

THE CURRENT STATE OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING AT A HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION IN NAMIBIA

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Abstract

The paper intends to evaluate the current state of staff development and training at tertiary educational institutions, with special emphasis on Namibia. The research adopted a meta-analytical study, which relied on secondary data. A qualitative research approach was utilised and the emic perspective (author's view point) was employed. An empirical analysis was utilised in the paper. The authors are of the view that all staff development and training activities should be linked to the strategic goals of organisations. This paper is original since it examines staff development and training activities and various factors affecting it in higher educational institutions, which creates an opportunity for further investigation into strategic issues confronting staff development and training activities in higher education in general.

Keywords: *development, human resource, institutions, staff, strategic*

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Introduction

Education, training and development have reached a turning point in Namibia, which is why education has received the biggest share of the government's budget. During the 2007/2008 financial year, the government spent 3.3 billion Namibian dollars (N\$) on education as an investment in human capital (Government Budget Report, 2007:23). However, the country has still failed to acquire a required skills base, which is necessary to achieve national goals (Heita, 2008). According to Nicko Tromp, group director for Nictus Furniture Stores, cited by Heita (2008), *the lack of skilled people is visible in Namibia*, which demonstrates that business people have also been hard hit by the skills shortage. As a result, the government initiated a programme to raise the profile of education, training and development in the country by launching the Education and Training Sector Improvement Programme in 2006 (ETSIP Phase 1 2006-2011). Therefore, this paper aims to evaluate the state of staff training and development in higher education in Namibia.

Education, training and development in Namibia

ETSIP was developed to support Namibia's Vision 2030 that states that: *Namibia should join the ranks of high income countries and afford all of its citizens a quality of life that is comparable to that of the developed world*, in order to become a knowledge based nation (ETSIP, 2007:1). The government programme via ETSIP has set different objectives for different sectors. The objective for tertiary education and training was *to improve the effectiveness and productivity of academic staff in terms of research and teaching competencies through staff development programmes* (ETSIP, 2007:46). The government further stated that they will involve a percentage of each institution staff member in staff development activities annually (ETSIP, 2007:46). Until presently, the Namibian government has spent N\$19.5 million on this initiative (ibid). From a broader view of education, training and development in Namibia, the focus of discussion will proceed to tertiary education and training institutions in Namibia.

There are only two tertiary educational institutions in Namibia, namely the PoN and the University of Namibia (UNAM). As tertiary educational institutions they are mandated by legislation to produce high level skilled and knowledgeable human resources that are required for the economic growth of the country (Republic of Namibia Higher Education Act, 26 of 2003). Therefore, the director of the science and technology sector developed a report in 2005 to provide a mechanism to support research activities in tertiary institutions, which are essential to build the knowledge capacity of the country and enables employees to perform better in their work environments (Nyiira, 2005:7). Namibia has a long way to go; however, effective training and development policies in tertiary institutions can reduce that long journey. PoN (Polytechnic of Namibia) was established in 1985 under the framework of the Academy for Tertiary Education (1980) as the first higher education institution in Namibia. In 1991 the Presidential Commission of Higher Education recommended the creation of a PoN through merger of the Technikon of Namibia and the College for Out-of-School Training (COST). The PoN was subsequently established by an Act of Parliament, namely Act 33 of November 1994, and started to fully operate as an independent institution on the 01 January 1996 (PSP, 2004-2008:3).

The PoN is the second largest institution in Namibia and has a total staff compliment of 511 full-time staff members of which 230 are Namibians (AA Report, 2007/2008:4). This includes academics, administrative and support staff. Having looked at the broader perspective of education, training and development, some variables that affect effectiveness of the HR Code: SDT, are explicated in detail in the following sections.

Staff members in higher education institutions are key resources. McNaught and Kenedy (2000:95) commented that quality and quantity are both important considerations for universities in the 21st century. The quality that service staff members deliver has an impact on student learning. There is a need to continuously enhance staff skills, whilst providing them with resources to consider new ways to design learning, which will enhance student learning (Barnes, 1994:130). Staff

development activities should include institutional policies, programmes and procedures, which facilitate and support staff to increase their performance and to serve the institutions' needs (Webb, 1996:10). Staff development gained increased attention in higher educational institutions in the UK, Australia, New Zealand and Netherlands, since government wanted to make the universities more efficient, effective and accountable (Partington and Stainton, 2003: 475). Provision of training, mentoring and effective review of training and development activities to ensure that they result in the achievement of university goals (Blackmore, 2003:7).

