

## Improving Staff Utilization and Productivity in the Nigerian Public Service through Training

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### Abstract

Training is a purposeful development of the required skills, knowledge and attitudes in an employee. It is the process of developing an individual's skills, knowledge and abilities so as to improve the present and future performance. Staff utilization and productivity in the Nigerian public service are adjudged to be very poor. The findings of the study indicate that employees are recruited into the Nigerian public service essentially not on merit, but "political connections" and "god-fatherism". Consequently, employees recruited into the Nigerian public service more often than not, do not possess the relevant skills for effective job performance. Similarly, as a result of political patronage, staff recruited are posted to juicy areas that seem to be more lucrative in terms of financial benefits and returns, regardless of the background and skills possessed. This follows that most staff find it extremely difficult to cope with their job specifications and as a result perform at substandard level. Based on the findings of the study, it is strongly recommended that effective training is the only panacea towards enhancing good staff utilization and productivity in the Nigerian public service.

**Key words:** Staff utilization, productivity, training and public service

### Introduction

Training is a purposeful development of the required skills, knowledge and attitudes in an employee. Bedeian (1987:361) defines training as "the process of developing an individual's skills, knowledge and abilities so as to improve present and future performance." The specific advantages derivable from training are varied, but the common denominator is improvement of employee performance. Training becomes meaningful only if trained staff are effectively utilized where they can apply the knowledge and skills gathered during training in the work environment. Training is a costly exercise and the organization can only justify such expenditure by utilizing the trained staff maximally towards the attainment of organizational objectives which invariably culminate in improved productivity.

This study, therefore, sets out to examine the importance of training in enhancing staff utilization and productivity. Specifically it will examine:

- The importance of training;
- Methods of staff utilization;
- Training, staff utilization and productivity nexus.



### **Importance of Training**

Training has been variously defined by scholars in the field (see Dersal, 1968; McCormick and Tifflin, 1965). In addition to the definition by Bedeian (1987) already cited in this study, Flippo (1965:226) defines it as “the act of increasing the knowledge and skills of an employee in doing a particular job.” Both definitions point to the fact that training leads to improved performance, and there lies its importance. Specifically, training is important because of the following reasons:

- (i) It leads to increased productivity. Adequate training increases skill which improves the quality and productivity of the workers.
- (ii) Training improves employee skills and thus builds up confidence and satisfaction. This helps to raise employee morale.
- (iii) Training ensures the availability of future human resources needs of the organization.
- (iv) Staff training reduces the rate of accidents, spoiled work and damage to machinery and equipment because the trained employees have acquired increased skill and dexterity in the performance of their jobs.
- (v) Training reduces dissatisfaction, complaints, absenteeism and turnover. This emanates from the fact that trained workers develop sense of achievement and self-fulfillment. It promotes staff motivation. Consequently, they became more committed to their work.
- (vi) Training saves time; when an employee is not well trained, he learns by performing the job. It, therefore, takes him much longer to reach the same standard as a trained staff (Ezeani, 2002).

### **Meaning and Methods of Manpower (Staff) Utilization**

Staff utilization relates to decisions and actions taken to employ the staff of an organization to achieve its objectives. Manpower (staff) utilization has also been defined by Egungwu (1992:99) as a gradual and systematized continuous job-related education, training and job assignments during working life, which in itself, is a process of ensuring improvement in the performance ability on the job.

Staff utilization implies maximum use of competent staff, their employment at strategic places and the creation of enabling environment for the practice of acquired skills. It is pertinent to point out that all staff utilization activities are directed towards improving staff productivity and hence, achieving organizational objectives. What then are the methods adopted in manpower utilization?

### **Methods of Staff Utilization**

The methods of manpower (staff) utilization are varied. However, we shall discuss those that are more relevant to our topic. Some of these are also applied in manpower development.



### ***Recruitment and Selection***

Recruitment is the process of assessing the job, announcing the vacancy, arousing interest and stimulating people to apply (Fatiregun, 1992). It is a process of generating a pool of qualified applicants for organization's jobs. After recruitment has produced a pool of applicants, there are usually more applicants than job vacancies. Consequently, some of the applicants must be accepted, and others rejected through selection process. Selection is, therefore, a process by which the most suitable applicants are identified and accepted into the organization.

Recruitment and selection are crucial activities in staff utilization because they determine to a large extent, the calibre of the organization's manpower and their contribution to the organization. Wrong recruitment and selection processes (e.g. through ethnic, religious and political affiliations) have created a situation of "garbage in and garbage out." An employee cannot give what he does not have. This is inimical to organization's performance.

### ***Job Rotation***

This is the lateral transfer of an employee from one job to another. The basic purpose of job rotation is to broaden the knowledge of employees. The staff learn about the different functions performed in the organization by rotating into different positions. In addition to improving the employee's experiences in different jobs, job rotation provides opportunities for testing an employee's potentials.

### ***Special Assignments***

This could be part of a staff's routine job or given on ad hoc basis. The purpose of this is to test the employee's potentials or create the opportunity for him to practice acquired skill.

### ***Assistant Positions***

This method affords a staff the opportunity to perform specific duties competently. The concerned staff is expected to perform the task for a specified period of time. This approach is most effective and beneficial where the superior is qualified enough to develop and guide the assistant. An added advantage is that when the incumbent is away, the assistant performs the task and no significant gap is created. Continuity is maintained.

### ***Acting for Superiors***

Staff are sometimes appointed to acting positions when for instance, the permanent incumbent is on leave, tour, is ill or when the position is vacant. This temporary promotion provides an opportunity for employees to practice acquired skills or show possession of some desired skills. Through this means, staff show their potentials for development for some other jobs. Acting appointment also motivate employees. It is a form of recognition and thus creates a sense of belonging in the recipient. It makes the employee to work hard as he/she now feels part of the decision making process.

### ***Committee Membership***

Committee membership acquaints the employees with a variety of issues that concern the whole organization. They learn about the relationships between different departments and problems



created by the interface of these organizational units. It exposes staff to the mechanisms of business problem solving and decision-making.

### **Training, Staff Utilization and Productivity: The Nexus**

In this section, we shall discuss the connections among training, staff utilization and productivity. The purpose is essentially to establish how training enhances staff utilization and productivity. Earlier on we highlighted the importance of manpower training. Crucial in the list of the identified importance is the fact that it increases employee skills which in turn builds up confidence in the staff. These qualities acquired through training (such as on-the-job, seminars, workshops, etc.) are crucial in manpower utilization. They will make the staff amenable to be used in the different methods of staff utilization already discussed. Skills and knowledge acquired through training make staff versatile. This will make them suitable for job rotation, special assignment, acting appointments, as well as membership of committees. Through these means, staff productivity is enhanced. It has also been pointed out that trained staff develop sense of achievement and satisfaction and thus become more committed to their work. There is a direct correlation between high commitment to work and high productivity. Through the reduction of complaints, absenteeism and staff turnover, training helps to create a conducive work environment. This is necessary for effective staff utilization and enhanced productivity.

Training saves time because it makes the employee proficient. There is no gainsaying that a speed in performance will enhance productivity. Through the reduction of accidents, spoiled work, and damage to machinery and equipment, training enhances organizational efficiency. This in turn will lead to increase in productivity.

### **Conclusion**

This study has examined the relationship between training and staff utilization and productivity. It has been established that training enables staff acquire skills crucial for effective staff utilization. These skills also make them more committed, satisfied, motivated and proficient. These go a long way in enhancing productivity.

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