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Analysing Conditions Necessary for Effective Implementation of Training and Development in Local Governments of Malawi: A Case Study of Zomba District Council

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Abstract:- Local governments in Malawi just like in many countries have been undertaking training and development initiatives as part and parcel of capacity building programs. Drawing from a qualitative epistemological approach and using Zomba District Council as an illustrative case study, this paper assess whether conditions necessary for successful implementation of training and development programs are put in place in Malawi's local government authorities. The central argument is that the current training and development initiatives just like the previous ones are likely to fail since they are imposed on an environment where they are no good conditions to thrive. The study concludes that local governments' efforts to ensure successful implementation of training and development are likely to be fruitful if challenges that militate against effective implementation of these practices are confronted and dealt with accordingly and putting necessary conditions in the physical setting where they are going to be implemented. The findings from this case study are in line with the experiences in many countries that have been undertaking training and development initiatives but there is little to show of the tangible progress due to primarily unrealistic commitments.

Keywords:- *Development, Local government, Training, Capacity Building.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Training and development is about providing workshops, coaching, mentoring or offering learning opportunities to employees to inspire, challenge, and motivate them to perform the functions of their position to their best within standards set by different levels of government and licensing organization guidelines (Obi-Anike & Ekwe, 2014). There is a need for employee training and deployment in any organisation including local government councils to ensure better performance (Fajan, 1997). As a result training and development practice has been a central feature in many local governments worldwide. This is the case because politicians want civil services which are more focused and responsive, more focused on getting results, more skilled and, if possible less numerous, and therefore less expensive in total (Pollit and Bouckaert, 2011). It is therefore in realization of the value of trained and skilled manpower and how this essential commodity can be practically utilized for productive output in the provision of services that most or all local governments concentrate and emphasize on the training of local government staff (Abbas, 2013). Joseph (2015), claims that in as much as people are regarded as a set of the major resources of work performance to managers, the successful performance of the job depends on the training and development given to them. He further argues that, in totality every category of staff in the local government council deserves to be trained and should be desirous of being trained for personal improvement and local government area achievement for desired objectives. Owing to this, training should be a matter of deliberate policy and a continuous process of all the categories of local government employees (Abbas, 2013).

However, in spite the adoption of training and development in local governments globally, it is widely acknowledged in literature that training and development processes are facing a lot of challenges. For example in New Zealand, it has been revealed that local government workforce does not always feel supported to adjust to the pace of change and new skill requirements (Terry & Mansfield, 2016). Further to this, the Tanzanian case illustrates that the local government system is an institution where the old, the unskilled and unprofessional employees constitute the main labour force (Njuwa, 2017). Hence personnel weakness in the local government as regards to general lack or inadequacy of sufficient number of trained staff has contributed serious threats to face the very same challenges in local governments (Abbas, 2013). There is therefore a greater need to confront and overcome these challenges to ensure smooth implementation of training and development in councils.

The government of Malawi through the National Training Policy (NTP) of 1996 recognizes that the delivery of quality services depends on the availability of well-trained managers and leaders (Hussein, 2019). Further to this, pursuant to Section 6(1)(g) of the Local Government Act of 1998, one of the functions of local governments pertinent to this study is to appoint, develop, promote and discipline its staff. However, despite local governments having a legal mandate to train and develop their employees, there has been a concern that the processes are encountering a lot of challenges. The Public Service Management Policy (2018-2022) admits that there is inadequate capacity of public servants to effectively design, implement, monitor and evaluate projects and programs due to a number of factors including lack of systematic in service training. Similarly Hussein (2006), observed that capacity problems, including the lack of appropriately trained personnel is prevalent in local governments. Against this backdrop, the main thrust of this study was motivated by the desire to critically assess whether the right conditions are put in place to ensure successful implementation of training and development programs in councils. The ultimate justification for this study was that by paying attention to assessment of necessary conditions for successful implementation of training and development, the study would yield a richer understanding to the present body of knowledge on why training and development practices are failing to come to fruition in despite some reform efforts.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

This section attempts to clarify key concepts pertinent to this study namely training and development. It might not be out of order to clarify these concepts because they are frequently confused and used interchangeably, yet they are by no means synonymous.

