skill in continually higher stake environments until they can use it fluently in any situation. The key to successful practice is that the teacher must provide a reasonable practice field where it is acceptable to make mistakes (S. Taylor, personal interview, February 13, 2017). Practice fields are anywhere the employee practicing the soft skill feels comfortable, and may be found in physical places, relationships, or even event (Taylor, 2015).

#### 2.5.3 Checking for Employee Training Effectiveness

Time is valuable to a company when it comes to training employees. Every person is different, so it is important to understand how each trainee learns in order to optimize the training time. One way is to follow the People Styles Model Training. “The model categorizes two dimensions of behavior (assertiveness and responsiveness) into four different people styles: *driver*, *expressive*, *amiable*, and *analytical*.” The model suggests that every employee has some of each trait, and each trait is valuable (Charoensap-Kelly, 2016). Understanding the balance of traits an employee possesses enables an instructor to create a teaching strategy that will be effective during training. This understanding also allows for positive communication between the instructor and the trainee. Once an instructor chooses a style of teaching fit for the trainee, it is important to continually assess its effectiveness.

One way to ensure training effectiveness is the Model of Training Evaluation and Criteria. This model suggests an instructor should consider four topics during training: reactions, learning, behavior, and results. Evaluating reactions consists of review of trainee satisfaction. Studying learning strives to determine the information the student has understood and absorbed. Assessing behavior establishes changes in job-related activities. Auditing results provides a strong understanding the benefits of employee improvement (Charoensap-Kelly, 2016). If training strategies are not working, it is important to study the processes and the trainee. If the process does not align with the employee's learning style, there will never be positive results (Charoensap-Kelly, 2016).

## **2.6 Mentoring**

Mentoring is a form of training in which an older, more experienced mentor helps a younger, less experienced mentee develop skills and gain company knowledge (Srivastava, 2013). One purpose of implementing a mentoring program within a company is to eliminate some of the communication barriers between people with different positions or levels of experience.

A successful mentorship program requires dedication and input from both the mentor and mentee. These programs work better when they are voluntary (Trees, 2016). One objective of mentoring is to pass knowledge to a mentee. The mentor must be willing to share their experiences and the mentee has to be open-minded. It is important to choose mentors who have the ability to form relationships with different types of people because the relationships between mentors and mentees can influence the success of a mentorship. The mentee can learn more from the mentor when they have a good relationship. This relationship helps both the mentor and mentee practice and improve their soft skills. Additionally, with a well-developed relationship, both can effectively communicate with each other. The mentor can give guidance and listen to the mentee, while the mentee asks for and accepts advice (Srivastava, 2013).

Beyond the benefits of improved soft skills, mentoring also creates a succession plan. This benefits the company financially and ensures the mentor someone can fulfill their position when they leave the company. The mentee would benefit as they could more easily move into the mentor's position and confidently take on their responsibilities (Srivastava, 2013).

## 2.7 Incentives

Employers often use incentives to motivate their employees. Many employers believe monetary incentives are most effective, however, these benefits are only effective for short periods of time (Rewarding, 2016). Non-monetary rewards are easy to implement, maintain and track (Birtles, 2012). These programs can “provide effective incentive alternatives without compromising morale or straining operation budgets.” In fact, businesses have noted that tangible, non-monetary rewards do a better job of attracting and holding people’s interest.

Fostering happy and motivated employees is essential to company success (10 Non-Monetary, 2017). Incentives are an excellent tactic to improve morale, however to keep employees motivated, the company must give rewards on a consistent basis (Bodell, 2016). Employers often overlook staff recognition, but it is one of the most effective reward strategies, and the easiest to implement because it does not need to be a formalized process. A company can provide staff recognition through informal praise such as an in-person thank you, or by mentioning employees in a newsletter or email. Public recognition is a great way to boost employee motivation because it showcases, “employees who demonstrate behavior and performance that you [the employer] want to cultivate” (Bodell, 2016). If employees become complacent, and are no longer motivated by recognition, receiving physical incentives can provide motivation.

The Employee Motivation Model developed by Nitin Nohria, Boris Groysberg, and Linda-Eling Lee explains, “There are four main drives that contribute to motivations: the drive to acquire, the drive to bond, the drive to comprehend, and the drive to defend” (Nohria, 2008). The drive to acquire is the desire to obtain goods such as physical incentives. This drive could be focused toward food or money; however, it also applies to experiences such as receiving an award or receiving a certificate.

Employers must keep their employees motivated for their company to reach its full potential. Though every employee is motivated differently, if no incentives exist, motivation will “fizzle” (Rewarding, 2016). Non-monetary reward incentives programs are both easy to implement and cost effective, making these programs invaluable to any company.

## 2.8 Summary

TransNamib's history is rooted in colonization and apartheid, but this history does not define what the company has become. It is the only railroad company in Namibia and is one of the main transport systems for bulk freight. TransNamib now exists as a symbol of promise for Namibia and the rest of the southern African continent (Jarvis, 2015). This is due to its access to the Walvis Bay port, which acts as a gateway to trade with the rest of the world. TransNamib has several challenges to overcome before it can propel the country forward. Additionally, TransNamib's employees must have well developed soft skills for the company to reach its full potential.

Soft skills have become an essential quality for employees to possess. Though it is a common misconception that soft skills are not trainable (Soft Skills, 2017), soft skills can be taught and employees need a low risk practice field to practice them (S. Taylor, personal interview, February 13, 2017). One method of observing and analyzing the current state of soft skills is Instructional Rounds. These skills can be developed through mentoring and enhanced using incentives. The following chapter will describe three data collection techniques used to analyze soft skills at TransNamib.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

The goal of this project is to identify areas for soft skill improvement and offer recommendations on possible soft skill development techniques for the TransNamib rail operations sector's managers and supervisors by conducting a detailed analysis of current daily practices. In order to accomplish this goal, the team constructed the following objectives:

1. Gain trust and build relationships with employees
2. Understand current practices and viewpoints of employees pertaining to soft skills
3. Experience TransNamib's employee's soft skills first-hand
4. Work alongside employees to identify areas for soft skill improvement.

The project used interviewing, job shadowing, and Instructional Rounds in an attempt to complete these objectives. Each method is intended to check the data of the other two methods, which leads to reinforced results. This process is called triangulation, which is a cross validation of two or more distinct methods that yield comparable data. This analysis technique also nullifies any blind spots of one single method (Jick, 1979). This enabled the team to see which data was most consistent and thus most conclusive.

This chapter outlines the specific methods used throughout the interviewing, modified job shadowing and Instructional Rounds processes. Table 1 provides a timeline for completing this project.

Table 1: Project Timeline

	Prep Time	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8
Choose Methods									
Conduct Interviews									
Job Shadow									
Instructional Rounds									
Formulate Recommendations									
Compare Recommendations									
Final Presentation									
Finalize Deliverables									

The flow chart below, Figure 9, shows the project's general steps to create final recommendations. The project members started by constructing a mission statement found in the blue oval. Next, the flow chart depicts the objectives intended to achieve the mission in yellow boxes. Interviewing, job shadowing, and Instructional Rounds are all connected to objective one as each method is intended to better the project team's relationships with employees. Interviewing and job shadowing are linked to objective two because these methods were intended to provide an understanding of TransNamib practices and employee viewpoints by talking to employees and asking them questions. Job shadowing and Instructional Rounds help achieve objective three as these allow the project team to physically immerse themselves into TransNamib and observe employee interactions first-hand. The team intended to achieve objective four through the use of Instructional Rounds. This uses a collaborative approach in an effort to allow the group and TransNamib employees to identify areas for soft skill improvement

together. Each method has its own data analysis technique, shown in purple. These data analysis techniques are analytical strategies utilized in this report to identify areas for soft skills improvement at TransNamib.



Figure 9: Project Flow Chart

### **3.1 Project Stakeholders**

TransNamib influences the Namibian economy and therefore has a direct impact on all Namibian citizens. In eight weeks, the team could not work with all the people who may be affected by the project, and as a result, focused on five company stakeholder groups. These groups are designated by the five TransNamib locations in Windhoek. The five stakeholder groups were head office employees, marshaling yard employees, Goodsshed employees, train station employees, and WinCon employees. Head office employees represent the majority of managers involved in this project. Marshaling yard employees represent rail operations supervisors and general employees. These two locations contain the majority of the rail operations' employees, however, the plan was to utilize Goodsshed, train station, and WinCon employees to gain a holistic view of TransNamib.

When the team began working at TransNamib, it was necessary to create a recognizable presence at the company by working at the office every day. This was to gain the trust of stakeholders so they would be willing to contribute to the project. Team members attempted to exhibit positive soft skills by being friendly and communicating well. Greeting people in the hallways by name was a first step in creating relationships. When scheduling more formal meetings with employees, the team intended to be flexible and respond quickly to emails, to try to further strengthen working relationships. By working as a unit, the team hoped to increase its credibility by displaying the soft skills that the project intended to analyze.

### **3.2 Data Collection Methods**

#### **3.2.1 Interviewing**

Our initial goal was to interview as many TransNamib employees in Windhoek as possible. A large sample of interviewees was necessary to help ensure the team was fully informed on the status of soft skills and final recommendations were based on conclusive evidence. Project members used interviewing as the first data collection method in hopes to achieve objectives one and two. The team thought interviewing was a good strategy for building strong relationships with employees as this method allows for direct interaction. Another intention of interviewing was to gain an understanding of employee viewpoints and practices.

To begin the interview process, the team consulted the project liaison, Michael Feldmann, who provided a list of 11 initial interviewees. These interviewees consisted of men

and women holding various positions in different sectors of the Operations Branch. At the end of each interview, interviewers requested contact information for other possible interviewees.

The entire team conducted the initial three interviews to acclimate to the company culture and build a mutual understanding of the proper technique to conduct interviews. Once the team generated a larger list of interviewees, the team conducted interviews mostly in pairs to complete them efficiently and to avoid overwhelming the interviewees. One interviewer asked questions while the other took handwritten notes. After each interview, the interviewers transferred the notes to a Word document and gave a copy of the typed transcript to the interviewee for their approval. Section 3.3.1 discusses the analysis procedure for these notes. The project used the confidentiality statement seen in Appendix A to obtain informed consent and assure the interviewee the project will not disclose their identity. In an effort to reinforce confidentiality, this report excludes all interview notes.

To preserve credibility while interviewing, interviewers attempted to:

- ask unbiased questions
- ask questions that would not be seen as an attack
- ask open ended questions.