Higher educational institutions have mostly been concerned with academic staff development. Academic staff provides core business activities, which consist of teaching, learning and research (Thackwray, 1997:13). In some academic fields such as engineering and information technology (IT), human knowledge doubles every five or ten years. Therefore, most educational institutions would have units or centres that deal with academic, educational or professional development (Webb, 1996:10) to provide developmental activities that support core business activities and to ensure that they stay abreast of technological changes. Hence, academic staff remained the focus of staff development efforts (Fielden, 1998:7). Due to swift changes in management process and technology, administrative and support staff also require development (Fielden, 1998:8). As a result, higher educational institutions have developed staff development programmes for all staff including academic, administrative and support staff because they all play crucial roles in assisting students to learn and create an environment that facilitates learning (ibid).

Higher educational institutions that are in a climate of change should introduce a coherent staff development policy that is aligned to the university's "corporate vision" (Barnes, 1994:139). McNaughty and Kenedy (2000:98) posited that *effective staff development should be positioned at the centre of university functioning and yet needs to retain connections with the needs and perceptions of teaching staff*. Therefore, staff development programmes will be successful if they are strategically supported by the university.

Strategic Human Resource Development (SHRD)

SHRD is defined as creation of a learning organisation within which all training and development activities respond to corporate strategy (Blackmore, 2003; Millmore, Lewis, Saunders, Thornhill and Morrow, 2007:364). There has been a paradigm shift from training and development to SHRD. Traditionally, training and development was done to resolve work problems and operated in isolation, but this has changed (Opperman and Meyer, 2008:7). Organisations strategically plan their training and development activities by linking it to its business strategy. Blackmore (2003:5) noted that the strategic approach to staff development focuses on strategic change of the organisation, which should involve everyone because they all work towards achieving the same goal (Millmore *et al.*, 2007:354). McCracken and Wallace (2000, cited in Blackmore, 2003:5) identified nine characteristics that distinguish SHRD, namely relationship to organisational

goals; top management support; environmental scanning; staff development plans and policies; relationship to line management; role of staff developer; cultural engagement; evaluation organisation; and relationship to human resources. However, it was argued that an additional point of staff be included for SHRD in higher tertiary institutions. This includes the extent to which staff would be involved in strategic partnerships with the staff development function (ibid). Blackmore (2003) also noted that this involves strategic planning, execution and evaluation of activities of their peers.

Kalamas and Kalamas (2004:106) assert that SHRD should be a top priority on the strategic planning agenda because of the immense contribution that highly skilled employees could make to the long-term sustainability of a company. SHRD could create a strong learning culture, which addresses a need for flexible individuals who constantly learn and develop themselves (Blackmore, 2003:5). Higher educational institutions (HEI) that are learning organisations should view SHRD from a holistic perspective (Blackmore, 2003:5). Once organisations have set their goals they should decide and prioritize their needs. Institutions or business needs are defined as shortcomings between current and desired conditions, which are relative to achieving business goals (Gupta, Sleezer and Russ-Eft, 2007:175). These deficiencies could be identified in terms of employees' knowledge, skills and behaviour in performing the given task (ibid). Deficiencies could be minimised if employee needs are linked to strategic needs of the organisation, which is vital to the organisation's long-term success. Most training and development programmes that are linked to strategic goals and the business strategy of an organisation can yield positive results for the organisation (Dierdorff and Surface, 2008:28). Therefore, by linking training and development programmes, one determines business needs that are essential to assisting the organisation with meeting its goals (D'Netto, Bakas and Bordia, 2008:22).