Training refers to the process whereby people acquire capabilities to perform their jobs (Mathis & Jackson, 2009). Training may also denote any activity which is directed towards acquisition of specific knowledge and skills for the purposes of an occupation or task (Cole, 1999). Cole's definition conceptualizes training as more present-day oriented, its focus is to help employees to perform their current jobs well. In a similar vein Admoleku (1983) captures training as an act of equipping human beings with adequate and necessary knowledge or understanding to enable him or her performing in line with the required standards and expectations. A more comprehensive definition is given by Armstrong (2014), who looks at training as the systematic application of formal processes to impart knowledge and help people to acquire the skills necessary for them to perform their jobs satisfactorily. On the basis of these definitions, it is abundantly clear that training is solely designed to enhance employee performance which would bring about better achievement of organisation's goals and policies through application of gained skills and knowledge. In this respect training programs deserve greatest consideration to ensure a fit between the current performance and expected performance of employees.

By way of contrast, employee development is the growth or realization of person's ability and potential through the provision of learning and educational experiences (Armstrong, 2014). Similarly Cole (1999) sees employee development as any learning activity which is directed towards future needs rather than present needs, which is more concerned with career growth than immediate performance. Cole's definition coincides with that of Decenzo et al. (2002), who look at employee development as a future oriented training that focuses on employee potential growth. On the basis of these definitions it is evident that employee development is concerned with creating a flourishing workforce which is capable to exercise more responsibilities than before. It can be further deduced that developing staff ensures not only a more skilled workforce but also enhancement of future performance.

Although training and development are used together, they are often confused (Marsha, 2006). Cole (2004) has done a fine job in making an articulate distinction between training and development. He argues that employee development usually suggests a broader view of knowledge and skills acquisition than training; it is less job oriented than career oriented; it is concerned more with employee potential than with immediate skill; it sees employees as adaptable resources. It is apparent from this observation that development is broad as it focuses on the current and future demands of employee performance. On the other hand training is narrow as it focuses on current demands of employee performance.

2.2 THE CONTEXT OF TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT IN LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

2.2.1 Legal And Policy Frameworks

It is widely acknowledged in literature that constitutions create state institutions and sketches power maps. To illustrate this point, pursuant to S. 146-148 of the 1995 Republican Constitution of Malawi being the supreme law provides for the establishment, composition, functions and powers of rural and urban local government authorities (GoM, 1995). A part from the constitution, the Local Government Act No. 42 of the 1998 is the principal legislation to support the implementation of the 1998 decentralization policy (Chiweza, 2007). The Local Government Act specifies the objectives of local government authorities. It is not possible to reproduce all the functions. However, pursuant to S. 6(1) (g) of the Local Government Act of 1998, one of the functions of local governments pertinent to this study is to appoint, develop, promote and discipline its staff. This implies that local government authorities are responsible for the training and development of their personnel including councilors (Hussein, 2019).

The Constitution of the Republic of Malawi stipulates that Local Government authorities shall consist of political

body and administrative body or council secretariat. For the purpose of this study the focus is on the administrative body. The Council Secretariat is made up of fully employed Council employees. The Head of the secretariat in District councils is called a District Commissioner (DC), in Municipalities, Towns and Cities, they are called Chief Executives (CEO) (GOM, 2013). This implies that the DC or CEO is the controlling officer of the Council, and is responsible for the day to day management of all the resources of the Council. The administrative wing is generally subordinate to the political body to execute and administer the lawful resolutions of the political wing (Tambulasi, 2009). Chiweza (2007), identified the primary role of the administrative body as to implement decisions made by the council and run the day-to-day affairs of the council.

