

Public Service, Performance Enhancement and the Challenge of Economic Recession in Nigeria

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Abstract

The Nigerian economy has just technically exited recession. This harsh economic condition is no doubt of great concern to the government and people of the country in view of its attendant pains. Economic and financial experts and professionals are expected to find solution to this national challenge. This paper however argues that, in addition to seeking economic solution to this problem, the nation's public service in its position as the main machinery of government for the formulation and implementation of public policies should be recognised as a critical factor in exiting the country out of recession. This can be done by continuous training and re-training of public servants in order to increase their competence, morale and productivity towards speedy recovery of the country's economy. The paper adopted the qualitative method of analysis using mainly secondary source of data.

Keywords

Training, development, economic recession, economic recovery, performance improvement, training needs

Introduction

All organisations are set up to achieve certain set objectives. In order to achieve these objectives, they need to have well trained and competent employees in order to perform the activities of the organisation effectively. This is why training and development have become an indispensable ingredient of personnel efficiency. They have become increasingly important in modern day because of the complexity in jobs as a result of rapid development in science and technology. Governments in the developing countries of the world are today engaged in governmental activities that transcend the maintenance of law and order. They are now in addition

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concerned with the consolidation of national integration, economic development, nation building and national development, international relations, national security and economic depression among others. This development no doubt calls for more qualified personnel to handle government business. This is because work performance depends on the competence of the employees that are assigned the tasks.

Training and development are particularly critical to the public service of any country in view of the role it plays as the main machinery of government designed for the achievement of government goals and objectives. Effective and efficient formulation and implementation of the political, economic and social policies of government by the public service can only be attained through adequate, regular training and retraining of civil servants particularly at a time of national economic recession when their productivity is required for the acceleration of the country's economic recovery. This paper therefore contends that training and development of public servants is critical at this time when the country is just 'technically' out of recession. In order to achieve this objective, the paper is divided into four sections. The first section examines the concepts of training and development. The second section discusses the objectives and importance of training and development while the third section examines training and development in a period of economic recession. The methodology adopted in the paper is the qualitative method which utilises secondary source of data. The fourth part concludes the paper.

Conceptualizing Training and Development

Training and development are two interrelated concepts. However, in this paper, a distinction is made between training and development for the purpose of clarity.

Training

Training, according to Fagbemi (1992) refers to an organisation's efforts to improve a person's ability, skills and knowledge required to perform on the job. Training is job-oriented and should result in an observable change in the behaviour of the trainee as it increases his ability to perform his duties. It is the systematic process of altering the behaviour or attitudes of employees in a direction that will increase organisational goal achievement (Hays and Reeves, 1984). Similarly, Basu (2012) defines training as the systematic imposition of skilled knowledge to all categories of employees for their advancement and efficiency in service. It is an action process by which capabilities of the personnel can be improved to meet the organisational needs in terms of their knowledge, skills and attitudes required in performing organisational tasks and functions. Training is therefore, the process of developing the skills, knowledge, habits and attitudes of employees of any organisation for the purpose of increasing their productivity, effectiveness and efficiency. It is a

learning experience that is capable of changing what employees know, how they work, their attitudes towards their work and their relationship with their colleagues in the organisation. Training should normally be a continuous exercise in all organisations in order to keep employees abreast of current developments in their field of operations.

Development

The semantic difference between training workers and developing managers is significant. Workers are trained so that they can better perform their present duties; managers are developed so that they can be of greater organisational value in both present and future assignments. One common method of developing managers is to provide them with the kinds of assignments and experience that will allow them to grow professionally (Shafritz, 2011). Development is simply the activities usually undertaken by an organisation to expose her employees to perform additional or higher duties and therefore assume position of importance in the organisation. Moreover, training can also serve the purpose of preparing employees of an organisation for future positions in the organisation. For instance, assistant managers are often groomed for the position of manager. This type of training is known as development. While training is organisational effort aimed at helping an employee to acquire basic skills required for the efficient execution of the functions for which he is hired, development deals with the activities undertaken to expose an employee to perform additional duties and assume positions of importance in the organisational hierarchy (Nwachukwu, 1988). In the Nigerian public service, training for the junior officers and development for senior officers is common. For instance, public servants become eligible for, and indeed can only perform new responsibilities if they are manifestly capable of performing their present tasks for which they must have received adequate training. This is because training and development are interwoven, one leading to the other. According to Massie and Douglas (1981), the training function takes the present personnel as raw material and improves and develops them to their highest potentials.

