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Training and development as a tool for improving basic service delivery; the case of a selected municipality



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ABSTRACT

Municipal employees have come under fire for poor performance and conduct in their work as some engage in corruption and others are not qualified enough to discharge their duties to the required levels. Employee training and development has become one of the key aspects in improving employee performance in organisations, thus leading to improved organizational performance and growth. The study investigated the relationship between the quality of employee training and development on service delivery in a selected municipality with data collected from 150 employees. The results indicated the need for effective employee training and development systems and processes to achieve improved employee performance thus improved provision of basic services to the communities.

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Formación y desarrollo como herramienta de mejora de la dotación de servicios básicos; el caso de un municipio seleccionado

RESUMEN

Los empleados municipales han sufrido despidos debido al bajo rendimiento de su trabajo, ya que muchos de ellos caen en corrupción y otros no están lo suficientemente calificados para cumplir con sus obligaciones en el nivel requerido. La formación y desarrollo del personal se ha convertido en uno de los aspectos clave para mejorar su desempeño en las organizaciones y lograr el mayor rendimiento y crecimiento de estas. El estudio investigó la relación entre la calidad de la formación y el desarrollo del personal y la dotación de servicios en un municipio seleccionado, recogiendo información de 150 empleados. Los resultados mostraron la necesidad de contar con sistemas y procesos de formación y desarrollo del personal, para el logro de una mejora de su desempeño, lo que redundará en una mejor dotación de servicios básicos a las comunidades.

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1. Background

Poor performance and corruption by the workers of municipalities has been established as one of the major problems in the efficient provision of basic services by municipalities; the performance and conduct of municipal employees needs to be improved so as to improve the provision of basic services to the populous. Stredwick (2005) emphasised that improving an employee's performance and conduct is one, amongst many solutions, towards the

efficient and reliable provision of basic services by municipalities to the public.

Service delivery by local municipal authorities has proven to be a major problem in South Africa. Problems associated with service delivery have been highlighted by the widespread protests that have characterized South African communities (Service delivery Protests, 2011). The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), in reference to the functions and roles of municipalities, highlights that municipalities must structure and manage their administration, budgeting, and planning processes in order to prioritize the basic needs of the community and to promote the social and economic development of it. Thus, the provision of basic services to the masses has proven to be a significant priority of the

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municipalities' charter, including that of the selected municipality in this study. Municipalities are, therefore, faced with the challenge of how best to improve the provision of basic services to their communities.

Stredwick (2005) notes that the most important role in human resources is to help employees improve their performance (through employee training and development) and, by doing so, to improve the performance of the organisation. Employee training and development has become one of the key aspects in improving employee performance in organisations, thus leading to improved organizational performance and growth. Marquardt, Nissley, Ozag, and Taylor (2000) highlight the significance of employee training and development and the subsequent benefits for the organisation when they note that, in future, organisations will depend on well trained employees who will accomplish tasks and successfully operate in the global environment. Kuvaas and Dysvik (2009) add that when organizations offer organizational inducements in the form of developmental opportunities, employees become motivated to expend their efforts in order to benefit the organisation.

The provision of essential services by local municipalities has been in the spotlight for a long period of time, with many municipal employees caught up in the snare. Municipal employees have come under fire for poor performance and conduct in their work as some engage in corruption and others are not qualified enough to discharge their duties to the required levels. This is supported by Burger (2010) who suggests that the many reasons for poor service delivery, rampant corruption, nepotism and the deployment of 'comrades' to positions for which they are not qualified within local government structures, has led to the inefficient provision of basic services to the masses, by municipalities.

The problem of poor service delivery, which is evident in significant levels of dissatisfaction with the lack of delivery of basic municipal services such as running water, electricity and toilets, especially in informal settlements, unemployment (officially at around 23%), high levels of poverty, poor infrastructure and the lack of houses can, to some extent, be solved by the efficiency of municipalities (Burger, 2010). Competent municipalities are those that employ, skilled and qualified managerial and non managerial staff offering efficient and reliable essential services to the masses.

The challenges of poor provision of basic services by local municipalities are complex. However, much of the blame has been uniquely directed at the performance and conduct of the employees and management of these municipalities, which has led to the poor provision of basic services to the communities. The problem lies in the context of how these employees' skills, performance and conduct can be improved in order to improve service delivery. The improvement of employees' skills and performance, through quality employee training and development, will lead to improved performance by municipal employees. This will allow the selected municipality a greater opportunity to provide its residents with efficient and reliable basic services.