The employees of the local government, like others in public organisations, are the public personnel whose responsibilities are to successfully implement the laid down policies (Abbas, 2013). To illustrate the foregoing, he stresses that the effective and efficient performance of local government councils depends, to larger extent, on the productive capacity, quality and adequacy of the employees. This is the case because through manpower, other resources are harnessed in order to meet the demands of the society (Nwasu & Ugwuerau, 2015). Put differently manpower is the basis of all resources and it is indispensable means of converting to mankind's use and benefits (Abi-Anike & Ekwe, 2004). For this to be successful local governments need to understand their existing workforce as one of their important asserts to address the current demands local government faces as well as towards future models of service delivery (Terry & Mansfield, 2016). Therefore for a local government to function in an efficient and effective manner, its employees deserve to be given appropriate and adequate training and development programmes.

In a Malawian case, S.12 of the Public Service Act of 1994 stipulates that all public officers shall be accorded opportunity for career advancement and self-development through promotions and appropriate available training. Specifically S. 20(2)(b) of the Public Service Act of 1994 gives legal mandate to the Secretary for Human Resource Management and Development (DHRMD) to be responsible for human resource training and development. This shows that the Government of Malawi duly recognizes training and development interventions as vehicles to have a flourishing workforce capable of exercising duties and responsibilities in an efficient and effective manner. It is scarcely surprising to note that two years later the Government of Malawi formulated the National Training Policy (NTP) to translate the aspirations expressed in the Public Service Act of 1994. According to Hussein (2019), the NTP of 1996 recognizes that the delivery of quality public service depends on the availability of well-trained managers and leaders. This implies that training and development programmes have a strong influence on how employees meet the performance standards set by the concerned organization. The Local Government Service Commission (LGSC) has an important responsibility of ensuring that the local governments have the right quality and quantity of staff to deliver services effectively and efficiently to the public (GoM, 2013). This demands wider training and development opportunities in order have workforce with right skills and competencies capable of ensuring the agenda of local government (Khembo, 2003).

2.2.2 Necessary Conditions For Effective Implementation Of Training And Development

Armstrong (2014) claims that for training to be implemented systemically certain conditions have to be set. Bevis (2008) also argues that for training to be sustainable and implemented effectively attention must be given to conditions in the environment where training is carried out. This is the case because the implementation of training does not take place in a vacuum hence the conditions in the environment where training and development is implemented have a serious implication on the outcomes of training programmes. The key requirements for successful implementation of training and development activities are discussed below in belief.

The first condition is focused content and delivery. This means that content of training should be related to work development and training techniques should be appropriate to the purpose of the course and characteristics of the participants (Armstrong, 2014). In particular it focuses on the alignment of material content of training with the working situation and using flexible delivery to match the operational needs of the organisation (Bevis, 2008). This implies the training contents are set within the defined training and development needs and adopting appropriate methods to ensure successful transfer of skills and knowledge. To illustrate this point Hussein (2009), identified the following as the major areas critical for councilors' training and development: representation, developmental and public service delivery role and participation. These material contents if properly implemented and using appropriate techniques could improve performance both at individual and organisational level since they reflect the needs and realities on the ground.

The second condition is related to recognized achievement. This entails the use of different incentives such as higher occupation status, money and prestige thereby creating a virtuous circle to promote further training and development (Bevis, 2008). In this context, people will learn more effectively if they are motivated to be trained and developed. The incentives such as paying for training and increasing job prospects can encourage employees to enroll in training and development programmes (Schumaker, 2004). However the cases of Malawi and Tanzania illustrate that career progression is a dream far from being reached due to lack of incentives given to local government employees after undergoing training (Khembo, 2003; Njuwa, 2017). This lesson bears testimony on the significance of putting incentives to stimulate employee's appetite for training and development programmes.

The third condition is company and learners readiness. According to Bevis (2008), this encompasses development

of plans to accommodate training outcomes and concerns whether the right employees are chosen at the right stage in their own development. This condition advocates the greater need for readiness on the part of both individual and organisation to ensure effective planning. It advances formulation of comprehensive training plans encompassing: the training needs, targeted local government staff, training methods, training budget and training evaluation framework (Joseph, 2015). There is a consensus in literature that local governments are good at formulating plans. For example in Malawi training and development needs are usually identified and plans are laid down but are never implemented in councils (Khembo, 2003). In terms of leaner readiness right employees are often chosen but not at the right stage in their own development.