There are some training methods which have been evolved in various organisations and countries of the world over the years. Generally, it is believed that, in the public service, most, if not all staff have some form of training before joining the service. This is what is regarded as pre-entry training. This includes any educational qualification or training which prepares a candidate for the civil service job. This is mostly the type of education imparted in secondary schools, and other tertiary institutions. There is also post-entry training. This is the type of training which an employee gets in service. It may be formal or informal in structure and content. This type of training takes different forms. It is also known as on-the-job training. One of

this is the orientation (or induction) training. This is the planned and guided introduction of employees to their departments and new working environment. By this, the new recruit is guided and oriented towards the work programmes and the work situation in general. On the job training usually comes when the employees are fully on the job. It is probably the most popular form of training method in most organisations both in the private and public sectors. This training method could be an on-going process that does not disrupt normal organisational activities when it is being carried out. Formal training is also one type of training method. This requires classroom lectures, seminars, debates, workshops, discussions, combined with tutorials and work projects. In Nigeria, there are various administrative bodies and institutions that regularly conduct refresher courses for civil servants such as Staff Development Centres, Administrative Staff College of Nigeria (ASCON), Staff Training Centres among others.

The latest institutional framework for staff training in the Nigerian public service provides that the training of public servants will cease to be sporadic, unstructured and anaemic as hitherto. Instead, training will now be structured so that every public servant will be exposed to one type of formal training or the other at specific intervals during his career in the public service. Thus, periodic training has become a right of public servant and an obligation on government (Phillips, 1992). The strength of this institutional framework lies in the fact that it is capable of using training as one of the vehicles for making the periodic service professional, operationally effective and more result-oriented as well as its use as one of the criteria for assessing the suitability of officers for promotion. However, as a result of recent fall in government revenue, training programmes have not been periodic and obligatory as stated.

Training and development have frequently been victims of organisational neglect over the years, especially in developing countries of the world. In most cases, particularly in the public service, training and development are considered to be optional, a luxury or unnecessary whereas, training and development are as old as personnel management itself. They have always been recognised as important aspects of personnel management function in any organisation (Shafritz *et al.*, 2011).

Indeed, training has always been recognised as an important factor that contributes to improved performance of an employee right from the days of the earliest administrative and management Thinkers such as Frederick W. Taylor of the famous scientific management theory till today. Taylor holds that it is the responsibility of management to train and develop workers and place them in work situations so that they do “the highest, most interesting and most profitable class of work” (Taylor, 1919). Similarly, Henry Fayol (1949), another earliest administrative and management Thinker also identified the need for administrative training. He seems to be the first writer in pleading for administrative training of all employees at all levels. Therefore, training has always been vital to organisations since it provides one means of maintaining

acceptable levels of employee and organisational performance. Personnel's responsibility for training and development has grown over the past twenty years and will probably become increasingly important (Stone, 1982). Administrative activities in both private and public organisations are no longer simple today. They have become so complex and specialised that mere common sense is not enough to carry them out. Besides, the nature of administrative activities is constantly changing. This calls for constant training and retraining of organisational personnel.