Organisations that examine their current and future organisational needs in terms of position and position requirements will equip their employees with necessary competencies. Organisations should focus on questions such as "where" and "why" training is necessary to determine their training and development needs (Dierdorff and Surface, 2008:29). A study, which was conducted by Melum (2002, cited in D'Netto *et al.*, 2008:7) concerning 100 top companies in the United States, discovered that 90% of the companies linked their training and development programmes to the business' strategic mission and goals. D'Netto *et al.* (2008) noted that organisations that know their business needs, integrate their needs into their business strategy. Supervisors should understand how to integrate business needs with training and development needs. They should also be able to identify important needs and address them immediately (Gupta *et al.*, 2007; Millmore *et al.*, 2007:364).

Gupta *et al.* (2007:175) state that assessing business needs would benefit the organisation in the following ways:

- develop long-term solutions to existing performance problems or new performance needs; and
- solve problems that affect core business processes such as quality service delivery.

Business needs assessment provides a plan of where the organisation wants to be and how they can develop their employees (Gupta *et al.*, 2007:176). However, the organisational needs should firstly be clearly communicated to everyone in the organisation (Gupta *et al.*, 2007:21). Therefore, training and development needs should be linked to needs of the organisation. Once the business' needs have been identified, training and development needs can be discussed.

Evaluating training and development

If training and development is a process of updating knowledge, skills and abilities of employees to improve their job performance, then training and development should be evaluated. According to Goldstein and Ford (2002:138), evaluation *is the process of appraising something carefully to determine its value*. Most companies and higher educational institutions have shown their support for staff training and development. However, few can demonstrate the value of investments that they have made (Thuckwray, 1997; Sels, 2002; Goldstein and Ford, 2002). One of the reasons could be because they do not evaluate the impact that training has on business results (Aragon-Sanchez, Barba-Aragon and Sanz-Valle, 2003:956).

Large investments in training (input) do not necessarily mean that learning is achieved (output) (Sels, 2002:1279). Evaluating training and development activities will give an indication that training that was provided was beneficial to the organisation and had lead to performance improvement of those who attended the training (Meyer *et al.*, 2003:238). External training providers do not conduct follow-ups and monitoring to assess if training has contributed to improved job performance, therefore, organisations are encouraged to evaluate training programmes (Wickramasinghe, 2006:243). Evaluation is viewed differently in higher educational institutions because not all development is related to teaching and learning of their subject matter. Therefore, evaluating academic staff once they have attended development programmes may not be possible (Thackwray, 1997:178).

Research that was conducted by Swanson and Holton (2001), Goldstein and Ford (2002), Meyer, Mabaso and Lancaster (2003) and Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhard, and Wright (2006) indicated that there are benefits that can be obtained from evaluating training and development programmes. They noted that training evaluation may lead to performance improvement, profit growth and, decrease labour turnover. It can also be used as a diagnostic technique to review training programmes to meet desired results, and as a method to show job-relatedness of the training programme (Goldstein and Ford, 2002:140). Different models have been developed over the years to evaluate effectiveness of training and development programmes.

One of the most widely discussed models is Kirkpatrick and Phillips' evaluation model (Aragon-Sanchez, Barba-Aragon, and Sanz-Valle, 2003; Wickramasinghe, 2006; Lien, Hung, and McLean, 2007). A study was conducted

by Lien *et al.* (2007:36) on seven leading companies in Taiwan in order to examine training evaluation strategies by using Kirkpatrick's and Swanson's training evaluation models. The study discovered that none of the companies in which the study was conducted could best use the two models of training evaluation. Most of them have developed their own evaluation strategies, which use organisational training goals as a measurement technique for training evaluation.

If training and development is driven by institutional objectives, then any evaluation should be done to achieve the institutions' objectives (Thackwray, 1997:175). Hence higher education evaluation should link training and development to departmental and institutional outcomes (*ibid.*). Training evaluation should be an on-going process (Thackwray, 1997; Millmore *et al.*, 2007) and should not stop at individual levels, but flow down to departments and, the entire organisation. Organisations spend large amounts of money on training and development programmes (Aragon Sancez *et al.*, 2003 and Berge, 2008). Therefore, quantifying results would help organisations to monitor their financial resources (Phillips, 2003:26). Philips expanded Kirkpatrick's four-level model by adding a fifth level of Return on Investment (RoI) to reflect monetary value with program costs. He further explained how organisations should calculate RoI (Phillips, 2003:197).

