

Analysis of Methods for Identification of Training Needs in the Nigerian Local Government System

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Abstract

Local Government Service Commission is the organ that oversees and manages the affairs of the local government employees especially the senior cadre in Nigeria. The Commission is responsible for the recruitment and training of the staff of the unified local government system in Nigeria. Unfortunately and sadly enough, the findings of this study reveal that the membership of the Local Government Service Commission which is saddled with the onerous responsibility of staff recruitment, promotion and training comprise mainly the politicians who have little or no knowledge of what training is all about. The primary preoccupation of the politician members of the Commission, which more often than not are semi-illiterates, is how to claim their sitting allowances and share contracts. Consequently, they lack the necessary prerequisite skills for training needs assessment and identification which is a sine-qua-non for effective and efficient performance of staff at this level of government. The present study is an attempt to analyze and articulate the methods which could assist the semi-illiterate members of the Local Government Service Commission in Nigeria which has the monopoly of powers for the training of the local government staff through the utilization of the 1 percent training fund from the monthly statutory allocation from the Nigerian Federation account which is shared among the three tiers of government in Nigeria, namely – Federal, State and Local – to become proactive and alive to their basic responsibility.

Introduction

The primary task of local government personnel should be to create a desire for change in his/her locale, and to influence the indigenes and inhabitants of the area to take actions to effect desirable changes. Thus, he/she should possess a combination or all of the following complex characteristics: knowledge of administrative science; experience in human relations; dedication to the spirit of scientific inquiry; faith in humanity; and keen sense of mission. These need to be the aim of a training programme for the local government system that would engender good governance (Ofuebe, 2000:113).

Training refers to the process of applying appropriate educational methodology to those situations in which improved performance can result from effective learning. Flippo (1965:226) on the other hand, defines it “as the act of increasing the knowledge and skills of an employee in doing a particular job.” Dersal (1968:97) seems to equate training with education; he considers it “the process of teaching, informing, and educating people so that they become well qualified to do their work and to perform in a position of greater difficulty and responsibility.” He goes on: “Training has to be a two-way process. Someone must teach and someone must learn.” On their part, McCormick and Tifflin (1965:267) regard training as “any planned organized effort that is specifically designed to help individuals develop increasing



capabilities.” Finally, Stone (1958:33) asserts that training can be broadly classified as (a) inspirational; (b) informational; (c) operational; and (d) professional.”

Unfortunately, training is not the mere transmission of knowledge and skills. Rather, training is to be regarded as the acquisition of the art of utilizing knowledge and skills. It is a waste of time and effort according to Barraclough (1973:3) to transmit knowledge and skills without imparting the art of utilizing them. They are not valuable if they are not to be used. Effective training is not cramming information into the heads of trainees; it is a two-way process of interaction between trainees and teachers by which the trainees become fitted to act.