Training is often required for current employees when jobs are reviewed or restructured to include new equipment, procedures, responsibilities or performance standards or when employees are promoted or transferred in an organisation. It is also required when performance appraisals or other quality control measures indicate that a performance crisis exists and is due to a knowledge or skill deficit. It can also serve to prepare employees for future positions in the organisation (Stone, 1982). The role of training in public administration generally cannot be overstressed. This is because it is essential not only for effecting efficiency of administration but also for broadening the vision of the employees of any organisation. It teaches the employees the precision, makes them self-reliant and independent and develops in them, capacity to take decisions and arrive at good judgments. Training is also important because it has been described as a "change agent". This is because its purpose is to effect a change in knowledge skills and attitudes of employees. It is oriented towards job requirement and it has the overall objective of improving the performance of employees in specific job-related tasks (Maduabum, 1992). Training is also a learning experience because it seeks a relatively permanent change in an individual that will improve his ability to perform on the job.

Moreover, training and development provide employees with the knowledge and skills they need to remain qualified for their jobs. Periodic training is often necessary because the nature of one's job may change to include new responsibilities, performance standards and equipment or work methods (Stone, 1982). Training is particularly important in the civil service of any country. Training and development provide civil servants with the required abilities that are enough to carry them through for the rest of their career. Training of civil servants becomes important right from their period of entry into the civil service. Training helps the recruit to acquire occupational skill and knowledge and contribute his best towards the objective of the organisation. It moulds and shapes the entrants to internalise the organisational skills and character and helps them to adapt to new environments (Basu, 2012). This agrees with the views of Nigro (1970) who suggests that the function of training is to help employees grow, not only from the standpoint of mechanical efficiency but also in terms of the broad outlook and perspective which public servants need. Training is necessary to equip civil servants for higher positions

and greater responsibilities where specialised knowledge and increased competence may be needed. Training not only enhances the competence and ability of civil servants but in the process contributes to organisational efficiency and prestige.

Training helps build integrity and morale in the public servants by developing the requisite mental attitudes to questions of personal and public conduct (Basu, 2012). With the increasing diversification and complexity of the functions and tasks of government, occupants of public administrative offices have to be trained for their jobs. To meet the challenges of continuing socio-economic changes, the administrators of today and tomorrow have to be kept abreast of the latest developments in administrative theory and praxis to deal with all kinds of situations (Basu, 2012). This is because work performance depends on the competence of the employees in doing their jobs. Training therefore ought to address itself to the question of improving the competence of the personnel so that they can perform their duties much better (Mutahaba, 2000). This is important because government across the world is faced with the challenge of providing basic public services to which each citizen is entitled in a timely, fair, effective and transparent manner (Oyedele, 2015). In view of the objective and importance of training and development to any organisation, they are at the heart of employee utilisation, productivity, commitment, motivation and growth. Many employees have failed in meaningfully contributing to the growth of their organisations because their need for training was not identified and provided for as an indispensable part of management function (Nwachukwu, 1988).

Theoretical Framework: AMO Theory

The AMO framework was initially proposed by Bailey (1993), who suggests that ensuring the employee's discretionary effort needed three components: employees had to have the necessary skills, they needed appropriate motivation and employers had to offer them the opportunity to participate. The model was later developed by Appelbaum, Bailey, Berg and Kalleberg (Appelbaum *et al.*, 2000), and its acronym "AMO" stands for the three elements that enhance together employee performance: individual ability (A), motivation (M) and the opportunity to participate (O) (Boselie, 2010; Claudia, 2015).

Juan and Juan (2016) opined that work performance depends on the ability, motivation and opportunity for employees in order to make their contribution and maintain their well-being. If just one of the factors is zero, then the total equation is zero. The three factors cannot be left alone when it comes to employee's actual job performance. If you recruit and work with employees with high A, M and O, however, working for his or her own gain and not cooperating effectively will impact the well-being and overall work performance. Therefore, well-being is a further element in the equation, which will be called $A \times M \times O \times \text{well-being}$. If one of the factors is zero, then the total accounts i.e. the overall performance is zero.

