

# THE ABUSE OF TRAINING AS AN AGENT OF CHANGE IN ORGANIZATIONS IN NIGERIA

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## Abstract

This study aims at examining the extent to which training brings about desired organizational change in terms of employee performance. According to Okpara (2005), organizations and companies are being encouraged to seek employee training and development because the growth rate of organizations is likely to be limited by their personnel than by any other factors. In the light of this scenario, therefore, this study probes into some perceived abuses that are associated with training in organizations/industries. In acknowledging the prevalence of this anomaly, Okpara, (2005) argues that training is gradually losing its grip as a catalyst of behaviour change in organizations in Nigeria because of some fundamental lapses. This review x-rays these lapses inherent in the use of training as a technique for changing behaviour. The work affirms that training should match learning principles and theories and an understanding of socio-cultural milieu under which the worker operates. Finally, some suggestions were proffered as a way of regaining the lost glory of training as catalyst of change in organizations.

**Key Words:** Training, Abuse, Change, Organization, Learning.

## Introduction

The term “training” is a strategy intended to change the beliefs, attitudes, values and structure of organizations so that employees can better adopt to new technologies, methods, markets, challenges and the rate of change itself. According to Ubeku (1975), training and development of employees is a continuous process and that money spent on this venture is money well invested. He is of the view that employees who have not received adequate development and training before being assigned with responsibility lack the necessary confidence with which to carry out the job. In the same vein, Tokunboh (1977), affirmed that personnel training in particular is one of the essential processes for making an organization effective, efficient and profitable.

The times have gone when staff member just sits close to an “old staff” watching and learning. Very often such procedures can transfer unwanted attitudes or skills that may become a problem for the worker in future. The answer to such problems is a systematic training programme. In the words of McCormick & Illgen (1987), people bring to their jobs their individual assortments of previously learned skills, knowledge, temperament, interests,

motivation and attitudes. It is important to affirm strongly the desirability of training in organizations in terms of enhancing job performance and productivity among employees. Nevertheless, there has been flagrant abuse of training by some individuals and organizations in recent times. However, the process of training and development is a continuous one. An employee should be helped to grow into more responsibility by systematic training and development.

The focal point of this paper is aimed at examining some envisaged abuses and flaws in some aspects of training and development as they have become very important in Nigeria's national, economic and social life. This will serve the purpose of re-positioning training to achieve the desired intentions of changing employee behaviour in organization. The following centres which are part of the efforts by tertiary institutions, especially at managerial levels, to introduce training and development in Nigeria include: Centre for Management Development (CMD), Administrative Staff College of Nigeria (ASCON), the Industrial Training Fund (ITF), the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS), and the Nigeria Council for Management Education and training (NICMET). These centers and institutions present new and potentially strong sources for organizational commitments in training. According to Okpara (2005), organizations and companies are being encouraged through these sources to seek for training and development of their personnel because the growth rate of any organization is likely to be limited more by its personnel than by any other factor.

In the opinion of this paper, there is no doubt that training has over the years become a veritable instrument of change among employees in terms of improvement on efficiency, performance and productivity. However, it is also important to posit that training, if not properly conducted using some objective procedures, may fail to achieve desired results hence the abuses it has suffered in recent years in Nigeria. Before training is concluded, some objectives must be set out to make sure that it will achieve those objectives as: goals of the organization, area of organizational needs, capability of trainers, availability of relevant equipment, the target employee to receive the training, the length of training programme and the observance of relevant step by step procedure of the training exercise to ensure success in the long run. In the light of the observed abuses, there is a call for critical appraisals of the instrument of training to enable it achieve its well intended objectives.

In view of the socio-economic conditions and industrial culture prevalent in Nigeria, employee training and development techniques which engender relevance to the employee's individual characteristics and work attitudes should be adopted so that workers can utilize their abilities to the full and find continuing job satisfaction. Nevertheless, not all organizations have formal training programme, but some type of training is carried on in practically every organization. However, there are many employers in this country who still do not believe in the philosophy of training. Among the worst offenders are the small manufacturing companies, contracting companies and the small shopkeepers. So long as the employees can be used to get money, such employers are not, interested in training programmes for their employees. To them, training is redundant.

According to Okpara, (2005) "... a few years ago, we spent some time trying to search into a new training syllabus for secondary schools teachers in Nigeria. The problem as posed was that schools were everywhere in need of improvement, of revitalization, of innovation, of changes. Schools were falling into disrepute. They were not meeting the needs of society". However, despite the huge gains of employee training that accrue to the organization, a lot of flaws and lapses have been witnessed in recent years. Today, training is riddled with some

wide-scale lapses and flaws that have made it a “toothless bulldog that barks without biting”. Thus, it is questionable and casts doubt on the efficiency of training as a change agent. Also, it poses a nagging question on whether training is really changing people’s attitude and values. How long should training take place in order to be effective? Are procedures duly followed by training department before embarking on training exercise? Is there any relative difference between training and formal education in our universities? In fact, the basic question pre-occupying this paper is, what do we adduce as panacea for the failure of training to bequeath the desired changes among employees in both organizations and industries?