The team conducted semi-structured interviews. Though the group used a list of questions in efforts to gain similar information from each interviewee, the semi-structured plan let the interviewer adapt their questions based on the employee's position and responses. This plan kept the interview fluid by allowing the interviewer to stray from interview questions when necessary. However, with this approach, the interviewer was not able to ask the same questions to all the interviewees. Figure 10 displays the questions used in the semi-structured interview plan to focus the interview and to ensure the interviewee discussed key topics.

To begin each interview, interviewers used an oral history approach in efforts to make the interviewee more comfortable and give them more control of the conversation. In addition, this was designed to build trust and form quality relationships with employees which would aid in achieving objective one. The oral history approach focuses on the interviewee's personal life and background. Questions one through six in Figure 10 are the general questions used to complete this portion of the interview.

As the interview progressed, the interviewer attempted to guide the interview towards topics pertaining to training and soft skills at TransNamib, while keeping the questions focused

on the interviewee's personal experience. Questions seven through ten in Figure 10 relate to training. Interviewers asked these questions to learn about the training processes at TransNamib and determine characteristics of successful training techniques. The remaining questions focused on the state of employee soft skills, the development of these skills, and areas needing improvement. Questions seven through 15 targeted objective two. The team used the term interpersonal skills when referring to soft skills because TransNamib employees understand this term better.

1. Have you always lived in Namibia?
  - a. If yes: What was it like growing up in Namibia?
  - b. If no: What brought you here and made you stay?
2. What is your favorite part of Namibia?
3. What other jobs have you had?
4. How did you end up at TransNamib? What brought you here?
5. What is your current role at TransNamib?
6. Have you held other positions in TransNamib?
7. What kinds of training have you had at TransNamib?
8. What did you like or did not like about the training?
9. What has been your favorite training?
10. What do you think makes a training successful or unsuccessful?
11. What do you consider an interpersonal skill?
12. Have you experienced interpersonal skill training?
13. Have you experienced interpersonal skill training at TransNamib?
14. What did you think of the interpersonal skill training?
15. How do you communicate with other employees?
  - a. How do you communicate with your bosses?
16. Is there anyone else you suggest we interview?

Figure 10: Interview Questions for TransNamib Employees

During the interview process, the interviewers practiced active listening. This meant paying attention to body language, such as smiling and nodding, as well as using verbal

encouragement. If the interviewee made a general statement, the interviewer asked them to elaborate. The interviewers always concluded the interview by saying thank you and asking if the interviewee had any questions.

### 3.2.2 Modified Job Shadowing

This project used modified job shadowing to corroborate the information from interviews by observing employee interactions first-hand. To effectively conduct this method, it was paramount to stay humble and objective. The team modified job shadowing by focusing on employee interactions rather than employee technical skills and by not taking physical notes. The goal of these modifications was to observe employees in as normal a work environment as the project teams' presence would allow. For simplicity, this section refers to modified job shadowing as job shadowing.

The team intended to observe a sample size of 15% of the 84 marshaling yard employees as well as two Goodsshed employees. The first step was to choose job shadow candidates from interviewees because they would be more comfortable with the team's presence. The project team asked to job shadow select interviewees. The team wanted to observe supervisors in the marshaling yard because they have the most interactions with other employees and they are the focal point of this project.

The project team split into pairs to shadow employees. Pair one was Ryan Rigney and Amelia Mattesen and pair two was John Frigo and Jenna Shea. Both pairs observed employees from the marshaling yard and the Goodsshed on the mornings of 29 March and 30 March 2017. The intention was to job shadow four main employees and observe their coworkers. The team planned to arrive 15 minutes before the employee's workday to prepare and meet the person they would shadow. At the marshaling yard, each pair followed a different supervisor. Since these supervisors work closely with their colleagues each pair observed six other marshaling yard employees during an hour-long shunting process. These additional employees were a five-person shunting team and a train driver. The observations for these 12 employees were not as in depth as the observations for the four main employees. At the Goodsshed on the following day, the pairs job shadowed a supervisor and a data capturer.

When observing all employees, pairs watched for anything that related to soft skills and paid special attention to both constructive and negative interactions between employees.

Indicators of these were tone of voice, body language, and eye contact. When observing the shunting teams, the pairs hoped to observe teamwork and communication. As outsiders, the shadowing teams were careful to make objective observations.

When observing, the team expected employees to speak in Afrikaans because it is the most common language at TransNamib. Shadowing pairs did not want to ask employees to speak in English because the team thought this would restrict their communicative abilities and give an inaccurate depiction of TransNamib's communication. As a result, shadowing pairs asked for translations when appropriate. Additionally, as the marshaling yard was a new environment, pairs asked clarifying questions to better understand the actions of employees.

After leaving the job shadowing locations, teams debriefed and immediately typed their observations in a Word document to attempt to preserve the events of the day. Section 3.3.2 outlines the analysis of these notes. This report excludes these notes to protect the observed employees. The intent of job shadowing was to allow the project team to further relationships with employees, make observations, and gain a first-hand understanding of TransNamib, helping to accomplish objectives one, two, and three.

### 3.2.3 Instructional Rounds

The purpose of Instructional Rounds was to incorporate employees in the observation process in efforts to substantiate the data from job shadowing and interviewing. Concurrently, Instructional Rounds was meant to allow the team to build relationships, make first-hand observations, and work alongside employees to recognize areas for soft skill improvement, achieving objectives one, three and four.

To conduct Instructional Rounds, it was first necessary to identify possible employee candidates. Previously conducted interviews and job shadowing provided a pool for initial participant selection. One team member emailed select employees to request their participation in Instructional Rounds. This email can be found in Appendix B. The email thanked the employee for their assistance with this project and gave a brief description of Instructional Rounds. To pique the employees' interest, the email emphasized that by participating in this process the company would hear employees' opinions when considering recommendations for improvements. Though Instructional Rounds does not provide full anonymity, as the employees

involved interact directly with other employees, all participants were volunteers and this report does not disclose any identifying information.

While selecting the candidates, the team considered employees' positions and communication skills. The team wanted participants from multiple levels of the company in an effort to diversify employee viewpoints and knowledge of TransNamib. The team looked for employees with good communication skills because this would make working together easier and the Instructional Rounds process more successful. The project intended to have four participants from various departments and stakeholder groups.

The team performed Instructional Rounds on 10 April 2017 at the head office and observed a *Mondays @3* meeting. *Mondays @3* is a weekly interdepartmental meeting at the head office for managers and supervisors. Since the meeting is optional, only eight to 12 people usually attend, however, a full attendance would consist of 30 different department representatives (M. Feldmann, personal interview, March 27, 2017). In addition to the attendees, there is a facilitator who leads each meeting. The purpose of *Mondays @3* is to evaluate and discuss the previous week. The facilitator asks each department to summarize the previous week and offer recommendations for improving the following week. The facilitator encourages departments to assist each other in resolving issues they discuss in the meeting.

The team chose to observe *Mondays @3* during Instructional Rounds because it offered the opportunity to observe interactions between managers and supervisors. Figure 11 displays the schedule for Instructional Rounds:

10 April 2017
14h00 - 14h50 - Teaching Instructional Rounds
15h00 - 16h00 - <i>Mondays @3</i> Observation
16h00 - 16h15 - Data Review
16h15 - 16h45 – Observation Team Discussions
16h45 - 17h15 - Improvements

Figure 11: Instructional Rounds Schedule

When teaching Instructional Rounds, the packet in Appendix C was a visual aid to assist in explaining the schedule for the day, the overview of Instructional Rounds, and objective

observation techniques. Team member Ryan Rigney was the sole teacher as he had the best understanding of Instructional Rounds. The purpose of having one teacher was to provide a more comfortable learning environment for employees. Proper instruction was important because without a fundamental understanding of the process, participants could not collect data or positively contribute during discussions.

During observation, the plan was to create two Instructional Rounds observation teams, which would consist of two members from the project team and two employees.

Dividing the project team increases the chances of participants using proper techniques because the project team has more knowledge about the process. Additionally, dividing the team could create a less overwhelming environment for the employees and allow them to have more control and input in the process.

Both teams observed the *Mondays @3* meeting and considered:

- Interactions between employees
- Soft skills
- Communication
- Eye contact
- Attentiveness
- Body language
- Tone
- Meeting norms
- Employee mannerisms
- Topics of discussion
- Time dedicated to each discussion topic.

Ryan Rigney trained participants to remain objective and only record data that is specific and descriptive, as exemplified in Figure 12. Participants used the worksheet found in their Instructional Rounds packet to record observations. Once observation teams completed the observation stage, they began data review.

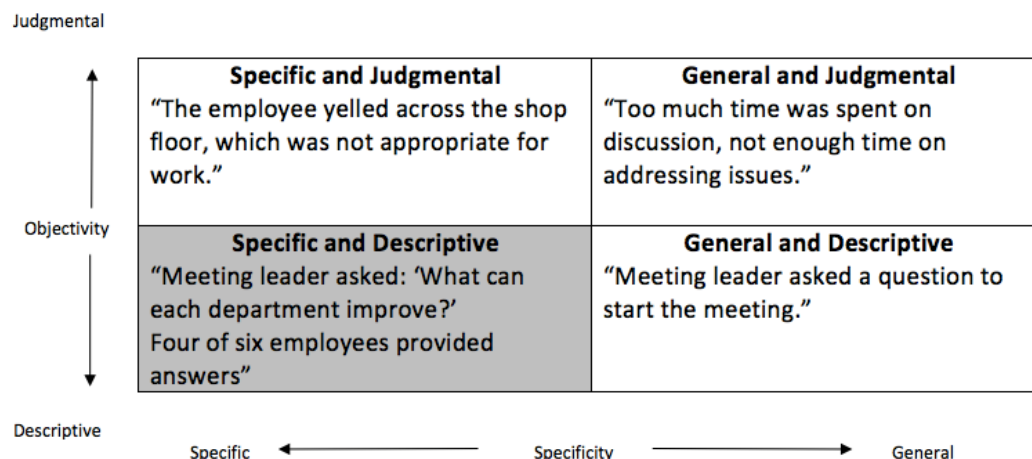


Figure 12: Objectivity and Specificity Matrix (Teitel, 2013)

Ryan Rigney provided a brief description of how to properly review data. He instructed participants to individually review their personal notes and mark five to ten of their most significant observations. Though a participant could select any observation, he told them to choose significant observations relating to soft skills. All participants recorded each of their significant observations on separate sticky notes.

When observation teams reconvened for team discussions, each observation team member had the opportunity to discuss their significant observations. The observation teams visually grouped similar observations together by placing similar sticky notes in piles to create categories.