To increase A, M and O, you can use the three factors as a structure of appraisal interviews by comparing your employee responses to your own perception of what they can, desire and have the opportunity for in order to gain a mutual understanding. Ability: What do your employees experience being capable of? Motivation: What motivates your employees and which tasks specifically do they find meaning in? Opportunity: Which opportunities do your employees experience having? An employee developmental plan should be based on the specific role and responsibilities of each employee i.e. how does their role/responsibility match the strategy of the business? What contribution do the employees offer with their assigned function in order for the organization to succeed in its objectives? And how can you unfold his or her AMO potential even more? When these are put in proper perspectives, there will be a performance improvement in the civil service in a time of economic recession.

Training is a critical part of motivation of human resources and the ability of the employee will be improved and the objectives of the organisation achieved as fast as possible. The AMO specific high performance work system demonstrates that mere recruitment and training of human resources is not sufficient to create a high performance organisation. You need to go to another level, especially in these poor economic times, when companies cannot afford to lose valuable people. Therefore, special emphasis must be placed on motivating and training of the employees and the opportunities offered to them.

Training and Development in the Nigerian Public Service under Economic Recession

Nigeria is presently in a time of economic recession. The economic recession is no doubt a very harsh experience for the country. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2018), the country is in its worst economic recession in twenty-nine years. Economic recession is defined as a significant decline in economic activities spread across the economy lasting more than a few months, normally visible in real Gross Domestic Products, real income, employment, industrial production and wholesale retail sales (US National Bureau of Economic Research, 2017). This situation has a lot of implications for any country's national economy as well as for the well-being of the citizenry. One of the major implications of this is that the income and resources of government have gone down remarkably.

The table below shows the unstable trend in the government revenue as it reflects on the Nigerian Gross Domestic Product (GDP) from January 2015 to January 2018.

Year	Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in %
Jan 2015	-11.57%
July 2015	9.19%
Jan 2016	-13.98%
July 2016	8.24%
Jan 2017	-13.26%
July 2017	8.97%
Jan 2018	4.29%

Table I: Showing the GDP of Nigeria from Jan 2015-Jan 2018

Source: NBS (2018) Nigeria GDP Growth Rate <https://tradingeconomics.com/nigeria/gdp-growth>

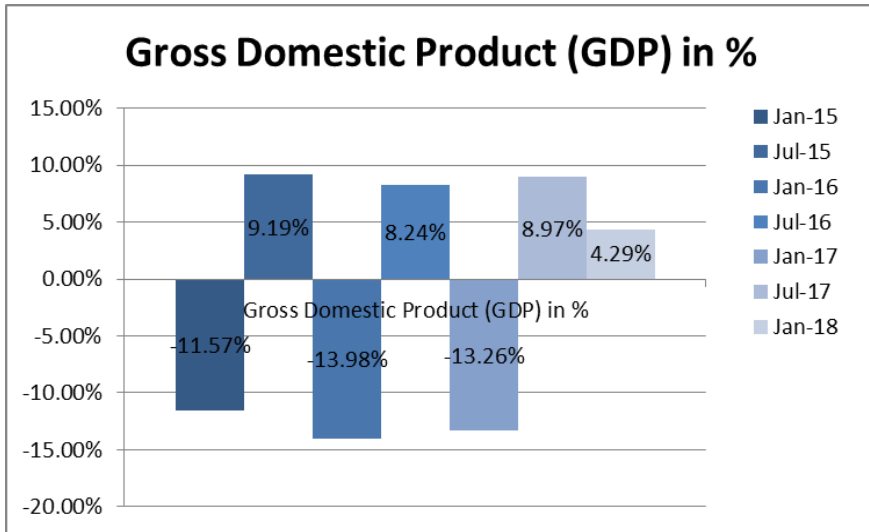


Figure I: Gross Domestic Product (GDP) from January 2015 to Jan 2018

While government responsibilities have remained on the high side the recurrent and capital expenditure have been adversely affected. Consequently, the federal government has enormous responsibilities to urgently get the country out of this harsh economic situation. To this extent, government has involved a number of financial and economic professionals and experts in finding solution to this national problem (NBS, 2018).