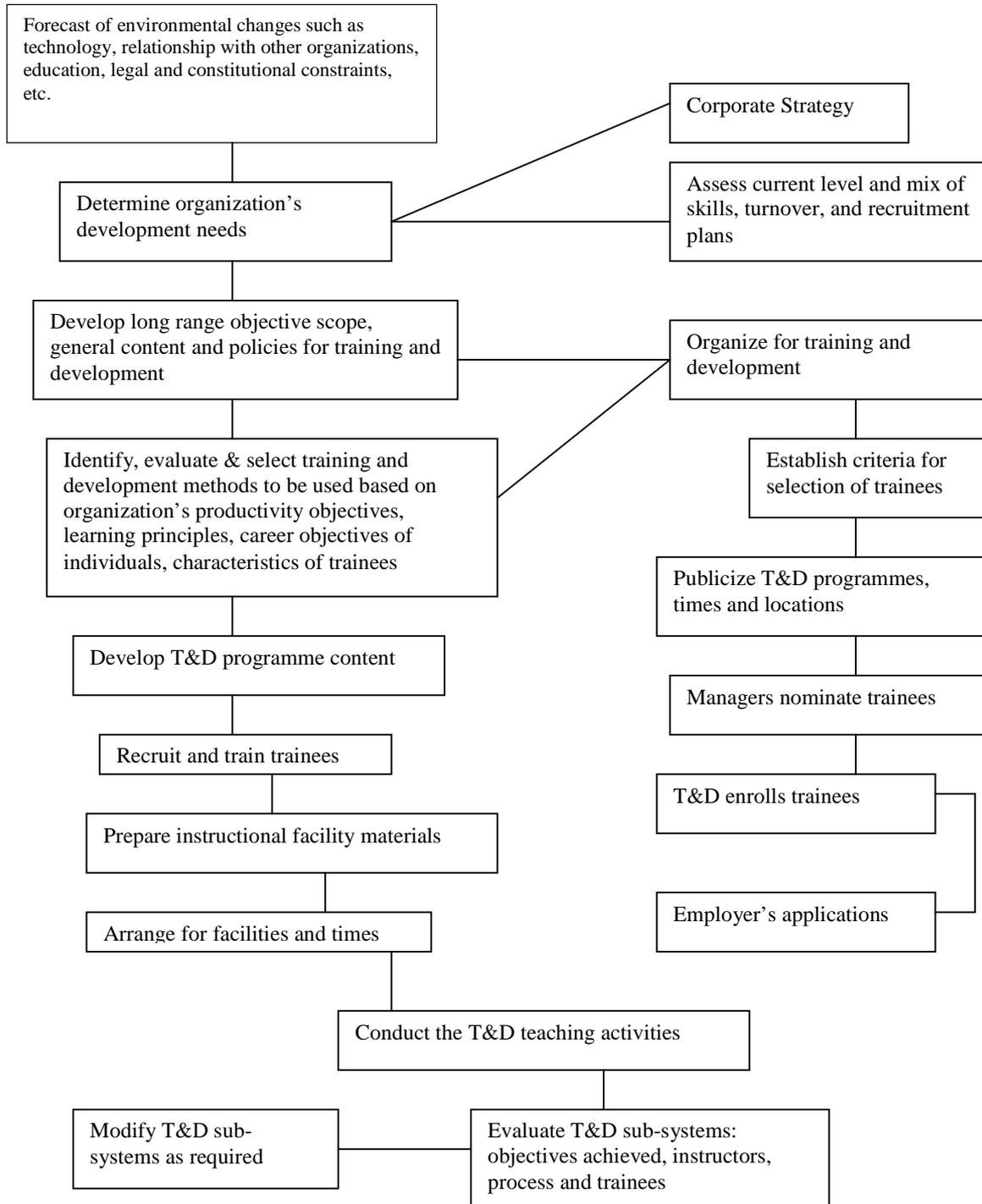
In many developing countries, training programmes have not been very satisfactory. They have been considered important, and yet, they have met with comparatively little success. Why is this? Three important reasons account for this. First, in many cases, the programmes have not been geared to actual needs, and methods taught are unrealistic and impractical. Second, the programmes are often planned from the top down instead of from bottom up. Trainees are mere passive receivers, not active participants. In addition, sometimes there is no firm commitment to a thorough, well planned, full training policy and accordingly, programmes are ad hoc, haphazard, and ineffective. Three, the programmes have received too little proper evaluation.

Training is an important issue in any organization. In Nigeria, the local government system must respond effectively to the demands of development, and in this, training has a vital part to play. Almost all Nigerian Local Governments are short of the skilled manpower necessary to implement development programmes. Training on a continuous basis is the best means of meeting this shortage.

In conclusion, training consists of the following as a tool package:

- assessing the needs of the organization;
- designing relevant means to meet them;
- selecting proper staff who would best benefit;
- conducting the actual training activity; and
- evaluating it by studying them on the job effectiveness of those who have received it (Williams, 1985:98).

Figure 1 below is a diagrammatic representation of the training and development sub-system. It shows methods of identifying training needs of an organization



Training and development is a sub-system within the human resources management. For the staff training and development to function effectively as diagrammatically represented above, there must be in place mechanism for determining training and development needs of the organization. Training and development needs of an organization (Agu, 2000:130) come about from two points of view: First, from the point of view of the organization and second, from the point of view of the employees. As far as the organization is concerned, staff training and development is important in so far as it:

- orients new employees;
- maintains performance of the organization by preventing absorbcency;
- builds a skilled workforce for the future;
- assists in meeting legal obligations such as the federal character and quota system;
- motivates employees by offering opportunities for growth.

On the other hand, training and development is crucial to the employee because:

- it helps him to avoid obsolescence;
- it prepares him for a better or different and more rewarding job;
- it prepares him to follow a planned and chosen career path.