The two Instructional Rounds observation teams discussed their opinions about each category and its meaning. Once observation teams reached a consensus on each category's meaning, they used a large sheet of paper to visually organize their categories. This visual representation aided the observation team in determining trends from the data. For example, trends could include common good practices or areas to improve. All participants reconvened and presented their findings in a way which section 3.3.3 describes.

### **3.3 Data Analysis Techniques**

The three different data collection methods required three different data analysis techniques.

The analysis of each method's data produced results which the team could compare to recognize similarities. The findings from each method were meant to substantiate the results from the other methods. The following sections discuss the analysis of each method.

#### 3.3.1 Interview Coding

Once a team completed an interview, the interviewers transferred all notes into a Word document. To identify common themes among interviews the team used coding. Coding is an analytical process to transform interview results into quantitative data (Griffiee, 2005). After completing all interviews, each member individually reviewed the notes to create pre-code categories based on relevant information to the project and similarities in the interviews. The purpose of pre-codes was to organize the interviewees' answers. In this step, each team member assigned categories a short phrase or word. Once each member determined the most suitable pre-codes, all members reconvened to discuss similarities and differences between each member's chosen pre-codes. The team came to a consensus on which pre-codes to use and defined the finalized pre-codes so they were consistent across all interviews.

With finalized pre-codes, interview pairs worked separately to complete the first round of coding. In this round, each pair reviewed all interview notes, and assigned relevant interviewee responses to a corresponding pre-code category. The team conducted this step in pairs to help improve consistency by allowing pairs to discuss discrepancies.

The next step was to reconvene and compare these coding results, addressing any differences. The team then worked together to determine sub-codes for each pre-code category based on reoccurring themes. The second round of coding utilized these sub-codes for a more in-depth analysis of the data. Once the team determined sub-codes, each interview pair conducted the same coding process used during the first round of coding. When finished, the group analyzed each sub-code with the intention of formulating conclusions supported by numerical evidence. Chapter 4 discusses the findings from this step.

### 3.3.2 Job Shadowing Analysis

To analyze the job shadowing observations, the entire team worked together to code the job shadowing notes. The team chose codes based on similarities in the observations that pertained to soft skills. With proper codes determined, the next step was to code the notes in pairs and compare results. Then, the team looked for observations made during job shadowing to find examples of behaviors described in interviews. This process was intended to add credibility to the information learned during interviews.

### 3.3.3 Instructional Rounds Analysis

The last stage of Instructional Rounds is the improvements stage, which was a time for participants to analyze the data from the first three stages. During this stage, the two observation teams reconvened and presented their findings from the previous stages in a discussion that Ryan Rigney facilitated. The goal of this discussion was to establish a group understanding of each identified theme and the causes of them. The discussion then focused on prominent themes and the aspects of the company that need improvement. Finally, the participants discussed a vision for future improvements and possible steps to achieve that vision.

## **3.4 Methodology Summary**

The team utilized three different methods of data collection, interviewing, job shadowing and Instructional Rounds, to identify areas for soft skill development at TransNamib. Interviewing was meant to aid in completing objective one, gaining the trust of the TransNamib employees, and objective two, understanding the current practices and viewpoints of employees pertaining to soft skills. The next step was to code the interview responses in an effort to further understand the areas needing soft skill development. Job shadowing was intended to help the team complete objective three, observe and experience employee soft skills first-hand, while assisting in achieving objectives one and two. The intention of coding the job shadowing observations was to find examples of behaviors explained in interviews. Finally, the team completed Instructional Rounds in an attempt to satisfy objectives four, working alongside employees to identify areas for soft skill improvement. Additionally, it contributed to fulfilling objectives one and three. Through Instructional Rounds the team hoped to work with employees to identify areas for soft skill improvement. All three of these data collection and analysis

processes could cross-check each other's findings which aimed to help generate reinforced results. The following chapter contains an analysis of the data and identifies areas of soft skills that need improvement at TransNamib.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS**

The three methods of interviewing, job shadowing and Instructional Rounds each individually generated raw data that the team analyzed to identify overlapping themes. This triangulation allowed for the cross-checking of data between methods. The analysis compared the information employees disclosed in interviews, personal observations in job shadowing, and employee observations in Instructional Rounds. The goal was to corroborate the quantitative data from coding interviews with the qualitative data from job shadowing and Instructional Rounds. Interviewing produced the most conclusive and accurate results because the team collected 23 distinct employee viewpoints, which was the largest sample size of the three methods.

The team conducted a stakeholder analysis to indicate that the project involved managers, supervisors and general employees from the rail operations sector. The common data from the three methods related to communication, motivation, and soft skill education. Sections 4.2.1, 4.2.2, 4.3 and 4.4 discuss each of these categories and organize them by explaining the interview data first, the job shadowing observations, and finally the Instructional Rounds observations. The data from each method corroborates the data from the other two to produce reinforced results.

### **4.1 Stakeholder Analysis**

The team analyzed the demographics of all the employees involved in the project and labeled the stakeholder groups as head office employees, marshaling yard employees, train station employees, Goodshed employees, and WinCon employees. The project team completed 23 interviews, job shadowed four employees and worked with three employees in Instructional Rounds because the fourth employee could not attend. Figure 13 displays the distribution of employee participants. All employees the team job shadowed and used as participants in Instructional Rounds were interviewees, except for one employee who the team job shadowed but did not interview.

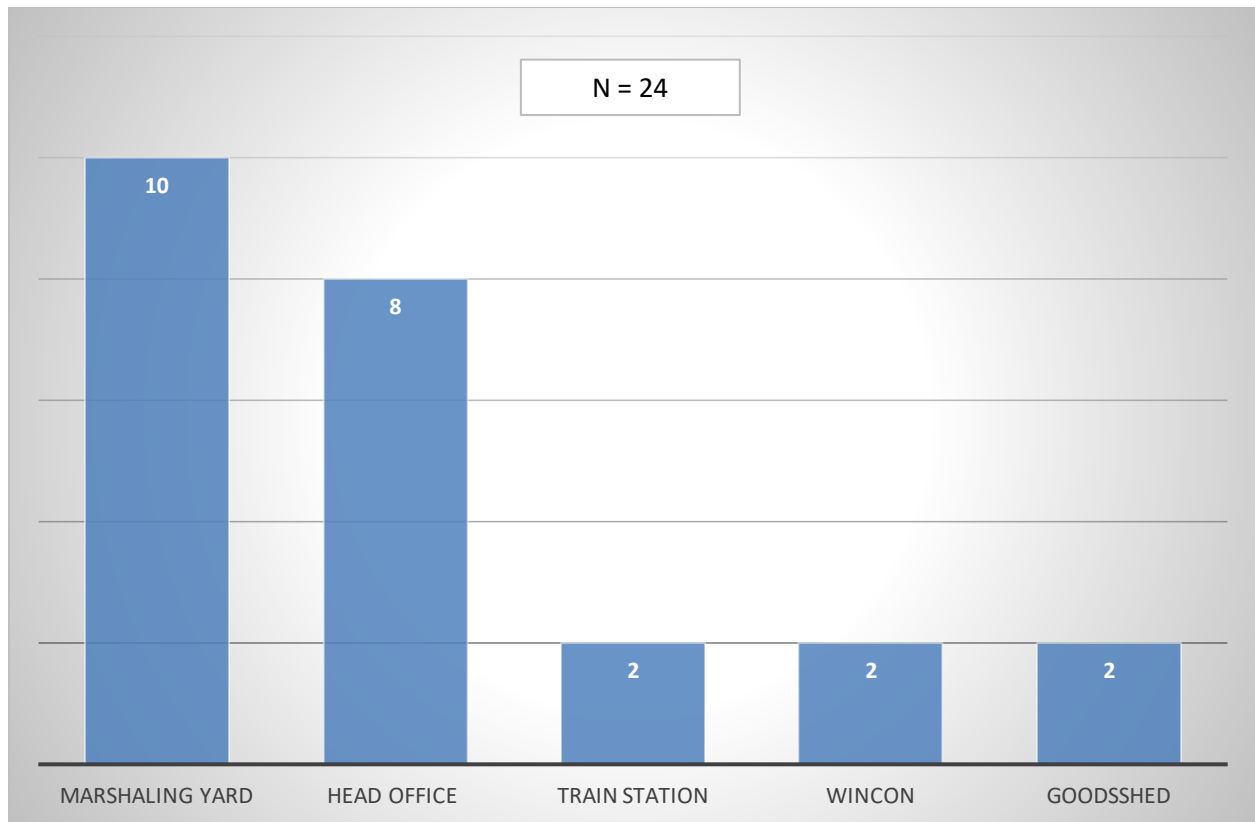


Figure 13: Employee Participants in Data Collection Methods by Stakeholder Group

The team interacted with more employees from the marshaling yard and head office, because those stakeholder groups encompass employees from the rail operations sector. The project still included interviews with employees at other locations to gain a more expansive view of employee soft skills throughout the company.

Within the different stakeholder locations, there are differing employee positions for the project to consider. To study soft skills effectively, the team wanted to understand their current state at all employee levels. Figure 14 graphically represents the composition of participants by employee position for each stakeholder group. The category the graph labels as other consists mainly of general employees, but includes several unique TransNamib positions as well.