The fourth condition is relevance of training and development programmes. Relevance of training is a very important issue that the organization should look critically at, if they really want to improve the effectiveness of their employees (Joseph, 2015). Armstrong (2004) agrees that for training program to be relevant, it must satisfy the identified and appropriate needs in order to solve problems and fill the gaps in employee performance. The foregoing said, it is abundantly clear that this condition ensure that training and development programmes are of benefit to the organisation and the desired performance is realized. The corporally would be that if a training and development programme is failing to achieve its intended purpose it should be cancelled. The cases of Malawi and Nigeria illustrate that the relevance and applicability of training and development is complicated by lack of well-coordinated programmes, poor utilization of training needs and inadequate institutional capacities (Hussein, 2019; Joseph, 2015). There is therefore a need to strategically rethink how best to make training and development programmes to be relevant to local government authorities.

The fifth condition is measured outcomes. According to Bevis (2008), this condition concerns the proportion of evidence competent staff rising as a direct result of training and development activities He adds that in particular it involves a quantifiable contribution to the company's business strategy realized from training and development. This implies that training and development outcomes should be measured to assess if intended results are being achieved and draw lessons in order to improve the future activities related to training and development.

The sixth condition is receptive organisation. The receptive organisation is seen as the one which provides space for new skills to be rehearsed and progressively implemented (Bevis, 2008). This implies that a receptive organisation is the one that has support to advance training and development initiatives with zeal and dedication. The cases of Malawi and New Zealand demonstrates that the local government authorities are not supportive enough to champion training and development programmes (Terry & Mansfield, 2016; Khembo, 2003). This is attributed to the bureaucratic rigidity and unwillingness to embrace change within local government authorities (Joseph, 2015). It is therefore the duty of a receptive organisation to confront and overcome thereby creating an enabling environment to ensure smooth implementation of training and development programmes.

The last condition is organisational motivation. According to Bevis (2008), this condition ensures that training and development needs are within the priorities set by senior management, line management and client base. He adds that in general it focuses on the appetite for training and development at particular time and in particular environment. This implies organisational motivation ensures that councils to have a strong and a consistent desire to train and develop their employees. As noted by Khembo (2003), training and development needs are usually identified and plans are laid down but are never implemented in councils. This demonstrates lack of organisational motivation in Malawi's local governments to champion training and development programmes.

III. STUDY METHODOLOGY

The article involved the usage of both primary and secondary data. Secondary data was collected through a systematic review of existing literature pertinent to training and development in local governments. The study adopted qualitative approach in accordance with the research questions it poses and the fact that it required a comprehensive description of themes to solicit the required information both of which made this approach most suitable. The researcher selected Zomba District Councils after doing a preliminary consultation and it was observed that it is one of the local governments that are putting much emphasis on training and development. Cases selected on the basis of prior knowledge are most likely crucial for enabling the development of a strong theoretical base for the research, which makes the procedures of theory testing more rigorous (Starman, 2013). This ensured development of a better research plan based on the preliminary information.

Qualitative key informant interviews were held with the following local government managerial officials: Director of Administration, Director of Planning and Development, Director of Finance and District Human Resource Manager. The study also used in-depth interviews to collect data from 37 non-managerial employees from the following departments: Registry, District Rural Development Office, Accounts, District Procurement Unit, District Environmental Office, Deceased, Social Welfare, and National Registration Bureau. The study adopted thematic analysis since it involved exploring different views which in turn demanded a flexible approach to analyze qualitative data into emerging themes or patterns.