2. Objectives

The objectives of the study are:

- To investigate the relationship between the quality of employee training and development on service delivery in the selected municipality.
- To establish recommendations on the importance and use of quality employee training and development strategies and the benefits thereof in the efficient provision of essential basic services, within the selected municipality.

3. Literature review

3.1. Employee training and development

Nisha (2009) notes the need for, and appreciation of employee training and development and contends that it ensures that the organisation functions according to promulgated government regulations and has skilled competent staff, this is supported by Marquardt et al. (2000) who highlight that employee training and development are playing an increasingly important and strategic role in the economic success of the U.S. organizations which recognize that they now operate in a new global economy, an economy that involves the use of advanced technology and increased responsiveness to customer needs. Nutting (2000) adds that employers should develop training or learning paths for employees based on criteria such as their status, title, or job description.

3.2. Service delivery

Palmer (1998) contends that services are described by their distinctive features. These are: intangibility, inseparability, variability (heterogeneity), perishability and the inability to own a service. The above characteristics apply to all services regardless of the type of service offered. Intangibility implies that the services cannot be touched or tested and inseparability means that the time of production and time of consumption are very close, or that these happen simultaneously. Hollensen (2003) explains that variability infers that services are rarely the same because they involve interactions with people.

Lamb (2004) perceive of a service as a result of both human and mechanical effort focused on people or objects. In the context of this study, services refer to the efficient and effective provision of basic services that the selected municipality should provide to its citizens. Matarirano (2005) elaborates by stating that services are deeds, performances or efforts that cannot physically be possessed.

3.3. Methodology

A quantitative approach was adopted, using a survey questionnaire to test hypotheses. The sample of the study consisted of 150 employees. Information was elicited using questionnaires. A pilot study was deemed necessary to ensure operational administration, validity and reliability of the questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was computed to assess internal consistency. The questionnaire for the employees of the selected municipality computed a Cronbach's alpha of 0.824943. ANOVA was used to analyze the data.

4. Empirical results

4.1. Employees' analysis of variance report-one way Anova

There was a significant difference between the mean scores of respondents from the department of water and scientific and those from the department of housing. Following analysis of results in the table below employees from the water and scientific department showed knowledge of municipal management's set employee training and development objectives, in comparison to employees from the housing division (Mean score 3.777778 vs. 2.833333, $c-t = 3.9417$, $df = 90$ and $P = 0.014350^*$).

Employees from the water and scientific services department agreed to the perception that the municipality's Human Resources (HR) department was equipped with enough resources in personnel and finance to administer effective and efficient employee training and development programmes. On the other hand employees

from the electricity department were neutral about the perception of the municipality's Human Resources (HR) department being equipped with resources (personnel and finance) to administer effective and efficient employee training and development programmes (Mean score 4.055555 vs. 3.166667, $c-t = 3.9417$, $df = 90$ and P value = 0.70706).

The results in the investigation of employee perceptions in their access to employee training and development information in the municipality showed that employees from the construction department seem to have greater access to employee training and development information than employees from the water and scientific department, who claimed not to have access to employee training and development information (Mean 3.888889 vs. 2.777778, $c-t = 3.9417$, $df = 90$, and P value = 0.018542*).

When investigating whether employees perceived the facilitators of employee training and development in the municipality to be highly qualified, major differences in employee perceptions were noted from the department of water and scientific services and the department of roads and construction. Employees from the roads and construction department agreed that facilitators of employee training and development in the municipality were highly qualified, while employees from the department water and scientific services were neutral on the matter (Mean 3.722222 vs. 2.888889, $c-t = 3.9417$, $df = 90$, and P value = 0.046431*).

In the investigation as to whether employees viewed the implementation of employee performance management and evaluation processes in the municipality as successful, major differences were noted amongst the employees from the departments of water and scientific services and the department of roads and construction. Employees from the roads and construction department agreed that the performance management and evaluation systems in the municipality have been successfully implemented whilst employees from water and scientific services remained neutral (Mean 4.055555 vs. 2.944444, $c-t = 3.9417$, $df = 90$, and $P = 0.012224$ *).