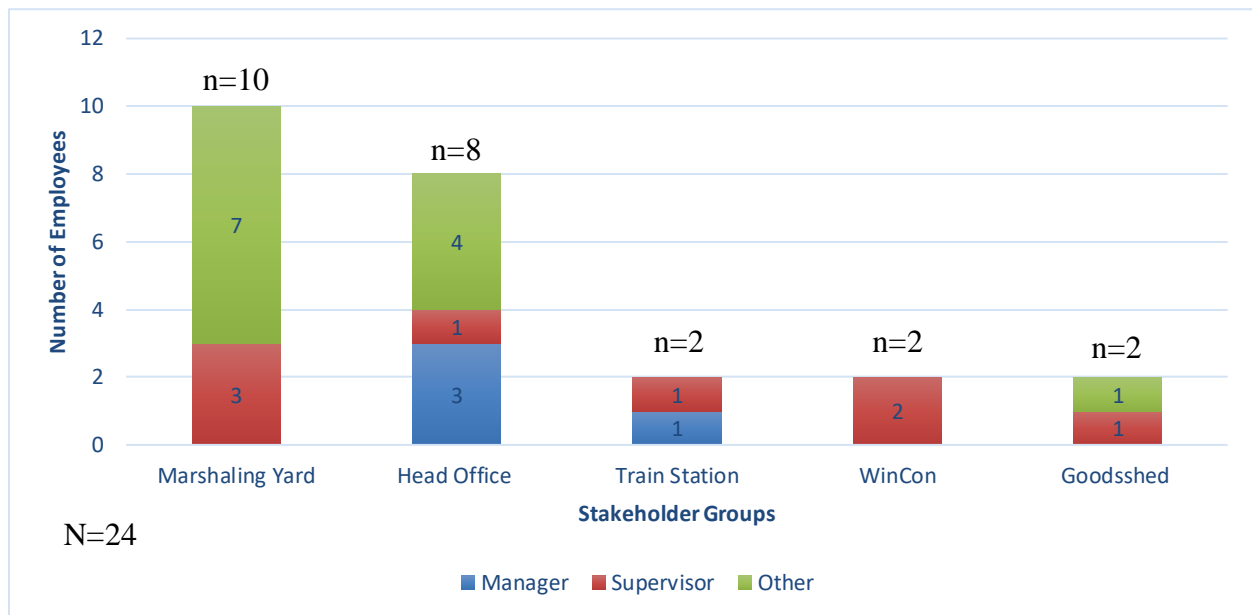


Figure 14: Employee Participant Breakdown by Position for all Stakeholder Groups

The team wanted to involve managers, supervisors and general employees from the rail operations sector in the research because they are the focus of this project. In the head office, the team interviewed managers, supervisors, and other employees to gain data from all levels. In the marshaling yard, interviewers did not speak to any managers because supervisors hold the highest positions at this location. To gain a holistic view of the company, the team also interacted with upper management at the train station, Goodsshed, and WinCon. These upper management positions require more knowledge of their sector and its relationship to TransNamib as a whole. Therefore, by including these managers as stakeholders, the team could learn more about the company and identify company-wide areas needing improvement.

## 4.2 Communication

Interviewees stressed the importance of good communication at TransNamib. From employees' interview responses, the team determined that good communication practices at TransNamib would include frequent contact between locations and employees answering emails and phone calls. One interviewee said TransNamib employees must communicate effectively, otherwise the company cannot deliver goods on time. Further, late deliveries cause the company to lose revenue. Currently, TransNamib uses four main channels of communication: email,

phone calls, WhatsApp, and face-to-face. Although communication is essential to TransNamib, not all employees have access to the company's communication tools. A lack of proper communication channels delays information, leaving employees disconnected. From interview coding, the team found a general desire for improved communication. Out of the 23 employees interviewed, 13 stated that they wanted improved communication. These 13 employees represented four out of the five stakeholder groups as displayed in Figure 15.

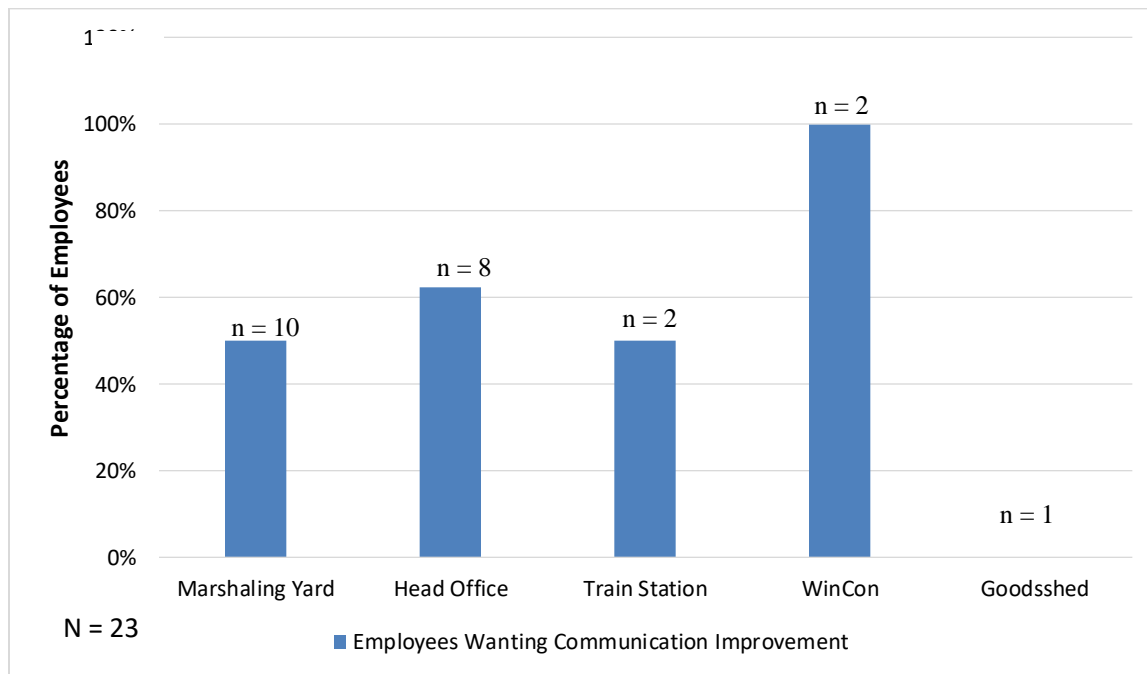


Figure 15: Percentages of Employees Desiring Improved Communication by Stakeholder Group

This result shows that employees across the spectrum of the stakeholder groups currently see communication as an issue throughout the company. One interviewee said employees tend to focus on the information they do not have rather than sharing the information they do have. This causes problems within departments because it creates a culture of having to ask for necessary information rather than a culture where people are openly sharing information.

Beyond this need for general communication improvements, there are two main disconnects. The data collection methods revealed that communication between upper management and general employees needs improvement, as well as interdepartmental communication across TransNamib locations. Though these two areas of communication need

improvement, the team witnessed employees practice effective communication while completing Instructional Rounds. Though Instructional Rounds was meant to collect soft skill data from the *Mondays @3* meeting, when conducting the process, the team observed that Instructional Rounds fosters communication among the employee participants.

#### 4.2.1 Supervisor and Employee Communication

Communication between supervisors and employees is key to TransNamib's success. During the interview process, three employees mentioned difficulty speaking with their supervisors. A manager shared that some supervisors target employees who disagree with them making supervisor and employee relationships tense, which also makes communication more difficult. Additionally, one interviewee said employees do not want to listen to their supervisors. This attitude can produce tense relationships with supervisors causing communication between employees to be more difficult. Interviews revealed that many employees do not want to speak with their supervisor, and instead utilize TransNamib's open door policy. This policy allows employees to go to the head office and talk to managers directly. By communicating outside normal channels and circumventing supervisors, employees degrade the communication between themselves and their supervisor.

While job shadowing, the team was able to witness two examples demonstrating a lack in communication from supervisors. Job shadowing revealed that not all supervisors greet their fellow employees. Not having these basic personal interactions adds to the tense relationship described by interviewees making communication challenging. Additionally, another employee being job shadowed stressed the importance of not bypassing supervisors. This employee has to actively combat this behavior by only speaking to their direct reports. This employee does this to maintain the communication between the employees below them.

Instructional Rounds presented an example of miscommunication between an employee and their superior. During the *Mondays @3* meeting, the facilitator asked these employees a clarifying question regarding their shared project. The superior attempted to answer, but the employee interrupted with a contradicting answer. Both the superior and employee discussed the matter and concluded neither one knew the answer. This instance displayed multiple components of poor communication between reporting employees. Interrupting others during a formal meeting exemplifies poor communication. Additionally, the misunderstanding between the

superior and employee showed neither had communicated project progress to each other. This led to neither having the ability to answer the facilitator's question and the employees could not accomplish anything further.

#### 4.2.2 Communication Between Stakeholder Groups

The data from the three methods revealed clearly that communication between stakeholder groups is an area for improvement. Five interviewees, who all work outside of the head office, explicitly stated that they wanted better communication between the Windhoek locations. One interviewee commented that the head office and marshaling yard do not work together in a "cohesive unit." Instead, there is a disconnect in the flow of information hindering the company's ability to communicate effectively. One interviewee stated employees only communicate between the head office and marshaling yard when it is necessary. Employees claimed that each location must know about the affairs of the other location to work as a "cohesive unit". The current communication status between the marshaling yard and head office makes it difficult of creating this cohesiveness.

A job shadow pair observed an instance of insufficient communication between the head office and another undisclosed location. An employee postponed a daily conference call with the head office due to lack of preparation for the conversation. The employee told the job shadowing pair they postpone this call often. This daily conference call informs the head office of train and goods movement along with any problems which the head office needs to address. By postponing this phone call, the head office is not receiving the necessary information to properly understand the affairs of this location.

Finally, through Instructional Rounds the team and a group of TransNamib employees observed the need for improved interdepartmental communication. During the meeting, a supervisor from vehicle maintenance said they were waiting to hear back from finance about funding. This supervisor did not address the question to the finance representative at the meeting and instead addressed the facilitator. The facilitator then needed to ask the finance representative about the funding and the finance representative was unfamiliar with the funding request. This observation shows a lack in communication between department heads. It appeared they do not talk to one another outside of the *Mondays @3* meeting. In the improvements stage of Instructional Rounds, one participant addressed this issue and suggested department heads need

to communicate outside of the *Mondays @3* meetings. The participant continued to explain department heads need to discuss departmental problems with each other more frequently so they can work together to generate solutions.

#### 4.2.3 Instructional Rounds Communication

TransNamib employees struggle to communicate with their supervisors and between departments. Instructional Rounds is a method that can address these gaps in communication. The intention of Instructional Rounds in this project was to collect data on employee soft skills and identify areas for improvement, but the method served another purpose as well. During Instructional Rounds, the team observed the employee participants communicating and witnessed the process's potential to improve the *Mondays @3* meeting.

While conducting Instructional Rounds, the team saw that the employee participants were able to work in teams and examine their own communication abilities. Instructional Rounds is a team-based process and during the discussion and improvement phases, participants communicated their views. The Instructional Rounds participants were from three different stakeholder groups, but they were able to effectively complete the process. The participants communicated and worked together to create the flow charts and improvement strategies seen in Appendices D, E, and F. Specifically in the improvements stage, the employees discussed company-wide problems, such as a lack in accountability, and they worked together to create improvement strategies. By removing employees from their normal work environment, they were able to practice communicating. This establishes Instructional Rounds as low-stakes practice field for developing communication skills.

Moreover, the *Mondays @3* meetings can benefit from Instructional Rounds because during the last stage employee participants made recommendations to improve communication. When the meeting facilitator learned of these proposed recommendations, they said the recommendations could be beneficial to the meeting. This shows the ability of Instructional Rounds to identify areas of communication improvement and provide feasible recommendations that address these areas. Instructional Rounds also gives employees an outside view of the meeting. Immediately after conducting Instructional Rounds, the team asked participants for feedback. An employee who usually attends the *Mondays @3* meeting expressed that while observing, they could watch the dynamic and participation of the meeting rather than focus on

their role in the meeting. Instructional Rounds lets employees witness communication areas that they would not see otherwise and enables them to make improvements to communication in the *Mondays @3* meeting. Due to the impact this meeting has on the company, the improvements from Instructional Rounds can have a company-wide effect.