It therefore, follows that training and development needs are not determined at random.

There is no hard and fast rule on how to determine the staff training and development needs of an organization. However, literature on the topic suggests at least ten techniques to achieve the objectives, which are:

- (a) Interview with potential trainee to identify the type of training that would improve his or her job performance or prepare him for future and/or higher jobs.
- (b) Questionnaire surveys may be used to identify training needs that may not be immediately available or compare the employees' desire for specific training and development courses with those the organization thinks are needed.
- (c) Analyses of personnel files may be consulted with a view to matching the employee's training need with the future needs of the organization.
- (d) Management may request the training body to admit certain employee to specific courses, or that specific courses be mounted for its employees.
- (e) Observation of on-the-job behaviour may suggest needs for technical training, training in communications, and general organizational development.
- (f) Job analysis and job competencies may dictate that an employee be re-trained.
- (g) Tests may be given to employees to determine promotability.
- (h) Outside consultant may be called to review the training and development programme of the organization and make recommendations.
- (i) Group problems analysis involves the coming together of all managers concerned with problems of a specific nature to discuss them. Sometimes, training of employees is a major part of any solution that may be advocated.
- (j) Assessment centres are used for evaluating employees for promotion, placement, and further training and development.

Once the training needs are determined the next necessary step is to articulate where the relevant training can be obtained. Furthermore, to determine the training needs of a local government, the following strategies could be adopted:



- A look at the goals or ends of the local government. The questions that arise in this regard are: What goal(s) do we want to achieve? And how far can we achieve these goal(s)? There is also the need to take a look at the priorities (immediate, short, and long-term).
- Analysis of organizational needs. The questions that arise here are: Is the local government short of particular skills or jobs? Where and in what areas are further skills required?
- Determination of performance shortcomings, and identification of areas that needed training. The activities here include job analysis (involving an examination of the duties, responsibilities and skills required by the job) and person analysis (which may entail performance appraisal, among others).
- The financial resources available to the local government. This significantly determines what the local government system may hope to achieve at a time and its training needs.
- Absorptive capacity. Note every investment undertaken by a local government may easily be automatically beneficial to it. To avoid the training of over-qualified manpower, which may end up under-utilized and the like, the absorptive capacity must be thoroughly examined before training starts.
- Capacity building and capacity utilization. This relates to absorptive capacity. Training is a form of capacity building and has to be in tandem with the expected and possible level of capacity utilization.
- National and states priorities. Local government operates in the contexts of states and the central government, and no local government can find life easy if its training and other priorities are not consistent with the state, federal and constitutional requirements, as well as the self-development efforts of communities (Ezeani, 2002:110).

Types of Employee Training

There are many types of employee training used in every organization, the local government inclusive (Ezeani, 2002). However, according to Pigors and Myers (1983:283):

The types of employee training best suited to a specific organization depend upon a number of factors such as skills called for in jobs to be filled, qualifications of candidates applying for jobs, and the kinds of operating problems confronted by the organization...

Implicit in the above statement is that there are different types of employee training adopted by organizations. Also, whichever method adopted should be closely linked to the needs of particular situation and based on sound principles (Pratt & Bennett, 1979:126). Bass and Vaughan (1973) opine that a technique will be judged adequate to the extent that it appears likely to:

- Provide for the learner's active participation;
- Provide the trainee with knowledge of results;
- Promote the transfer of training experience to the job;
- Provide reinforcement for appropriate behaviour;
- Motivate the trainee to improve his performance;



- Encourage the trainee to accept and adapt to change.

What follows are discussions of the various types of training programmes in organizations such as the local government. These include:

1. On-the-Job-Training (OJT)

This is perhaps the commonest and the oldest method of training. It is a method by which employees (especially new employees) are trained on the job usually by assigning them to experienced supervisor(s) or senior co-workers. In the words of Bedeian (1987:359), "The trainee is expected to learn by observing the supervisor or co-worker and working with the actual equipment and materials that will be used once OJT is completed." The advantages of this method are as follows: First, no special facilities are required for the training. Second, trainees are immediately engaged in productive work. However, a major disadvantage of OJT is that if wrongly handled, it could be expensive due to damaged machinery, wasted materials and poorly trained employees. In order to ensure that such problems do not arise, it is necessary that trainers must be carefully chosen and adequately rewarded for doing a good job.