However, in addition to the contribution of economic experts in getting the nation out of its economic recession, it is imperative to note that the federal civil service is also capable of contributing immensely to the rescue mission for the country’s economic recovery. The country’s public service has significant role to play in this direction. This is because the role of a country’s civil service cannot be divorced from the political, constitutional and economic climates in operation in the country.

From early 1979, the role of the public service in Nigeria has had to adapt to modern challenges of managing an ailing economy, through the Structural

Adjustment Programme (SAP), rationalisation, nationalisation and so on (Olagunju, 2006). Therefore, and in view of the fact that the Nigerian Civil Service has had to play important role in managing the nation's ailing economy over the years, it is necessary to involve it in the challenges of the present national economic recession. One way to do this is for the government to embark on continuous training and retraining of civil servants for improved performance. This will enable the civil service to effectively formulate and implement economic policies of the government that are designed to ensure speedy economic recovery of the country.

The Nigerian national bureaucracy came under sever ridicule following the discovery and recovery of large-scale looting of government money and illicit assets by public servants recently. This has led to large-scale forfeiture of illicit money and assets by public servants (*Punch*, March 8, 2017). It is not possible for a public service affected by this magnitude of corruption to be effective and efficient, especially in the area of national development. Similarly, inadequate training leads to incompetence which cannot enhance performance development. The Minister of Education (Mallam Adamu Adamu) remarked that most directors in the public service cannot write good memorandum, a factor which he opined that it was responsible for the failure of Government policies and programmes needed for national development (*Punch*, March 8, 2017).

It is probably unthinkable to suggest that the public service of Nigeria in its present harsh economic milieu should embark on staff training and development programmes. This is because the country's economic recession is so bad that the government at all levels has not been able to pay staff salaries as and when due for some time now. However, this paper contends that this is the right time to enhance the capacity of public servants through well designed training. This is because training and development will ensure public servants' competence, high morale and increase their productivity which are highly needed at this time of economic recession to help the country out of recession. The need for continuous training and development in the Nigerian Civil Service has been identified and emphasised in the report of the Public Service Review Commission headed by Chief Jerome Udoji in 1974 where it was noted that:

Training is a continuous process from recruitment (induction and orientation) to retirement... Training is vitally important for our public services... We need to train people who are result-oriented, who can recognise opportunities and meet objectives... Our findings re-emphasize the importance of training. Training will be the most urgent consideration in accepting and implementing our Report (Federal Republic of Nigeria:

Public Service Review Commission, Main Report, 1974).

The report of the Public Service Review Commission has identified the importance of training and development in the Nigerian Public Service, particularly in the civil service because it will go a long way to improve the competence and productivity of the civil service system. In the past, and for a long time, training of personnel in Public Administration Organisations was regarded as a waste of time. The predominant view was that administrators are born, and not made. What future administrators needed, therefore was a sound and rounded education, after which they would acquire the necessary know-how and skills solely through practice (Mutahaba, 2000). However, the nature and scope of governmental activities have since changed very drastically in modern times. Today, governments, particularly in developing countries are engaged in governmental activities beyond the maintenance of law and order. As noted earlier, they are now in addition concerned with the consolidation of national integration, economic development, nation building and national development, international relations national security, economic depression among others. This development no doubt calls for more qualified personnel to handle government business effectively and efficiently.

Historically, during the colonial administration, the need to embark on the training and development of Nigerian public servants was not realised until 1954 when Gorsuch Commission drew attention to the importance of training. According to the Commission's report, a well-trained and properly graded service cost less and gives better value for money than a service in which indifferent quantity is substituted for less numerous quality and highly qualified and experienced officers have to do routine work below their levels because there is no one else to do it (The Gorsuch Commission Report, 1955). This report prompted the federal and the regional government to embark on the training and development of their employees. After independence, the Public Service Review Commission otherwise known as the Udoji Commission was to observe the importance of training.