#### 4.2.4 Communication Summary

Through the three methods of data collection, it was evident TransNamib can improve its communication. Throughout the interviews and job shadowing it was apparent TransNamib needs to develop the communication between employees and supervisors and there is a disconnect between the information in the yard and the information in the head office. The results from Instructional Rounds further support the need for improved supervisor and employee communication and a lack of cross stakeholder communication. While using Instructional Rounds as a method, the team witnessed positive communication between stakeholder groups as well as the potential to improve the *Mondays @3* meetings.

### **4.3 Motivation**

Employees are motivated by their own inherent need to succeed at a challenging task (Wiley, 1997). During five weeks of data collection, the project team identified employee internal motivation as an area that needs improvement at TransNamib. Internal motivation is a soft skill that employees must possess to persevere through challenging times. Currently TransNamib employees face a lack of job security, budgetary restrictions for equipment and bonuses, and an absence of time-consuming work. The data the team collected through interviewing, job shadowing, and Instructional Rounds, showed that many employees did not always demonstrate internal motivation, however, employees did suggest incentives as a mechanism in which this could be improved.

During interviews, when talking about soft skills, 12 employees discussed employee motivation and ten of these employees related internal motivation to work ethic and attitude. All ten responses were unprompted. Figure 16 shows the percentage of employees who thought work ethic and attitude at TransNamib needed to improve.

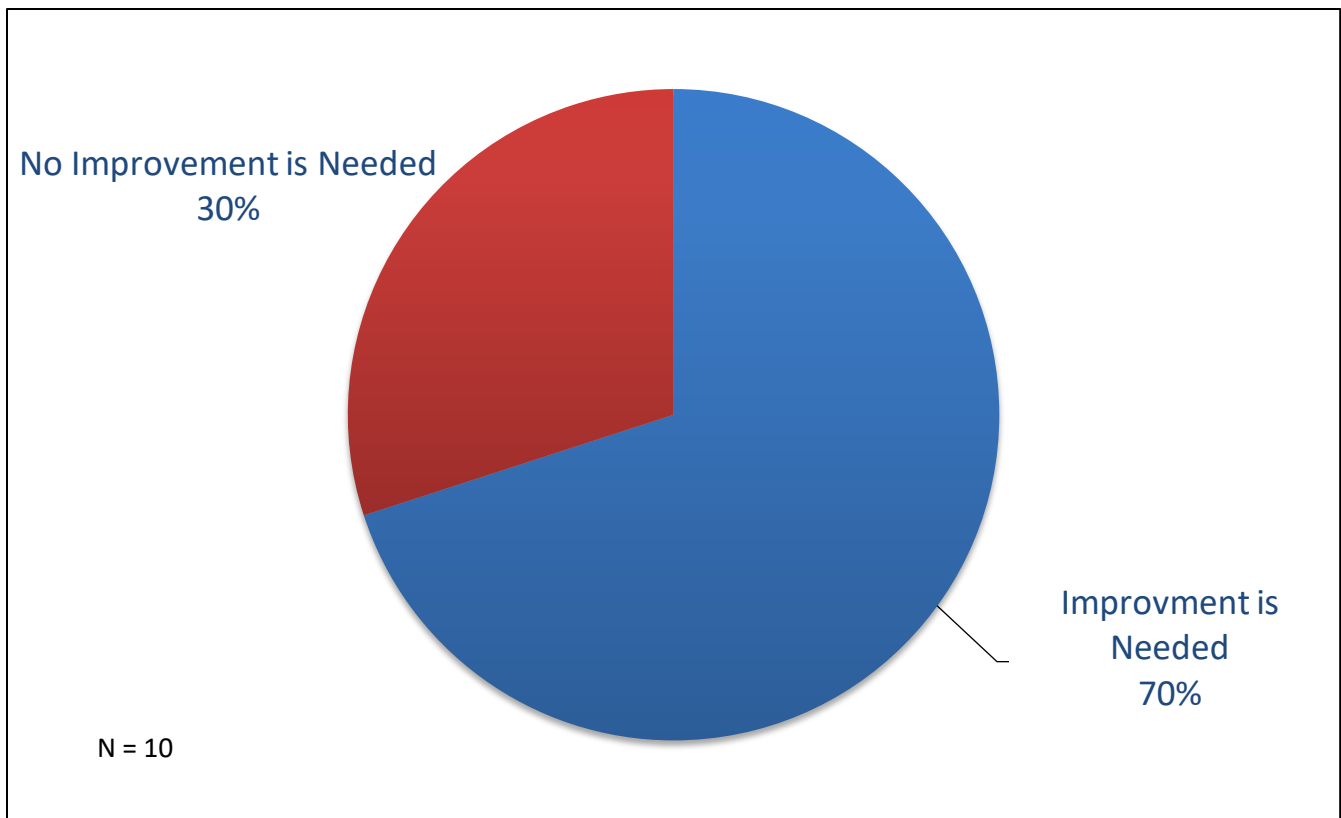


Figure 16: Percentage of Employees' Opinions on Whether Work Ethic and Attitude Need to Improve

Of the ten employees, 70% of them believed that improvement to employee internal motivation was needed. These seven employees are from the head office, marshaling yard, and WinCon, showing internal motivation to be an issue across the rail operations sector. One of these seven interviewees thought poor work ethic and laziness play a role in the company's recent economic decline. Another said a big problem is people showing up late to work and leaving early. These sentiments reflect the state of employee's internal motivation at TransNamib and imply a need for improvement.

Not having a consistent goal to work towards causes a lack in motivation. This is true in TransNamib's case because employees do not have sufficient work for the entire shift. TransNamib's loss of clients and its outdated equipment are two reasons for the lack in work for employees. Without clients, TransNamib does not have consistent contracts to fill, leaving most of the rail sector with limited work. One employee claimed that even if TransNamib did get more clients, the company would not be able to handle the work because of its outdated equipment. Outdated equipment restricts the amount of work TransNamib's employees can do. With

outdated equipment, these employees must wait for available equipment before they can complete their daily task. Another employee supported this claim explaining that people are slow to get into their rhythm of work because there is not enough equipment. Without the equipment required, employees cannot complete any tasks and do not have a goal to motivate them.

Another factor that results in employee's inability to set goals for themselves is the perception of unfair career advancement at TransNamib. Four interviewees mentioned that the TransNamib promotion interviewing committee is biased. A biased committee means that employees receive promotions based on favoritism rather than qualifications. According to one of these employees, this results in people not caring about their work and not putting extra effort into their jobs. Without the promise of fair promotions, employees are not motivated to work hard since there is not a goal to achieve. Though there is currently a lack in employee internal motivation at TransNamib, this was not the sentiment expressed by all the stakeholders.

When TransNamib had more clients, employees had consistent work. During this time, the company had incentives programs to motivate employees. An employee explained there was once a point system at TransNamib, where employees could receive points for doing good work. At the end of each year, the company awarded a bonus to the person with the most points. The employee explained that this was both fun for employees to participate and motivating, but was discontinued due to monetary restrictions. Recently there has been a lack in focus on incentives. Interview coding revealed employees desire recognition and physical incentives from TransNamib. In interviews, 12 employees said incentives would improve employee motivation. Figure 17 depicts the viewpoints of employees who believe incentives would be beneficial at TransNamib. Due to rounding, the pie chart percentages sum to 101%.

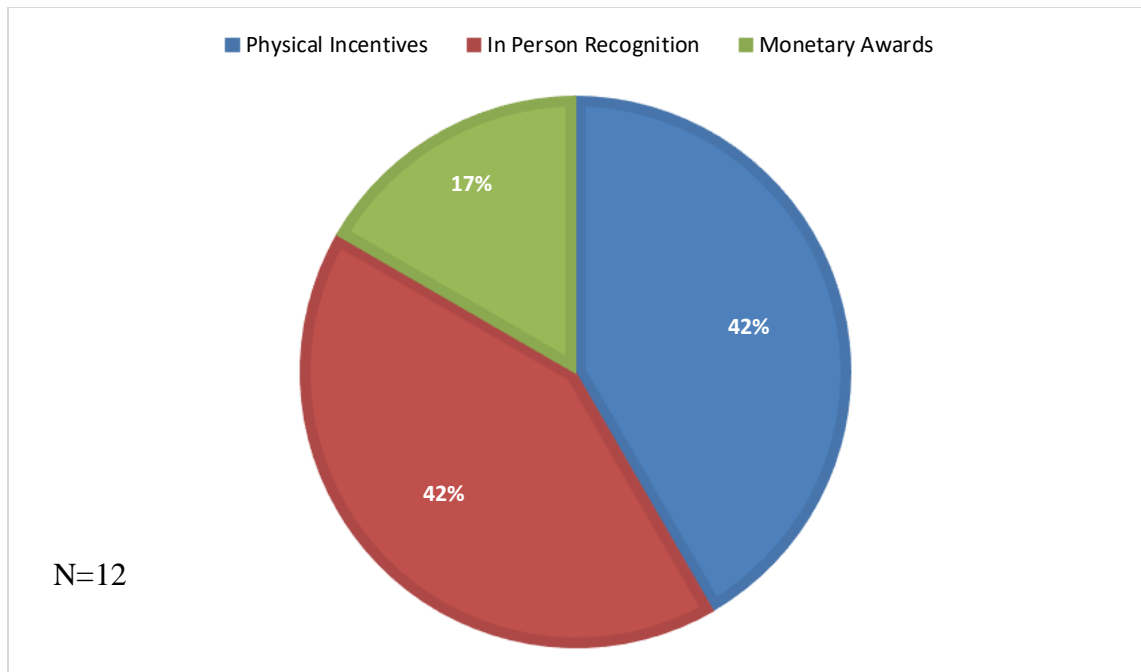


Figure 17: Percentage of Employees Who Discussed Each Type of Incentive

Of those 12 employees who discussed a form of incentives, 42% said they would like personal recognition, while 42% said physical incentives would be most effective. This data shows TransNamib employees value recognition and physical incentives over monetary incentives.