IV. STUDY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 To assess whether training and development processes are aligned to necessary conditions for effective implementation of training and development

This objective sought to assess whether training and development processes are guided by the necessary conditions for effective implementation of training and development. The successful implementation of training and development programmes at Zomba District Council, just like at any organisation is contingent on adhering religiously to the necessary conditions for effective implementation of training and development. Suffice to say at this introductory part of this section, the study adopted the conditions suggested by Bevis (2008). These conditions have been categorised into three groups as shown in the table 1. As illustrated in table 1, the results have been mixed.

Table 1: Alignment with necessary conditions.

CATEGORY	CONDITION	ANALYSIS
Conditions that concern the state of the organisation itself.	Company Readiness	Zomba District Council assesses the training needs of its employees and develops training and development plans however it falls short on implementation and evaluation of training and development programmes.
	Organisational Motivation	Zomba District Council is not committed enough to support training and development programmes.
	Receptive Organisation	Not flexible enough to cope up with changing circumstances and creating an enabling environment for employees to practice what they have been trained.
Conditions that relate to employees involved.	Learner readiness	Right employees are selected for training and development programmes however the stage at which they are selected of their development is often not done systematically.
	Recognised Achievement	Employees are only involved in training and development processes to only earn allowances since long-life incentives such as recognition and promotion are rarely available.
Conditions that relate to more specifically to organisational goals and the appropriateness of training.	Relevance	The training contents are relevant to daily operations of Zomba District Council.
	Measured Outcomes	The training and development programmes are not often evaluated.
	Focused Content and Delivery	The study found that training content is related to the duties and responsibilities of employees however appropriate training methods sometimes are not used to meet the characteristics of employees.

Source: Author's own construction based on field findings and using conditions necessary for effective implementation for training and development suggested by Bevis (2008).

In summary, table 2 illustrates that at Zomba District Council, necessary conditions for effective implementation of training and development are partially put in place. Training and development conditions that concern the state of the organisation and those that relate to employees being involved are most non-adhered to. This implies that the major challenge for successful implementation of training and development at Zomba District Council can be confidently attributed to the way the organisation and employees perceive training. The table indicates that Zomba District Council is not a learning organisation to wholeheartedly support training and development. This is the case since it falls short on organisational motivation and receptive organisation and only showed some success stories on company readiness. In terms of conditions that relate to employees, in as much as the right employees are selected, the general picture leaves a lot to be desired as training and development programmes have become immediate sources of earning allowances. This is attributed to lack of long-life incentives such as recognition and promotion.

However, putting in place the conditions that relate more specifically to organisational goals and the appropriateness of training to a larger extent shows that Zomba District Council is making some strides in training and development planning. Hopefully full adherence to the conditions necessary for successful implementation of training and development programmes will be observed in the future training and development processes. To this end it is important to note that without putting these conditions into consideration challenges will continue to resurface and that will not be healthy for staff development (Bevis, 2008). If the conditions necessary for effective implementation of training and development are not put into consideration then certainly we can forget the successful implementation of training and development at Zomba District Council. There is therefore a greater need for councils to fully align training and development processes to these conditions, it is a long overdue step in the right direction.

4.2. To analyze strategies that would more practically, ensure effective implementation of training and development.

This objective sought to interrogate what would it take for Zomba District Council to do better in terms of training and development implementation. In addressing this hard question, the paper argues that local governments' efforts to ensure successful implementation of training and development are likely to be fruitful if challenges that militate against effective implementation of training and development are confronted and dealt with accordingly and putting necessary conditions in the physical setting where they are going to be implemented. Drawing from the

research findings this paper suggests the following mechanisms:

4.2.1. Transforming councils into learning organisations

The study disclosed that Zomba District Council is not a leaning organisation. A better understanding of the genesis of the many challenges which undermine effective implementation of training and development at Zomba District Council can be confidently attributed to lack of aspects of learning organisation. A learning organisation is one that is flexible and able to adapt to changing conditions, both the organisation and its staff are learning in order to foster continuous improvement (Bevis, 2008). Training is the use of systematic and planned instruction activities to promote learning. (Armstrong, 2014). This implies that a learning organisation priorities training and development activities and events as some of the responses an organisation can undertake to promote learning.

