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Leveraging Information Communication Technology for Manpower Training in Nigeria's Public Sector

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Abstract

The paper examines the role of ICT in achieving effective manpower training in Nigeria's public sector. It is a qualitative paper that relied on secondary data which were textually and descriptively analysed. The historical approach to the empirical review on manpower training in Nigeria's public bureaucracy revealed some reforms and attempts at remedying the challenges to manpower training. The application of Human Capital and Scientific Management theories illuminated the discourse. Notable impediments to manpower training in Nigeria's public sector are bureaucratic lapses in the identification of training needs; obsolete or poor strategies/approaches to manpower training; and limited appreciation of the role of ICT in achieving robust training outcomes. The paper discussed four ICT-driven learning techniques and suggested the utilisation of competent ICT professionals in manpower training (among others) as bulwark to the deficiencies identified.

Keywords: Manpower, Training, Information and Communication Technology, Public Sector.

Introduction

In today's competitive work environment, manpower training plays a significant role in organisational development (Sunday, Benjamin and Ekpe 2015). This finds expression in the fact that manpower training is a key requirement for all employees to be equipped with multiplicity of skills geared towards work improvement for future work activities and achieving organisational objectives (Attah, 2017). Similarly, the 21st century organisational environment gives another situation where machines and artificial intelligence are slowly taking over jobs, yet the essential role of human resources in realising organisational objectives cannot be overemphasised (Obisi, 2011).

Training is a significant part of human resource development which focuses on the efficiency of employees in organisations. Absence of training accounts for low manpower utilisation. Manpower training in the Nigerian public sector has been identified as a cause for concern to policy makers and researchers (Omitola, 2017; Oni-Ojo, Salau, Oludayo, and Abasilim, 2014). Furthermore, available evidence from the public sector adduces waste and lacklustre performance based on insufficient or absence of budgetary provisions, poor financing and corruption as major threats to training activities in some organisations, including Industrial Training Fund (ITF), Centre for Management Development (CMD) National Manpower Board (NMB), National Productivity Centre (NPC), to mention a few (Ofobruku and Nwakoby, 2015).

While several researchers have conducted studies on manpower training in the public sector globally, (Adiele and Ibietan, 2017; Fajoh and Faniran, 2016;; Dialoke et al, 2016; Halidu, 2015; Idoko, 2015; Aibieyi, 2014; Ibrahim and Yemen, 2014), there are limited research on the role of ICT in enhancing manpower training in Nigeria's public sector, and this constitute the focus of this paper.

Methodology

This paper employed the qualitative approach with reliance on secondary data from articles, books, conference papers and journal publications on manpower training in Nigeria. This paper is divided into subsections, beginning with the introduction, which highlights manpower training and links the concept to Nigeria's public sector. This is followed by the empirical review on manpower training; theoretical framework and its application. The nature and methods of manpower training, challenges to manpower training in Nigeria's public sector, and the extent to which ICT can enhance manpower training in the sector were sequentially discussed.

Empirical Review on Manpower Training in Nigeria's Public Sector

Manpower training in Nigeria's public sector can be traced to the 1967 Wolle's Commission which sought to identify the need for manpower training in the Federal Civil Service. The report of the commission titled- "Training Needs of the Federal Civil Service" was submitted to the Federal Government in 1968 which led to a follow-up whitepaper in 1969 titled- "Federal Government's Approach on Staff Training and Development in the Federal Public Service" (Obadan and Odushola, 2003).

Obadan and Odushola (2003) noted the following in the whitepaper:

> First, the arrangement of Department of Training Officers with duty regarding surveying staff improvement needs, getting ready and actualising projects to address these issues. Second, restructuring all Ministries to guarantee that more prominent need is given to manpower training. Third, the foundation of standing board of trustees on training. Fourth, the consolation of offices/services to build up a training unit similar with the size and capacity of the service, and ultimately, the development of Administrative Staff College of Nigeria (Obadan and Odushola, 2003, p.5).

Additionally, the 1970 Adebo Commission was set up to strategically examine the public sector issues at that time, which were compensation and wages in public enterprises and state-owned organisations, foundation of the public service commission and to suggest satisfactory courses of action for staff training (Ewoh, 2014). In 1971, the establishment of Industrial Training Fund (ITF) to advance the right skills for indigenous manpower through training received further consideration.

Okotoni (2015) documented that the Federal Government again made attempts to provide training for public sector staff through the 1972 Udoji Commission and it realised that manpower training strategies and retraining of employees would greatly impact public sector productivity. In addition, the 1985 Dotun Phillips commission/Presidential Task Force on revamping of the public sector recommended that the public sector must set aside 10% of its staff cost for training of workforce yearly, and that the professional success of public sector employees through manpower training should be seen as ideal for the development of all government employees (Adeyoriju and Fajebe, 2019, p.32).