While job shadowing, the project team observed multiple instances of a lack in internal motivation as well as a support of incentives. In the marshaling yard, job shadow teams noticed there is not sufficient work to keep employees busy throughout the day. During job shadowing, one employee explained that sometimes employees only have one hour of work to complete for their eight-hour shift. Shadowing teams observed that without a specific task or work incentive, employees spent considerable amounts of time in the break room. This environment makes it difficult for employees to motivate themselves because they do not have a challenging task to accomplish. Without much work to do, employees do not have the opportunity to demonstrate good work ethic.

The team observed another example of this lack in internal motivation when an employee was not properly prepared for a daily conference call with the head office. This employee asked to reschedule the meeting because they were not ready, even though they knew the time the

meeting would occur. When a shadowing pair asked the employee about this event, the employee indicated they often postpone this call because they are unprepared. As well as a demonstration of a lack in communication discussed in section 4.2.2, this showed a lack in internal motivation because the employee was aware of the expectations and did not attempt to meet them.

Finally, in job shadowing an employee explained it is customary for employees to receive a certificate of appreciation after every five years of working at TransNamib. Job shadow pairs observed that employees hang these certificates in their office. The employees hang their certificates in visible places, which shows the employee's appreciation of physical incentives.

During the team discussion stage of Instructional Rounds, both observation teams grouped similar notes into categories relating to employee motivation. One of these categories pertained to a lack in participation in the meeting. An observation that participants grouped in this category was that in the first 23 minutes, only two meeting attendees spoke. The facilitator was persistent in asking open-ended questions to the entire group to try to engage the meeting members, but attendees only participated when the facilitator directly addressed them. Instructional Rounds participants analyzed this data and concluded that the meeting was not as effective as it could be. The employees participating in Instructional Rounds noted that because the meeting attendees are usually managers and supervisors, each attendee knows the meeting expectations, however, they are not meeting these expectations. This demonstrates a lack of internal motivation because there is a clear task for employees to accomplish, yet they do not complete it.

Later, employees discussed the fact that there is no one holding the meeting attendees responsible for coming prepared or completing meeting tasks. This lack of accountability puts more responsibility on the meeting attendees who already struggle to motivate themselves in the *Mondays @3* meeting. The meeting facilitator invites approximately 30 employees to the meeting, but only seven attended the meeting that participants observed. Due to the meeting not being mandatory, this project cannot conclude whether employees do not attend because of a lack in motivation, or a busy schedule. However, in the final stage of Instructional Rounds, improvements, employee participants determined that for the meeting to be most effective, employees must attend and be prepared for the meeting. To achieve this, there must be a more definitive, and motivating incentive.

Through Instructional Rounds the team was again able to corroborate previous observations from job shadowing and interviews. The project team considered employee internal motivation as an area of improvement because employees are influential to a company's success. Moreover, TransNamib employees appreciate incentives and found them motivating in the past.

#### **4.4 Soft Skills Education**

The previous sections revealed a need for soft skill improvement relating to employee communication and internal motivation at TransNamib. One employee stated these skills have been degrading over the past few years and the absence of soft skill training may be the cause of this decline. Prior to 2015, TransNamib offered effective internal and external training programs that emphasized soft skills. Since 2015, the company has not offered soft skill training. While the lack in training is due to TransNamib's insufficient funds, soft skill education is still a vital aspect of any company.

Currently, TransNamib promotes employees from within the company, but the employees do not learn the skills necessary to be a manager or supervisor. Five interviewees mentioned a need for manager soft skill training and four others suggested implementing manager and supervisor specific training to improve soft skills. Employees cannot learn soft skills through experience alone. TransNamib must teach its employees soft skills and give them the opportunity to develop and practice these skills (Ansel, 2016). Interviewing, job shadowing and Instructional Rounds revealed that TransNamib employees support soft skill educational programs.

Interviewing revealed that employees are excited about prospective training at TransNamib. Seven employees wanted TransNamib to offer more training. These employees enjoyed the idea of training and saw it as an opportunity to better themselves. This excitement is a good indicator that employees would be willing to participate in training. According to two interviewees, training used to be effective for TransNamib. Past training's success reinforces the potential for training to be effective in the future. Though the trainings mentioned by these interviewees were not specific to soft skills, their general eagerness to train could be applicable to soft skill training as well.

Another form of education employees discussed in interviewing was mentoring. Throughout interviews, 19 interviewees across all stakeholder groups discussed the use of a mentorship program. Of these 19 interviewees, 16 believed mentoring would be beneficial to the

company, even though they recognized some employees might not be fit to mentor. Interview coding showed that 56% of employees that said mentoring would be beneficial stated this without being prompted by a question. The fact that their responses were unprompted shows that interview questions did not influence employee beliefs and that employees genuinely support mentoring. One employee stated, “Mentorship programs would be good to share knowledge and experience.” A mentorship program would allow employees with well-developed soft skills to transfer their knowledge to employees with less developed soft skills. The interview data presented both mentoring and training as possible soft skill education techniques.

Job shadowing reinforced the belief that TransNamib employees desire training. The team observed an instance of this in the marshaling yard. One shadowing pair interacted with a shunter that was receiving a promotion. This employee expressed excitement to learn new skills for their new position. This showed the excitement for training that interviewees had expressed. In addition to training, job shadowing also reinforced the potential of mentoring. The team found that some sectors already use an informal form of mentoring. Participants in this mentoring explained the benefits of the informal program. Mentors explained that they try to provide the mentee with all the knowledge they have. Mentees said that it was helpful and they learned valuable information from their predecessor. Despite the absence of a formal mentoring program, employees created their own process, which is indicative of a sincere desire for mentoring.

Lastly, to conduct Instructional Rounds, the team had to teach the TransNamib employee participants the process. Though the intention of Instructional Rounds was to be a data collection method for *Mondays @3*, the team was able to observe the interactions between Instructional Rounds participants. When observing the process, the team witnessed employee eagerness for learning. During the training phase, employees were attentive and asked questions. As the day progressed, employees stayed engaged and actively participated in team discussions and improvement planning, even though the process extended past the scheduled end time. The employee’s interest and willingness to learn Instructional Rounds further reinforced that employees want to expand their skills and knowledge.

During all three methods, employees expressed a desire for more education at TransNamib. The eagerness employees have towards learning in general is applicable to soft skill education as well. Soft skill training used to be effective at TransNamib, but this training is no longer possible for the company due to monetary restrictions. Regardless, TransNamib must

find a cost effective substitute so its employees can learn these soft skills. Employees support mentoring and see its benefits. Any educational program will likely be effective because employees are eager to learn and are accepting of new knowledge.

#### **4.5 Summary of Results**

Using triangulation of three methods, the team was able to recognize five distinct results. The data revealed a need for TransNamib employees to improve communication between sectors and ranks. Specifically, the communication between the head office and the marshaling yard needs improvement as well as the relationships between supervisors and their employees. Further, Instructional Rounds showed that employees could evaluate their own communication skills as well as the communication at *Mondays @3*. The project results demonstrate a lack in employee internal motivation and the desire for recognition and physical incentives to increase this motivation. Finally, the project team concluded that there was a need for employee soft skill education. Employees enjoyed past soft skill training, and supported mentoring as an alternative due to monetary restrictions. The following chapter addresses these areas of improvement by offering recommendation strategies.

## CHAPTER 5: RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the major areas of improvement, the project team devised three suitable recommendations for TransNamib: an incentives program, an Instructional Rounds program for *Mondays @3* meetings, and a mentoring program. All three programs should address the need for soft skill improvement. An incentives program would motivate employees. Instructional Rounds will assist in building interdepartmental communication, along with teamwork and problem solving skills. Finally, a one-on-one mentoring program would allow the employees to receive necessary soft skill training. This chapter presents each recommendation and provides evidence to support each claim.

### 5.1 Incentives

Due to the employees' emphasis on incentives, the team recommends a non-monetary incentive program that focuses on recognition and physical incentives. With the company's financial constraints, non-monetary incentives are a feasible recommendation because they are cost effective and easily implementable. Furthermore, since employees are lacking motivation in the current work environment at TransNamib, incentives should be used as a tool to better motivate employees. TransNamib should use these incentives to recognize and reward its employee's hard work on a regular basis, showing them appreciation.

Incentives should take the form of in-person recognition or physical incentives. An example of in-person recognition would be a manager praising an employee in front of their coworkers. A physical incentive could be certificates of recognition for exceptional work. Both types of incentives provide employees with an attainable goal. Though these are examples of recognition and physical incentives, TransNamib should conduct research to understand which incentives are most suitable for their employees. Currently, TransNamib provides employees with certificates of recognition for five years of employment. These incentives may not be the most effective strategy to motivate employees because they are given to everyone, which makes them less significant. However, management should continue this process, while the company searches for different recognition techniques and finds various physical incentives to use.

## 5.2 Instructional Rounds for *Mondays @3*

Instructional Rounds is typically an organization wide initiative, however, using Instructional Rounds in this manner is not possible at TransNamib due to the lack of regularly scheduled meetings that participants can observe. However, Instructional Rounds is flexible, and a modified Instructional Rounds program could benefit TransNamib. With TransNamib's lack in interdepartmental communication and its need for soft skill development as explained in section 4.2, the project team suggests implementing an Instructional Rounds program explicitly for *Mondays @3* meetings. Though the original purpose of Instructional Rounds was to be an analysis technique, after completing the process, the team realized that Instructional Rounds could improve both the soft skills of employees participating in the process and the productivity of *Mondays @3* meetings. Since *Mondays @3* is the only usable meeting for observation, employees should conduct Instructional Rounds at the first meeting of each month.

The company established *Mondays @3* meetings two years ago, but employees involved believe they can make the meeting more efficient. Implementing an Instructional Rounds program for *Mondays @3* meetings has two benefits. First, the act of participating in Instructional Rounds will bring employees from different departments together to observe the meeting, discuss areas of improvement, and work together to determine solutions. This could improve the communication between employees and provide a practice field for improving the employee soft skills of communication, problem solving, and teamwork. Second, the deliverable from implementing Instructional Rounds is a set of recommendations for how to improve observed shortcomings in the *Mondays @3* meeting. If Instructional Rounds participants can recognize ways to improve *Mondays @3*, and these ideas are successfully implemented, the meeting could become more productive. With the nature of the meeting and the employees in attendance, this could in turn improve the whole company.

If employees conduct Instructional Rounds monthly, the meeting participants will have the opportunity to actively work towards implementing ideas suggested from previous Instructional Rounds. Each month, Instructional Rounds participants will be able to evaluate the effectiveness of last month's recommendations. Additionally, conducting the program monthly decreases the chances of employee's changing their current behavior while in the meeting. If employees observe every meeting, meeting attendees may feel like they are being watched constantly, causing them to act differently. Finally, a monthly schedule would allow different

employees to be involved each time, giving employees who already participated in Instructional Rounds the chance to improve their soft skills by applying the skills they have learned through the process.