According to the commission's report, training is vitally important for our public service and should be given most urgent consideration (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1974). However, three decades after this report, not much was done in the area of manpower training in the public service until the 1988 Civil Service Reforms headed by Dotun Philips. The report emphasised the importance of training by making it obligatory and periodic rather than the sporadic, unstructured and anaemic as hitherto (Philips, 1992). This reform is about the most recent remarkable effort of the federal government on man power training.

The importance of training for Civil servants in Nigeria was also stressed by the Minister of Education (Mallam Adamu Adamu) during a training workshop for Directorate Cadre civil servants when he lamented that:

Most Directorate Cadre officers (Directors and Deputy Directors) in the Federal Civil Service in Nigeria cannot write good memorandum, a factor he said, is responsible for the failure of most government policies and programmes (*Nigerian Tribune*, 10th November, 2016).

He added that in the provision of good quality service delivery, Directors are important in policy making and implementation (*Nigerian Tribune*, 10th November, 2016). Overall, training and development reduce costs as they increase productivity. There is a popular saying in human resource parlance that “it costs money to train, but it costs more money not to train”. On the whole, training and development reduce costs and they reduce employee turnover and promote goal congruency. Lack of quality training increases absenteeism rate, low output, poor quality of professionalism and therefore result in high unit cost of production and service delivery (Nwachukwu, 1988).

In order to make training and development effective in any organisation, the training needs of the personnel of the organisation must be properly and objectively identified by management. Identification of training needs is always the first step in the training system. In fact, it is the pivot of training since every other activity or segment in training system depends on how successful this first step is carried out (Maduabum, 1992). Therefore there is the need for the federal government to creatively identify the training needs of civil servants of the Federal Civil Service. The word “need” according to Boydel (1975) implies that something is lacking.

On the other hand, “training” implies that this lack can be supplied by systematic training. He adds that training need exists when the application of systematic training will serve to overcome a particular weakness or deficiency. It could thus be said that a training need is a gap between the kind of performance or competence an employee demonstrates and the kind of performance or competence which he is expected to have. The kinds of training needs vary in scope and dimension. They include training needs at the level of individual employee, at occupational level, organisational level, present training needs, future training needs, in-house and off-house training needs. Training needs can be identified through job analysis, annual performance evaluation, questionnaire, interview and observation.

Conclusion

As canvassed earlier in this paper, the need to intensify training and retraining in all organisations at all times has become very important to the development of organisations. Indeed, the relevance, importance urgency for training and development for the public service of any country, particularly developing countries of the world have become imperative today more than ever before.

This is in order for the purpose of innovation in administration to meet the demands and challenges of these countries particularly in time of economic depression. Training and development are also needed to meet the demands of the rapid multiplication and complexity of government tasks and obligations as well as to meet the challenges of the acute shortage of skilled manpower in these developing countries. Training and development produce qualified manpower. Qualified manpower is central to the social, political and economic development of any country. There is no country known to have attained high level of economic growth and development without adequate supply of qualified manpower.

It has been shown by the lamentation of Nigeria's Minister of Education (Mallam Adamu Adamu) that most Directors and Deputy Directors in the federal civil services cannot write good memorandum that adequate training is lacking in the civil service. This sad reality has great implications for quality policy formulation and implementation in public governance. Training and retraining of civil servants as well as their development have therefore become imperative, particularly at this time of economic recession in the country. This is because the various economic policies of government designed to tackle the challenge of economic recession may come to grief if public servants are not properly and adequately trained in view of their strategic role in the formulation and implementation of government policies for quality service delivery.

Against the backdrop of the importance of training and development to civil servants, particularly at a time of economic recession, it is hereby suggested that continuous training and retraining of civil servants must be taken as a matter of necessity in order to ensure speedy economic recovery of the country. This should be done by first identifying the training needs of all categories of public sector workers and provide the required training for them. Financial considerations should not be allowed to stall such training programme. In order to reduce the cost of performance enhancement in Nigerian public service, training programmes such as seminars, training workshops, refresher courses and other forms of in-house training programmes should be organised on regular basis for public servants in order to promote performance improvement in the Public Service both for national development and institutional efficiency of public bureaucracy.

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