As it has been demonstrated that at Zomba District Council for a very long period of time training and development initiatives have not been prioritized. In this regard it makes eminent sense for Zomba District Council to be transformed into a learning organisation which wholeheartedly undertakes training and development with zeal and dedication. As such some challenges which compromise fruitful implementation of training and development such as lack of organizational commitment and difficulties in setting priorities are likely to become history. For this to be done there is a greater need for enthusiasm to push this agenda at all levels of the organisational hierarchy.

4.2.2. Coordinated efforts

If training and development initiatives are to be viable, legitimate and relevant, there is a great need to engage all stakeholders at each and every stage of training and development process (Joseph, 2015). The study disclosed that at Zomba District Council there is fragmented and uncoordinated approach to training and development. One of the key informants lamented that some development partners implement training needs contrary to those outlined in the council's training plans.[1] This implies that development partners have transferred training contents without considering the needs and circumstances of councils in which they are going to be implemented hence fueling the implementation mess.

Constrained by this challenge, councils are supposed to develop a dialogue with all stakeholders who are deemed to have a stake in training and development in order to develop an institutional arrangement stipulating the roles and responsibilities of each and every stakeholder. This is likely to ensure role clarity and a coordinated sense of direction hence the challenge of fragmented and uncoordinated approach to training and development will be lessened. Hussein (2017) neatly sums up by saying that there is a greater need for all stakeholders and training institutions to coordinate their activities and devise a comprehensive civic education programme for tangible outcomes, quality services in District Councils. Therefore, better alignment of priorities and resources as well as more coordination is required.

4.2.3. Enabling Environment

Finally, but perhaps very important is the creation of an enabling environment to ensure smooth implementation of training and development. A positive environment fosters an organizational setting which provides opportunities for incorporation of skill learned in training and encourages an organizational culture where employees support each other in their training endeavours (Schumaker, 2004). The study disclosed that Zomba District Council is not flexible enough to cope up with changing circumstances and creating an enabling environment for employees to practice what they have been trained. This is attributed to cultural characteristics of local government authorities. According to Joseph (2015), many employees sent for training are not allowed to utilize their skills and knowledge because of bureaucratic rigidity and unwillingness to change. This implies that many bureaucracies including councils are reluctant to adopt new ways of doing things as they prefer to maintain the status quo. Reflecting the frustration one local government officer lamented:

Opportunities to practice what we have learned are often not available; we are always constrained by the old habits which are deeply embedded in our working culture. This demotivates us.[2]

This narrative demonstrates deep-rooted and institutionalized characteristics of bureaucracies which make it difficult to effectively break the entrenched habits and adopt new ways of doing things. Given the presence of these characteristics, it makes eminent sense to create an enabling environment to support the practice of newly acquired skills. If well focused and implemented then it will be a good foundation for local government authorities to ensure smooth implementation of training and development.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The take-home message is that training and development initiatives in local government authorities are made in vain because the necessary conditions for effective implementation of training and development are partially put into consideration. The corollary of this finding is that without adhering religiously to the key components required for effective implementation of training and development, the current efforts just like the previous ones are certainly to goof as well. This is attributed to the imposition of training and development initiatives on an environment where there are no good conditions to thrive thereby compromising their implementation. At this juncture, it is therefore imperative to set the necessary conditions because the implementation of training and development do not take place in vacuum. The dismal performance should rejuvenate energies to better start putting all the necessary conditions for effective

[1] Interview with the District Community Development Officer

[2] Interview with the Registry Clerk

implementation of training and development in councils. If this is well implemented, it could spur successful implementation of training and development. That said, the following should be done:

a) Local government authorities should drive change in working culture by ironing out the cultural and attitude barriers which constrain successful implementation of training and development through mind-set change.
b) Local government authorities should create a conducive and supportive environment enough to allow training and development activities initiatives to thrive and create space for the employees to be innovative and practice what they have learned.

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