### **5.3 Mentoring**

Formal training, both external and internal, is an excellent technique to teach employees about soft skills. TransNamib once offered a wide range of training courses, however, over the past ten years the company has stopped all external training and many internal training programs. Though the project team sees a benefit to implementing a training program at TransNamib, this suggestion is not currently feasible due to financial constraints. Instead, the project team recommends instituting a one-on-one mentorship program.

Through mentoring, mentees have one-on-one interaction with their mentor to learn the requisite soft skills to be a better employee. Employees at TransNamib need a reasonable practice field to develop their soft skills, and mentoring could provide employees with this. As the process requires frequent communication between the mentor and the mentee, mentors can show mentees tactics to develop and apply soft skills. Though some employees at TransNamib have better developed soft skills, making them good mentoring candidates, TransNamib should note that some employees will not possess the skills required to be an effective mentor. These employees should first start as mentees before TransNamib determines whether they would make a suitable mentor. Additionally, a mentorship program will provide TransNamib with a more developed succession plan.

The data the team collected supports the feasibility of a mentorship program at TransNamib. Employees across all stakeholder groups are eager to learn and recognize the need for soft skill education. TransNamib's employees support mentoring, but the company should research one-on-one mentoring programs to find the most suitable program for their employees.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The project's goal was to assist TransNamib in identifying areas for soft skill improvements within the rail sector. Through background research, interviews, job shadowing, and Instructional Rounds the team collected data regarding manager and supervisor soft skills at TransNamib. The team then used triangulation to reinforce the results from interviewing, job shadowing, and Instructional Rounds. Data from these methods identified the areas for soft skill improvement: communication, motivation, and soft skill education. Within communication, the team identified two areas of improvement, employee-to-employee communication and interdepartmental communication, and one positive example of communication during Instructional Rounds. Furthermore, the three methods revealed that employee motivation needs to be improved, and employee's value incentives. Finally, while TransNamib cannot afford soft skill training, the data showed employees are eager to learn new skills and are receptive to mentoring. By comparing the data collected through all three methods, as well as taking employee ideas into account, the team recommends an incentives program, an Instructional Rounds program for *Mondays @3*, and a one-on-one mentoring program. While these recommendations may not fix all soft skill problems within TransNamib, the team hopes TransNamib will be able to implement one or more of these recommendations to aid the development of employee soft skills.

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## **APPENDIX A: CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT**

We would like to interview employees from across the project stakeholder groups. Most interviews will be conducted in pairs. One team member will ask questions from the list below while the other takes notes. To ensure interviewees their interview responses will stay confidential we have created the following confidentiality statement.

We are a group of students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute in the United States. We would like your permission to ask questions as part of an interview for our research project. The purpose of our research is to provide an analysis of TransNamib's soft skills and recommend how to help strengthen soft skill practices in TransNamib. TransNamib will review and publish our analysis in our research paper. From this interview, we hope to learn your opinions on TransNamib's soft skills. We will not publish any information with your name or any personal identifying factors.

### **General Interview Questions:**

1. Have you always lived in Namibia?
  - a. If yes: What was it like growing up in Namibia?
  - b. If no: What brought you here and made you stay?
2. What is your favorite part of Namibia?
3. What other jobs have you had?
4. How did you end up at TransNamib? / What brought you here?
5. Have you held other positions in TransNamib?
6. What kinds of training have you had at TransNamib?
7. What did you like or did not like about the training?
8. What has been your favorite training?
9. What do you think makes a training successful or unsuccessful?
10. What do you consider a soft skill?
11. Have you experienced soft skill training?
12. Have you experienced soft skill training at TransNamib?
13. What did you think of the soft skill training?
14. How do you communicate with other employees?
  - a. How do you communicate with your bosses?
15. Does mentoring happen at TransNamib?
16. Would mentoring be useful at TransNamib?
17. Is there anyone else you suggest we interview?

## **APPENDIX B: INSTRUCTIONAL ROUNDS EMAIL**

Hello

We wanted to thank you for your help with our project. Your time has been valuable to us so far and we feel you are dedicated to making a difference at TransNamib. To complete the data collection stage of our project we will be conducting a process called Instructional Rounds. Instructional Rounds is a four step team observation and analysis strategy. We would like to have four employees help us with this process and were hoping you would be a willing to participate. This process would take place on Monday 10 April from 14h00 until 17h15. Please let us know if you are willing to participate and if you have any questions, email us. Thank you again for your time.

Best,  
Amelia, Jenna, John, and Ryan

# Instructional Rounds

10 April 2017

Participants:

Not listed



## **Project Mission:**

The goal of our project is to offer recommendations on possible soft skill development techniques for the TransNamib rail operations sector's managers and supervisors by conducting a detailed analysis of current daily practices.

## **Today's Goal:**

To attend the *Mondays @3* meeting and record observations about soft skills so that we can recognize and discuss soft skills areas to improve

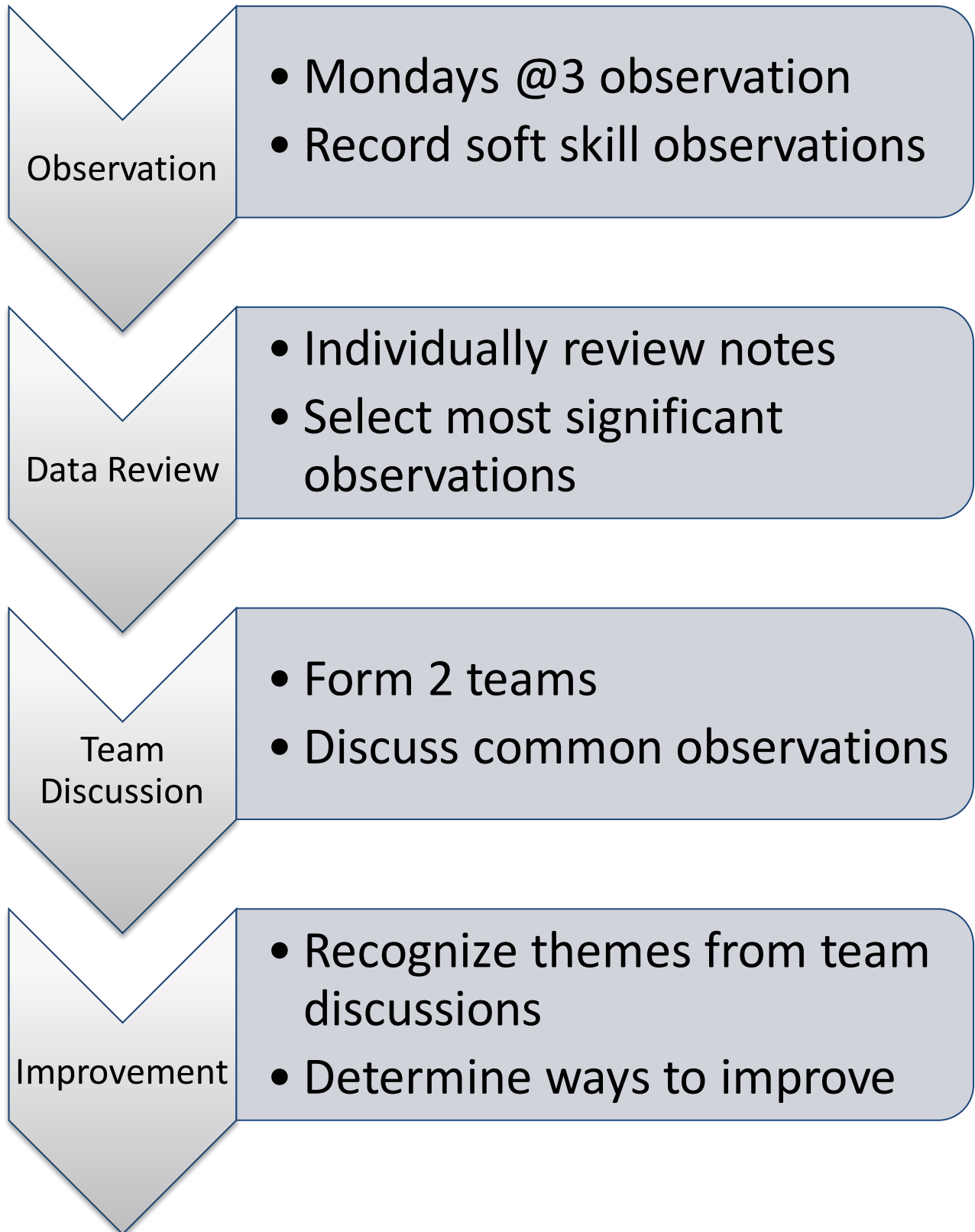
## **Examples of Soft Skills:**

- interpersonal skills
- communication
- teamwork
- internal motivation

## **Future Goals:**

- A way to improve employee soft skills
- To build camaraderie
- Help employees better understand other departments
- Create improvement with in TransNamib
- Issues can be recognized and acted upon
- Potential to involve employees of all level for solutions and ways to improve

## Instructional Rounds Overview:



## **Today's Overview:**

### **Schedule:**

14h00-15h00: Introductions and Packet Overview

15h00-16h00: *Mondays @3* Observation

16h00-16h15: Data Review

16h15-16h45: Team Discussion

16h45-17h15: Improvements

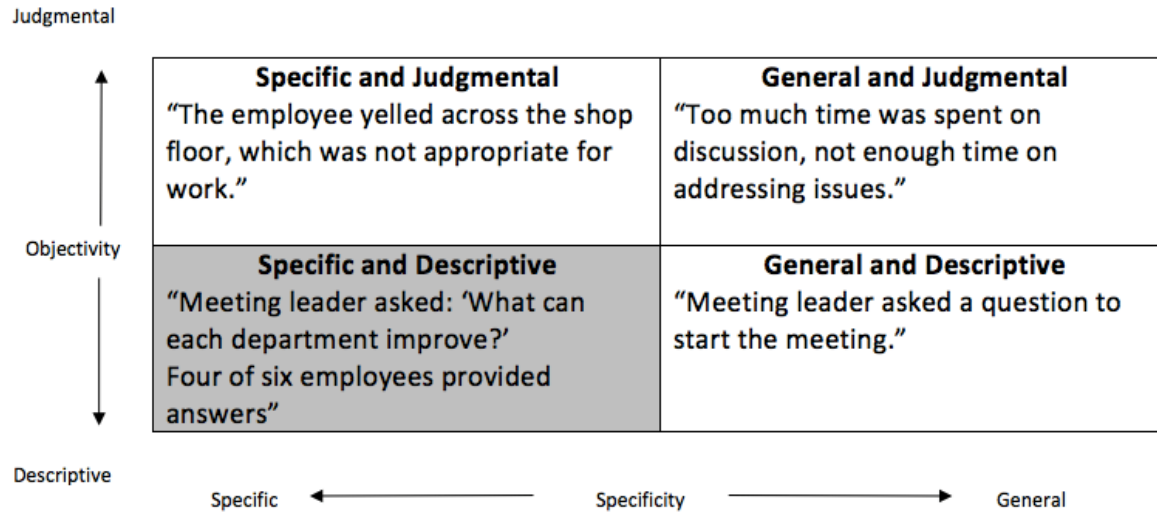
### **Discussion Team 1:**

Not listed

### **Discussion Team 2:**

Not listed

## Observations:



## Good Observations:

- Six out of eight employees looked at a person while they were speaking
- Two employees talked to each other while someone else was talking
- Facilitator asked a question four people raised their hand to respond
- Person 1 asked Person 2 how their week was and Person 2 responded
- People spent 15 minutes discussing improvement strategies