2. Job Rotation

This is another method of employee training. It is traditionally employed for management trainees in order to provide experience of a wide range of operations within an organization. Job rotation consists of periodically posting workers from one job to another. Bedeian (1986:359) states the following advantages of job rotation:

- (i) *Flexible assignments:* Employees acquire additional skill, knowledge and abilities, thus creating a large pool of qualified candidates for promotion;
- (ii) *Easier staffing:* Jobs that require extensive physical exertion or exposure to disagreeable working conditions may be difficult to staff. Rotation allows employees to 'share' such jobs.
- (iii) *Less boredom:* Jobs that require a narrow range of skill can easily become boring. Boredom can lead to low-employee motivation, low quality performance, low job satisfaction, high turn over, and high absenteeism. Rotation provides skill variety and offsets boredom.

3. Job Instruction

This approach is used by supervisors for training subordinates. It is based upon four steps, which consist of preparing the trainee, presenting the knowledge, allowing the trainee to perform. It is a logical approach and forms the basis of a great deal of traditional training.

4. Induction Training

This often consists of a short course or programme of items aimed at assisting new recruits to adjust to the organization and to provide them with background information. Typical course include talks and films about the organization's structure and facilities and the provision of literature containing regulations and useful information.



5. Lectures, Conferences and Talks

These are among the most common methods of transmitting information or training. They provide ample opportunity for trainees to interact and share experiences with their counterparts, both within and from other organizations.

6. Special Courses

This is classified by some as education rather than training. Included in this category are the OND and ADP programmes being offered in some designated institutions for training local government officials such as the University of Nigeria, Nsukka; Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. It is important to state that these special courses cannot be dismissed as general education since they are directly related to the affected employees' particular job.

7. Apprenticeship Training

The usual apprenticeship programme combines on-the-job training and experience with classroom instruction in particular subjects. Apprenticeship programme tends towards more education than on-the-job training in that knowledge and skill in doing a craft or a series of related jobs are involved. Apprenticeship programmes are available in a number of crafts such as machinists, electricians, welders, carpenter, etc. (Ezeani, 2002:109).

8. Institutional Training

In some, if not, all the states of the federation, local government staff training and development have received attention. Consequently, Colleges of Technology, Polytechnics, Colleges of Agriculture, Schools of Health Technology, National Water Resources Institutes, Rural Development Training Centres, and even state universities assist in local government staff training and development. Unfortunately, some of these centres are ill-equipped, poorly funded and inefficiently coordinated.

Furthermore, Federal and State Government Agencies such as the Administrative and Staff College of Nigeria (ASCON) in Badagry, the Nigerian Institute of Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS), Kuru, and numerous staff training and development centres at the state level, organize one form or another of local government courses. Courses and seminars offered by this category of local government training and development centres are helpful in knocking local government employees into proper professional shape and consequently improve their skills and performances on the job.

Problems of Local Government Training and Development in Nigeria

The followings are some of the identified problems, which tend to affect the quality and objectives of staff training and development in Nigerian local government system. These problems as identified by Agu (2002:135) are:

1. *Lethargy and Administrative Lapses on the Part of Some Recognised and Designated Training Centres:* Some training centres specifically recognized and designated by the Federal and State governments for the training and development of local government staff are bugged down by internal leadership squabbles, crass administrative ineptitude and culpable shortsightedness. As a result, they cannot transcend their petty and mundane visions to broader and more noble pursuit of the

objectives of other centres. In the process, they create a vacuum which private briefcase-carrying-consultants and passerby readily fill.

2. *Poor Funding:* The funding of the designated centres has progressively declined over the years. In most of these centres, structures are either not available, inadequate or dilapidated. Equipment is non-existent and in those centres where equipment is made available, maintenance becomes problematic. Facilities are either non-existent or very inadequate. Consequently, these centres cannot play their role effectively and efficiently. The result is invariably frustration and perfunctory performance.
3. *Poor Utilization of the Meagre Funds Available:* With the transfer of local government training fund from the Deputy Governor's Office to the Local Government Service Commission by the Presidential Order of 1992, the struggle for its disbursement became decentralized and more scavengers, as it were descended hungrily on the meager fund. Some chairmen of Local Government Service Commissions now see the fund as a ready source of personal aggrandizement. Spurious consultancies are undertaken as veritable channels for siphoning training funds.