In order to ensure faithful execution, the Ministerial Training Committee framework was presented as a significant part of the execution system (Adiele and Ibietan, 2017). During this period, the National Centre for Economic Management and Administration (NCEMA) was inaugurated in 1986 with the aim of providing training for employees. Also, in 1991, the National Manpower Board (NMB) was mandated to evaluate skill requirements for employees in the public sector.

The 1995 Allison Ayida Commission was initiated to deal with the complaints of top civil servants concerning the politicisation of the post of Permanent Secretaries. The board was saddled with the duties to review and reclassify the goals concerning the execution of programmes in government organisations, and make suggestions on modalities for improving work/efficiency in the public service (Omitola, 2012).

Under the Obasanjo presidency in the Fourth Republic, the Adegoke Adegoroye Panel was instituted with the goal of restructuring the civil service and setting up standard rules concerning the workforce. The Steve Oronsaye Committee was similarly commissioned during the Yar'adua/Jonathan administration to streamline and reposition Ministries, Departments and Agencies of government for effectiveness. The recommendations of these panels have not been faithfully implemented due (perhaps) to lack of political will and commitment by successive administrations.

Application of the Human Capital and Scientific Management Theories

Applicable to this paper is the human capital theory by Becker (1962) who saw individuals as assets that must be continuously improved through training and other considerations for higher efficiency and productivity (Eriko, 2017). This theory perceives individuals and their skills/expertise and experience alongside capacity to discharge their duties in the light of a legitimate concern for their organisations and individuals as wellspring of resources for the organisation. This theoretical approach is underscored by the essentials of manpower training, having the tendency to improve efficiency and productivity ultimately.

Also, this paper applies the scientific management theory by Frederick Taylor which takes an atomistic view of employees as economic beings to be maximised for efficiency, using manpower training for the development of organisations (Halidu, 2015). It is argued that the scientific management theory is geared towards improved profitability and efficiency through the application of effective methods targeted at maximising output and employees' training for organisational effectiveness.

The Nature and Method of Manpower Training

Manpower training deals with the information and capacities utilised in the advancement of capacity and mental power, obtained through methodical giving of guidelines for the general improvement of employees' expertise and productivity (Ofobruku and Nwakoby, 2015). Training is also a learning procedure that includes the procurement of information, abilities, ideas, and rules to improve employees' performance at work (Sabir, Akhtar, and Bukhari 2014).

Manpower training could be on the job or off the job. On one hand, the hands-on-training method is one that is given to employees within the formal setting of an organisation. This method helps in training employees in real work situations or conditions (Aibieyi, 2014). Hands-on-training strategies incorporate exhibition, work pivot, arranged work activities, entry level induction and apprenticeship (Kulkarni, 2013). In the first place, instructing is the technique for training whereby a manager helps the employee to discharge his/her duties and obligations more productively by responding to questions, directing the people in discovering answers to their concerns, setting the correct model and widening their perspectives (Banjoko, 2011). The manager should have harmonious relationship with employees and adopts appropriate remedial measures in order to accomplish organisational objectives (Fajana, 2016).

The next method is job pivot, which deals with moving employees starting with one employment position then onto the next in order to widen their experience and familarise themselves with different parts of the organisation's activities (Stoner et al., 2008). This is followed by exhibition, where the manager acquaints the employees in question with models, which is more of demonstrations than telling. This method is referred to as learning by observing. Moreover, exhibition is a deliberately created activity, displayed on practical circumstances, in which learners partake and get inputs. They are especially helpful for occupations in which the hazard and mistakes are high or in which direct perception and criticism are commonly missing.

Off the job training operates outside the real workplace. It is utilised in training both old and new employees. Off-the-work training adopts workshops, classes, contextual investigations, vestibule as strategies (Ekundayo, 2015). For example, vestibule is a type of training which includes employees

learning in a non-workplace in which conditions and hardware are for all intents and purposes not different from what will be experienced at work. Formal work situations are invigorated through this strategy so that employees are furnished with starter learning encounters preceding any real work practice. Consequently, the issue of moving the learning conditions to work is limited since the employees are engaged in what they would inevitably end up doing in real work circumstances (Adeyoriju and Fajebe, 2019).

Off-the-work training can be in form of discussions, where the study strategy is the most customary type of training. It includes the transmission of information, thoughts and verifiable data from the educator to many learners one after another along these lines having the benefit of applying minimal effort. It could also be a contextual analysis which is composed or oral portrayal and synopsis of a genuine or speculative setting or issue.

Challenges to Manpower Training in Nigeria's Public Sector

There are major obstacles to effective training outcomes in the public bureaucracy which includes poor financing and inadequate budgetary provisions for training activities. Another impediment to training is the issue of corruption which is a cankerworm that has eaten deep to the moral fabrics of the Nigerian society. It finds expression in illegal diversion of funds and conversion of public resources to private gain and advantage which circumscribe the attainment of manpower training objectives.