Training, education and development have different reimbursement timeframes namely, short term, medium term and long-term (Phillips, 2003:21). He stated that training will have short term payback, whereas education will have a medium term payback and development will render long term payback. Philips indicated that the different reimbursement timeframes should be considered when calculating RoI. It is argued that calculating RoI for training could be simple but calculating education could be tricky because sometimes people resign before RoI is calculated. Calculating RoI for education might also be time consuming (Phillips, 2003:24 and Berge, 2008:394). Calculating RoI can be used to demonstrate to management benefits that are gained from training so that they do not logically conclude that training will improve productivity, increase customer satisfaction, enhance quality, reduce costs and save time (Opperman and Meyer, 2008:220).

A study, which was conducted by Lien *et al.* (2007:43) reported that organisations found it difficult to calculate RoI. Berge (2008:393) stated that implementing RoI can be costly and difficult, although RoI can be used to adequately assess training needs. Philips (2003:27) acknowledged that the process of calculating RoI is challenging, albeit effective if applied correctly, and if those in charge of training understand formulae, statistics and all business operations.

RoI cannot be calculated if transfer of training does not take place. Once employees transfer their skills, the organisation can calculate their RoI by measuring, for example, the number of sales that are made once employees return from training (Phillips, 2003; Opperman and Meyer, 2008). Nevertheless, it would be worth discussing institutional support for the transfer of training. Transfer of training refers to the extent to which trainees can successfully apply their KSA to the job (Goldstein and Ford, 2002:86). Hence, understanding transfer of training is vital for the success of the organisation. Goldstein and Ford (2002) further note that

organisations should ensure that the KSA gained on training leads to improved job performance. A regular follow-up evaluation should be conducted with employees after training to give them a chance to apply their new knowledge and skills in the workplace (D'Netto, Bakas and Bordia, 2008; Scaduto, Lindsay and Chiaburu, 2008).

Studies have been conducted by Velada, Caetano, Michel, Lyons and Kavanagh (2007); D'Netto *et al.* (2008) and Scaduto *et al.* (2008) on the transfer of the training process. Their findings discovered that training will be effective if the work environment, organisational climate and culture supports the answer of training. These were identified as some of the factors that influence the transfer of training. Training will be effective if training outcomes are aligned with employee performance and when the training programme is designed in such a way that employees can transfer learning to the job (Velada *et al.*, 2007; Scaduto *et al.*, 2008). The organisation's climate should show that knowledge and skills that are gained through training are valued (Goldstein and Ford, 2002:86).

Training and development, which is gained, should also be intrinsically valuable to trainees and provide them with transferable qualifications that should be employable in the labour market, while organisations benefit from higher profits, decrease absenteeism and better customer service (D'Netto *et al.*, 2008:4). Measurable training objectives should be set for transfer of training to take place. According to Wickramasinghe (2006:228), setting objectives for training refers to the *process of translating the needs identified into observable and measurable behaviour*. He further notes that the objectives should describe what employees will be expected to do after the training. In other words, pre-and-post performance should be measured. Pre-training data refers to information that is collected before employees are sent on training, which should be used as a tool to measure their post-performance (Berge, 2008:391). Collected information would include the number of errors made, number of returned products, absenteeism and customer complaints. Post-training refers to collected information, which assesses whether the employee's KSA have improved (Scaduto *et al.*, 2008:160). Transfer of training might not take place if employees' performance is not assessed and if training intervention is conducted in isolation (Rowold, 2008:33). Therefore, training and development activities should be supported by the organisation.

Staff development in tertiary educational institutions is not only about academic development (Blackmore and Blackwell, 2003:1), since non-academic development should also be recognised. There is a difference between staff developers and academic developers. In academic institutions staff developers are mainly responsible for administrative functions of staff such as organising training and development activities with the purpose of enhancing staff competencies as means to improve their performance. Academic developers are responsible for developing competencies of academic staff in areas of teaching and research (Webb, 1994:11). Academic developers should assist academic staff with teaching problems that they experience and provide well-designed workshops, mentoring and orientation programmes (*ibid*).