Friends, relations and associates are given consultancies on the basis of "scratch-my-back-I-scratch-yours". Consequently, the aim of staff training and development is no longer so much the training and development of staff but rather the appropriation of the fund. Moreover the trainees are not given their due share of the fund. In most cases training allowances due to the trainees are delayed unduly doled out as privileges or not given at all. In some cases, participants at seminars and the training and development programmes are perceived differently by both the local government and the local government staff. The result is high staff turnover especially by those who have benefited from such trainings. In most cases the trainees struggle for the opportunity not really to eventually return to the local government and contribute to its development; but rather, as a sure means of acquiring higher qualifications for alternative jobs and career.

It is important to observe that out of the thirty-six Local Government Service Commissions we have interacted with in the federation, especially with staff training and development, Cross-River State Local Government Service Commission stands out as a model. It is only in Cross-River State that we found the training policy and plan well focused, organized and purposeful. Presently, Cross-River is the only state in the federation that does not make use of private consultants in executing their training programmes, at least to the best of our knowledge. The Local Government Service Commission of Cross-River State only makes use of accredited training institutions with outstanding track records in their staff training and development. Moreover, the Commission has done a training needs assessment in all the councils and they know where to direct training at any given point-in-time. While commending the Cross-River State Local Government Service Commission for the standard, which they have set in staff training and development at the local government level, we would like to implore the Commissions of other states to borrow a leaf and imitate the Cross-River State model in order to make their staff training and development appear organized, focused, articulate and purposeful.



4. *Absence of Evaluation of Training Programme:* There seems to be no systematic attempt to evaluate the various training programmes. It is expected that such evaluations will go a long way to revealing the lapses in the training programmes, especially, the lack of “fit” between the personnel needs and the local government needs. Moreover, such evaluations, especially if conducted periodically, will enhance the quality of the training programmes both in their content and in delivery.

Evaluation is not very simple. It is a complex matter and requires systematic application of some principles. Generally, evaluation can proceed along these lines:

(i) *Purposes:* This should be clearly and unambiguously defined, taking into account the cost-benefit calculations.

(ii) *Content and standard:* Usually, there is the problem of what should be measured and against what standard. However, the following questions can assist:

- Are purposes defined in clear measurable terms? Is the scope adequate, as well as the objectives?
- Are the objectives of training and development applicable to the jobs?
- Would the training programmes match the future needs of the local government?

(iii) *Sources of Data:* The data for the systematic evaluation could be obtained through a combination of the following methods:

- General impressions of people concerned with the training and development programmes and their results;
- Reports by officers in-charge;
- Supervisors’ ratings of trainees who have completed the programme versus those who have not benefited from the programme;
- Observed behaviour of trainees;
- Scores on tests administered to beneficiaries of training programmes;
- Interview with trainees;
- Questionnaire completed by trainees;
- Before and after measurements of trainees and measurements of successive groups of trainees over time;
- Costs of the programmes versus the expected benefits.

Efforts and actions along the above recommended lines, which have already been taken by the Cross-River State Local Government Service Commission, would assist to revamp the training and development programmes of local governments in Nigeria, which presently is in a sorry state of comatose.

Conclusion

Staff training and development is a continuous process. For training policies to be effective, it has to be related both to manpower planning, which indicates the future requirements of different categories of employees, and to job analysis, which gives a clear and accurate description of the job, which people do and for which they need training. It is necessary to keep these job descriptions up-to-date to allow for changes in technology and organization. With these guides, it is possible to estimate the numbers and types of trained personnel required and

to decode which parts of the training are best given on the job, in a training department or on outside courses.

Manpower training and development constitute the coordinate future investment of any organization or local government council. If an organization wants to keep pace with time especially in this space age of fast computer and technological speed, it must, as basic necessity, devote a large chunk of its resources to manpower training and development. This is because it is the employees of the organization that encompass and embody the soul and heart of the organization. If, therefore, the human resources are not properly developed, it would pay dearly for it. This is why the Local Government Councils in the Federation through the Service Commissions should devote resources to train and develop its employees (as the Cross-River State has done) or sink with the passage of time. The importance of staff training and development in the Nigerian Local Government Councils cannot, therefore, be overemphasized (Nnadozie, 2002:101).

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