## Bad Observations:

- Employees looked at each other when speaking
- Two people were bored and not paying attention
- No one had an answer for a question asked by the facilitator
- Person 1 and 2 had an inappropriate conversation for the meeting
- People spent too much time talking about improvement strategies

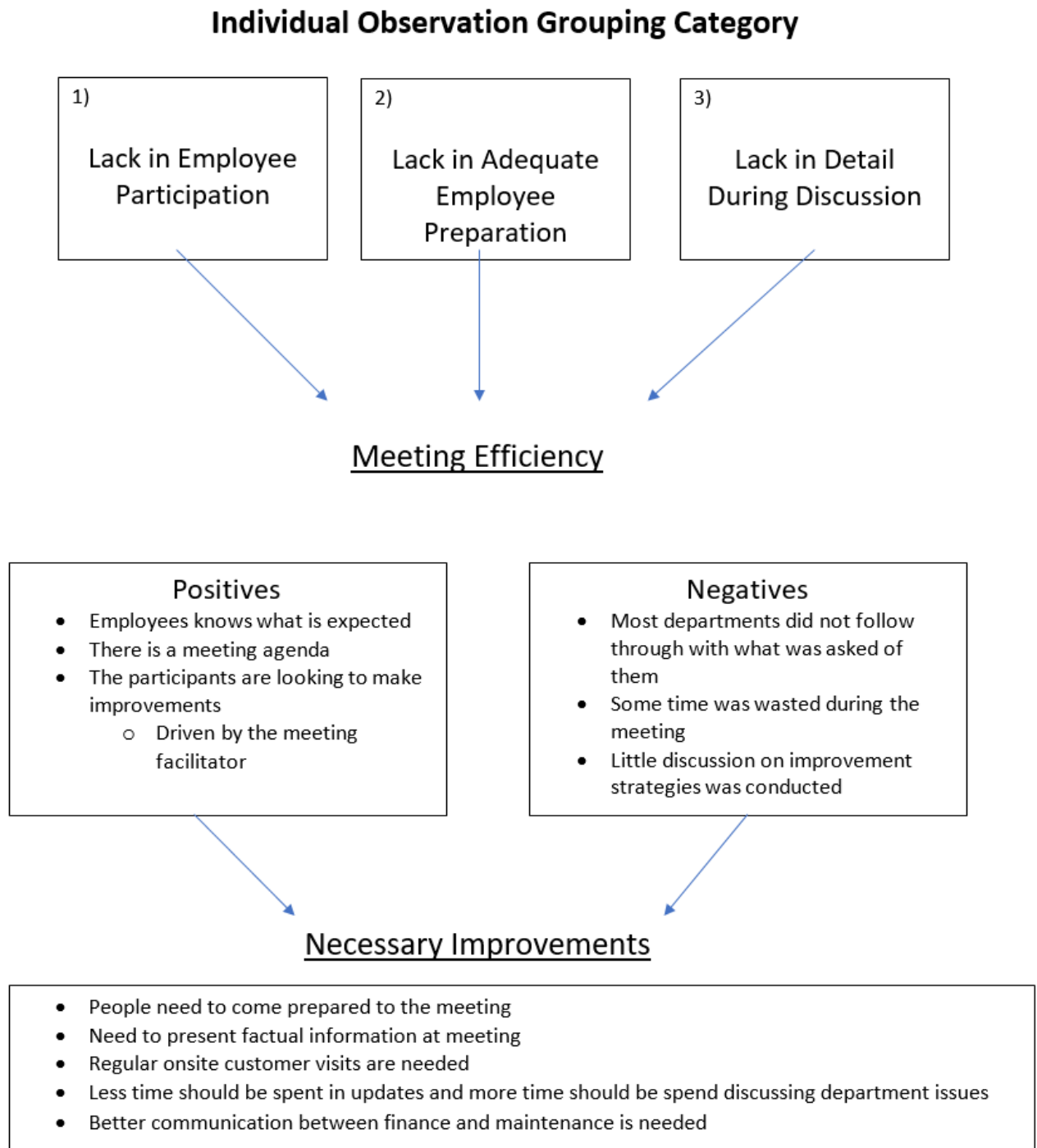
## Notes Sheet

**What to look for:**

interactions between employees, eye contact, meeting norms, active listening, dialog between employees, body language, topics of discussion

## APPENDIX D: INSTRUCTIONAL ROUNDS OBSERVATION TEAM 1 DISCUSSION FLOW CHART

The following flow chart is a recreation of the handmade flow charts made by TransNamib employees during the improvements stage of Instructional Rounds.

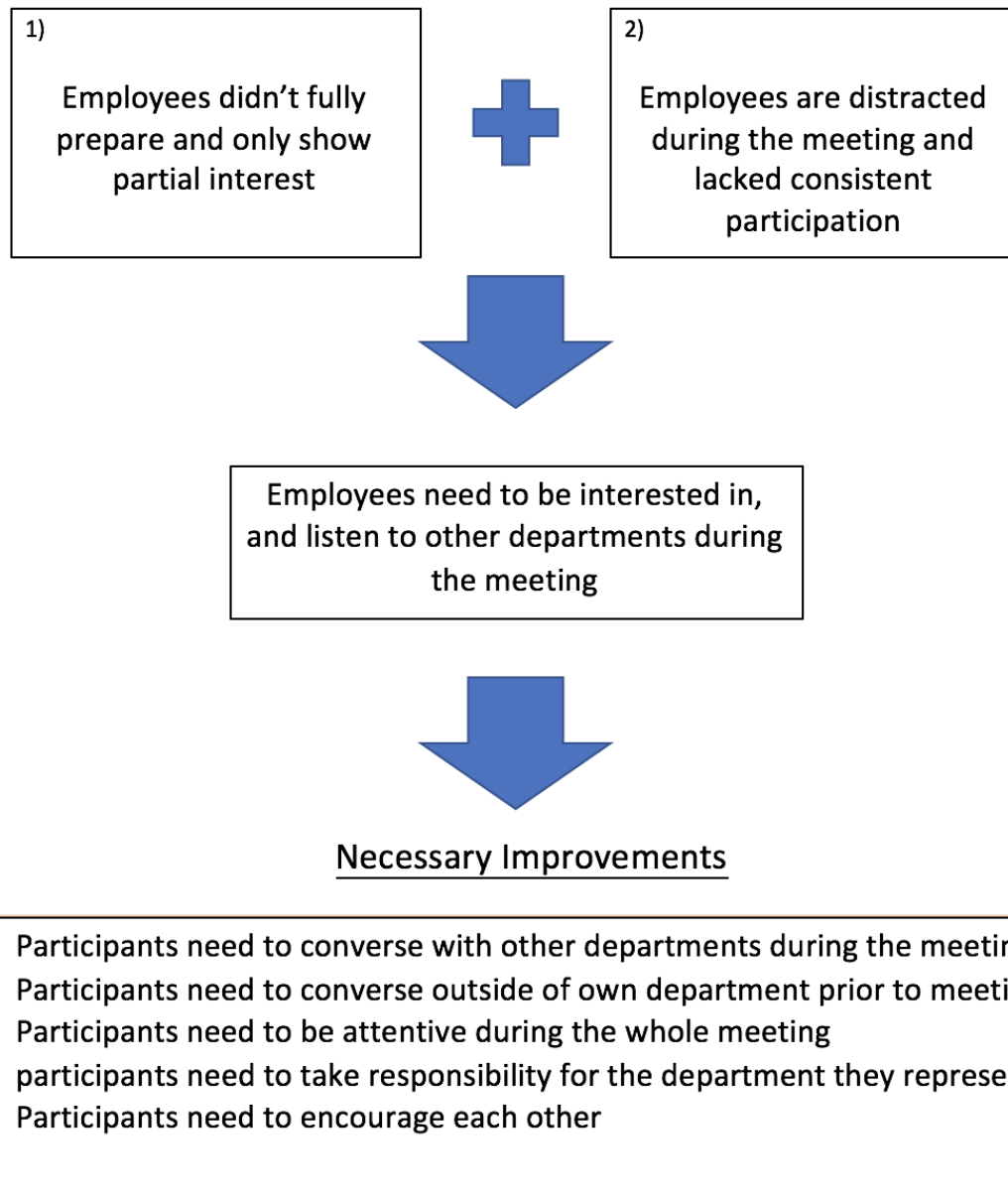


## APPENDIX E: INSTRUCTIONAL ROUNDS OBSERVATION TEAM 2 DISCUSSION FLOW CHART

The following flow chart is a recreation of the handmade flow charts made by TransNamib employees during the improvements stage of Instructional Rounds.

Observation Team 2 Flow Chart Creation

### Individual Observation Grouping Category



## **APPENDIX F: INSTRUCTIONAL ROUNDS STAGE 4 IMPROVEMENTS STRATEGIES**

### **Possible Improvement Strategies**

After completing the Instructional Rounds process, the participants generated the following improvement suggestions:

- 1) If you cannot attend the meeting, send Jason an email/communicate the information that needs to be conveyed during the meeting.
- 2) Change the meeting day to Tuesday to allow departments to review and organize the data needed for the meeting.
- 3) Need firmer deadlines/timeframes for actions
- 4) Focus meeting more on what needs to be improved.
- 5) Daily interdepartmental discussions
- 6) Come to meeting with possible solutions and results to problems instead of coming to the meetings with problems.
- 7) Stricter facilitator
- 8) More detailed agenda and conversations
  - a. Implement an action tracker or note taker.
- 9) Meetings must be feedback driven.