It is a responsibility of the staff developer to identify institutional needs and to incorporate them into the staff development plan (Scollaert, Schollaert and Bright, 2000:35). Staff developers should draft staff development plans by considering the needs of both the organisation and the individual. A staff development plan should begin with a needs assessment. Needs that are identified in the strategic plan might be met by a training and development programme for some staff members. Developing a staff development plan will ensure that goals that are set in the strategic plan, are achieved in a focused and systematic way (Scollaert *et al.*, 2000:35).

Scollaert *et al.* (2000) indicate that the following components should be included in a staff development plan:

- a summary of the institution's needs and individual needs;
- a prioritisation of those needs with reference to the strategic goals of the institution;
- available financial resources;
- the nature, time and targeted audience of activities that are planned;
- the evaluation procedure; and
- the approval of management.

A well established staff development plan can serve as a record of proof of training and development efforts, as well as proof of responsibility towards authorities that offer funds to the institution or organisation (Scollaert *et al.*, 2000:36). Policies that are formulated and implemented should support the staff development plan.

Empirical analysis

The study adopted a qualitative (focus on understanding) research method in order to study the various literature and analyse documents on staff development and training in both developed countries and developing country tertiary higher educational institution. Minutes of council meetings were reviewed to obtain information concerning issues that were discussed on matters related to staff development and training. The council forms part of the PoN decision-making board. The aim of the review of minutes was to assess if there were any inferences to events that is occurring in other institutions and in companies. The Higher Education Quality Councils' Audit report (HEQC) of 2007 and the World Bank report (2005) were also consulted. The Polytechnic's Strategic Plan 3 (PSP-3) was reviewed to investigate whether the staff development activities are aligned to the goals of the institution. One could argue that when policies are effectively implemented and monitored, it could lead to the achievement of set objectives. In assessing effectiveness of training and development at the PoN, the researcher posed questions and made statements to ascertain if the HR Code: SDT is implemented, as stated in the HR Code in order to identify weaknesses. The questions posed were:

- How frequently were staff members sent on training and development?

- Were the performances of staff members assessed before and after training?

The rationale for this information was to measure if staff members were sent on training and development programmes and to ascertain whether their job performances were assessed before and after they returned from training. Further reason was to establish whether staff members' job performance was assessed and whether training and development needs were properly identified, as stated in the HR Code: SDT.

Table no. 1

Frequency of staff training and development and assessment of their performance before and after training

		Performance assessment before and after training		Total
		Yes	No	
Number of times staff was sent on training	Never	4	29	33
	Some times	26	52	78
	Often	3	3	6
	Total	33	84	117
	Missing system	13	00	13

(n=117)

The cross tabulation revealed that from the 130 respondents, 33 of the respondents had never been sent on training and development programmes, while 78 of the respondents were sometimes sent and 6 were often sent on training and development programmes. The statement that respondents had to reply to was: my job performance is assessed before and after I went on a training and development programme, and while 33 of the respondents replied yes, 84 replied no. This gave a total of 117 respondents, while other respondents chose not to respond.

Conclusion

The above analysis revealed that training and development is not a standalone function, it requires involvement by all stakeholders. Changes in the external environment have led to organisations realising that their competitive advantage depends on skills and knowledge of their human resources. In other words, training and development has become such an important aspect for both organisations and individuals. The cross tabulation shown in Table 1 revealed a different point of view from the 84 staff members that had attended training and development, since none of their performance was assessed before and or after the training and development programme. The reviewed literature shows that performance improvement will result in the achievement of organisational objectives only if performance is assessed (Goldstein and Ford, 2002:130). If performance is not

assessed, then transfer of training might not take place. In terms of the PoN, it was also found that there are no formal assessment, evaluation and monitoring mechanisms to assess performance. Furthermore, the literature revealed that a staff development policy should have a plan of what should be achieved once training and development has been offered (University of Free State: staff development policy, 2005:3). This would facilitate that monitoring is conducted to ensure that intended results are accomplished. Tertiary education institutions are faced with double challenges, since on the one hand they have to deliver quality services to students and, on the other hand, meet national demands, which is to create a knowledge-based economy. The PoN is one of the two public higher tertiary educational institutions in Namibia, which focuses on delivering quality tertiary education. It is imperative for tertiary educational institutions, including the PoN to increase their training and development budgets, because staff development and training can be challenging, when there are no support base for the transfer of knowledge.

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