Other impediments are bureaucratic lapses typified by spoil system and cronyism in identifying training needs/personnel; faulty appraisal system or process that obstructs objective discovery of training beneficiaries; obsolete or poor strategies and approaches to delivering robust outcomes and improved performance in Nigeria's public sector.

Leveraging ICT for Effective Manpower Training in Nigeria's Public Sector

The role of ICT in revolutionising and achieving effective manpower training in Nigeria's public sector cannot be overemphasised. This has been established in literature as Onodugo (2016) stated that using ICT for training purposes has changed how training is conducted, and corroborated thus:

> Appropriate utilisation of ICT can change the delivery of objectives for the Nigerian public sector, in light of 21st century technological advancements and training strategies which when set up, will significantly improve the productivity levels of employees in terms of skills and expertise for the sector's development (Onodugo, 2016, p.2).

ICT, if utilised through its various processes (particularly the digital innovation, will produce employees who will perform better in carrying out their duties. ICT approaches are developed by identifying specific areas that the employees require training and will ensure that the employees go through series of activities- contextual investigations, exhibitions and other processes as contained in Onodugo (2016). The following approaches can enhance manpower training:

- **The Dynamic Learning Approach** - ICT improves learning devices for testing, counting and reviewing of information. In this manner, a motivation for training with current devices for employees to figure out how to function and adopt certifiable issues within and outside work becomes apparent (Okeh and Opone, 2014).

- **The Community Learning Approach –** This is an ICT-based learning and participation between employees and expert trainers, where the training is focused on identifying opportunities for employees to learn from successful individuals within work community, which gives the relational abilities of employees to improve on their relationship skills (being mindful/showing empathy at work) (Lopez, 2014).

- **The Innovative Learning Approach** - is ICT-based learning and application of information relevant to current realities. Training is conducted for employees based on previous information on the organisation and applying same to the attainment of organisational objectives (Onodugo, 2016).

- **The Mixed Learning Approach** - is the way to deal with training through ICT features that advances organisational coordination. This approach applies different theories to the current workings of the organisation, and explores the extent to which the theory can enhance the organisation's strategies (Okeh and Opone, 2014).

The adoption or utilisation of ICT has made significant impact on manpower training in organisations. There are electronic advances utilised for training, gathering, controlling and showing or conveying information which incorporates programming, equipment, and even the network (Anderson and Baskin, 2017). When ICTs are utilised in training correctly, they can quicken, improve, and extend essential abilities in human resources, and they can inspire employees to learn as they become increasingly autonomous and responsive to learning (Yusuf, 2015). Besides, ICTs help to link employees to their work and its impact is felt in organisational communication which has been found to energise the work environment and activates employees to become efficient in carrying out their duties (Cradler and Bridgforth, 2016).

Other advantages of leveraging ICT for manpower training are that it can help lighten the workload in the public sector through its utilisation for computerised worksheets and reports, where employees can send in weekly reports which can be verified to ensure that weekly objectives are achieved (Kulik and Cohen, 2017) in line with the strategic objectives of the sector. This is important as it will help the administrators identify areas where the employees are lacking in terms of skills and expertise, specifically with the tasks given to them and the reports they turn in (Ben and Ashang, 2017). Also, ICT can be utilised in getting essential training content for the employees, and coordinated efforts can be guaranteed through trainers comprehensively (Anderson and Baskin, 2014).

In addition, ICTs can aid the human resource department significantly towards general improvement, through e-learning expressed variously in courses, workshops, and different activities - formal and casual, where employees adopt ICTs crosswise in training programmes (Bamigboye, Aderibigbe and Buraimo, 2017). There are a few worldwide portals/on-line resources to facilitate human resources development, and if these materials are utilised properly, the efficiency level within the public sector will significantly improve (Bamigboye et al., 2015), leading to increased productivity and national development.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The paper interrogated the extent to which ICT can be leveraged upon to achieve effective manpower training in Nigeria's public sector. The empirical review on manpower training in the Nigerian public bureaucracy took a historical approach that unearth the trajectory of reforms and remedial steps/attempts at redressing the lapses and obstacles to manpower training. It identified lack of commitment and deficient political commitment as part of the factors thwarting successful execution and realisation of training objectives in the public sector. Based on these and the discussions of this paper, the following suggestions are proffered:

1. The Federal government should ensure that ICT strategy statements are clearly communicated and implemented in Ministries, Departments and Agencies.
2. The ICT component of the Federal Ministry of Communications and Digital Economy should be adequately funded and invigorated to enable the public bureaucracy take advantage of technological tools and impact the citizens maximally through improved service delivery.
3. ICT training should be mandatory for all public sector workers as part of the manpower training module by professionals/competent ICT trainers.

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