5. Discussion of results

The results of the findings concur that quality employee training and development programs are significant for improved employee performance in organisations. It is believed that this, consequently, leads to the improved provision of services to clients. Findings point out that improved, efficient and effective service deliverance, by municipal employees, can be achieved if they are trained and developed in programs of a high standard and which are administered by facilitators who produce work of a high standard. In addition, these improvements are sustained when employee performance is constantly managed and evaluated. Findings of this study concur with Wachira's (2010) findings within the Public Service Reforms in Africa started to emphasize obligatory and periodic in-service training as part of a strategy to improve Public Service delivery. She also recommends that quality employee training and development should be accepted as a prerequisite for improving efficiency in employee performance.

The majority of employees investigated, 53.33%, were of the view that employee training and development programs in the municipality were of a high standard. These findings are supported by Ekot (2010) who notes that the quality of an organization's training affects its value; he adds that untrained or poorly trained employees cost significantly more to support than well-trained employees do. Findings also reveal the importance of transfer of and access to information in organisations; this will largely determine an employee's behavior in the organization. In employee training and development, in any organisation, the transfer of and access to employee training and development information will largely influence employee training and development; if employees

are made aware of employee training and development programs they become motivated to participate in such programs. However, if access to and transfer of employee and development training information is limited, within the organization, smaller numbers of employees will participate in employee training and development as most of the employees will not be aware of the employee training and development programs of the organization.

Findings from this research cement Herzberg's (1959) two factor theory. In his study, Herzberg (1959) found that employees are motivated by intrinsic factors such as recognition. Muhammad (2010); who noted that the perspective that the training functions exists to deliver programs to employees without a compelling business reason for doing so is being abandoned. Today, training is being evaluated not on the basis of the number of programs offered and training activities in the company, but on how training addresses business needs related to learning, behaviour change, and performance improvement. In fact, training is becoming more performance-focused. That is, training is used to improve employee performance, which leads to improved business results.

The findings of this study reveal that employee performance can be improved if quality employee training and development programs are implemented; this concurs with Bandura's social learning theory. The significance Bandura's social learning theory, on the impact that quality employee training and development has on service delivery, is highlighted by Cropazano and Mitchell (2005), as quoted in Nel et al. (2008), who contend that when organisations train and develop their employees they invest in their employees and, in return, employees tend to reciprocate in positive ways.

Quality employee training and development that can be achieved from quality programs and highly qualified facilitators leads to improved employee performance and, consequently, improved service delivery. This is supported by Muhammad (2010) whose findings highlight that in order to impart a competitive advantage, training has to involve more than just basic skills development.

Findings from this study point to the importance of highly qualified facilitators designing and presenting employee training and development programs in order to contribute to improved performance. This is noted in the findings of Naris and Ukpere (2009) that highlight that effective staff development and training programs will improve staff performance. The relationship between the quality of employee training and development programs, and service delivery, is supported by Heeter's (2006) findings, which suggest that as we push forward into the 21st century, organizations are realizing the very real value of having high quality and focused training available to their employees. He adds that highly trained employees will also have a sense of control over their careers due to the opportunity to sharpen old skills and learn new skills.

5.1. Recommendations and conclusion

In order to improve employee training and development in the municipality, and improved performance and service delivery, management should increase the number of employees taking part in training and development. This can be done by providing incentives that may motivate employees to take part in training and development programs. Incentives that could motivate employees to take part in employee training and development include the prospect of promotion or the provision of clear hierarchies in the organization so as to indicate where performance is rewarded. The possibility of a salary increase can also be used as a motivating factor to encourage employees to take part in employee training and development programs. Access to and transfer of information on employee training and development programs can be improved by the responsible authorities, within the municipality. This is important in relation to employee training and development

as employees can only take part in employee training and development programs when they have access to information about them.

Ukpere and Naris (2009); Laabs (2001); Pretorius and Schurink (2007); Nisha (2009); Zulkifli and Duasa (2009); Ramalibana (2009) tested for the relationship between training and development and improvements in the provision of quality services. Their findings are consistent with the findings of this study. Quality is guaranteed by receiving service from qualified facilitators who are experienced in the subject matter. Quality employee training and development leads to an improvement in employee performance, which in turn leads to an improvement in the services offered to clients and greater organizational profits.

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