Based on the identified problems stated above, this study seeks to:

1. Examine the nature, modalities and principles of formal training methods.
2. To find out whether appropriate procedures are duly followed by training department before embarking on training exercises.
3. To identify some envisaged abuses and flaws in some aspects of training and development of employees.
4. Lastly, offer suggestions and recommendations on how best to make training not only effective but efficient as an agent of change among employees.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Training involves learning and therefore, training of employees need to adopt the application of appropriate learning principles in order to enhance its validity and credibility (Henrich, 1976).

In view of the suggestion by Henrich, it implies that various theories have been proposed to explain “the learning process”. A learning theory can be thought of as a way to explain, in conceptual term, what takes place when learning occurs, how the learning takes place and the condition of the learning process. Some of the salient principles of learning are summarized thus:

### **Knowledge of Results**

According to Ilgen, Fisher & Taylor (1979) feedback about the results of ones behaviour can serve either of two functions in learning. The first is a directional function providing information about the behaviour necessary to perform the job successfully. For instance, a crane operator simply cannot learn to manipulate the controls without knowing how the crane responds to the handling of the controls.

The second is a motivational factor in that it provides information about the outcomes of behaviours that are associated with possible rewards. Feedback that serves the directional function is necessary for learning and for subsequent continuous performance, there is no question about its relevance for training.

### **Distribution of Learning**

This principle pertains to the scheduling of training sessions overtime. According to McGehee, (1978) and Okpara (2005) people are said to learn more and effectively when the learning is split up into periods than where it is scheduled continuously. People who try to learn too much in too short a time may end up with an over-crowded dyspepsia of learning. Over-crowded study or practice produces fatigue and boredom which interfere with learning. The most efficient distribution of practice varies with the kind of material being learned as with the stage of progress. Each person has to find the best spacing of practice that fits him

and his task. It is believed that learning efficiency is enhanced when the learning periods are of optimum duration and are spaced appropriately. The problem for the trainer is in discovering what the optimum duration and spacing of learning periods should be for a given type of learning. Also, each training package should cover a cohesive segment of the training content.

### **Transfer of Learning**

By transfer of learning, it is meant that what a student learns in one situation affects the case of learning in another situation. This effect may be positive or negative. Proper management of training activities to enhance positive transfer contributes significantly to the effectiveness and economy of training. Positive transfer for instance, is the basis for the design and use of training devices.

As applied to training situations, it would appear that transfer of learning from situation to the job would depend upon the extent to which there are identical elements common to the two. For example, learning to operate a printing press gives little advantage when trying to run an office duplicating machine. Possibly, practice in mechanical drawing does not improve hand writing. In the same manner, some typists type very well, but their handwriting is horrible.

Transfer of training has major implication for the cost of training. Trainers can practice on inexpensive devices. This practice will then transfer to more expensive practice situations. The inexpensive situation may be either a complete or a partial substitute for the more expensive situation e.g. simulated cockpit.

### **Part Versus Whole Learning**

There is a fair amount of support for the proposition that learning tends to be facilitated when the content of a given presentation forms a reasonable and meaningful whole rather than an assortment of little bits and pieces that are covered individually during performing the whole task, though each trial has the advantage of affording practice in the activity that is ultimately required. In many situations, whole learning also makes the task more meaningful and permits the proper establishment of relations among parts. In many industrial tasks, however, some operations or units are more difficult to learn than others. Hence uniform practice by the whole method would lead to over-learning of some parts and under-learning of others. Under such conditions, a combination of part and whole methods usually proves better.

### **Motivation and Learning**

It is well established that motivation helps learning. Effective motivation is the essence of learning. Unless a person who is teaching takes pains to ensure correct motivation, little learning is likely to occur. Such motivation may be in the form of higher pay, security, promotion, other forms of recognition or status, or even the satisfaction of succeeding on the job. To be effective, Okpara (1984) opines that the anticipated reward must be one that is significant for the particular learner. The individual must be motivated to learn. This motivation should be related to the individual's needs. For instance, the individual must be aware of the inadequacy of unsatisfactoriness of his present behaviour, skill or knowledge. The individual must have a clear picture of the behaviour which he requires to adopt.

It is suggested that the various learning principles discussed in this work have evolved from research and experience but have received mixed review. Henrich (1976), for example, insisted that these principles have had such widespread acceptance that they cannot be ignored. Some of the principles have solid theoretical roots and most of them have at least some empirical support. Okpara (2005) affirms that nowadays most organizational training modalities do not hinge on any of the learning principles. Instead, training in Nigeria hinges on the “whims, caprices and interests of training managers/management”. This thus negates the due process of formal training mechanism, he concludes. He further added that even organizations that followed the due process of adopting the principles often times do not consider the appropriateness of the principles and the training situations. He suggests, therefore, that because of the many types of training situations, no single principle can be applied on an across the board basis. Rather, specified principles should be considered for use in those training contexts for which they are specifically appropriate. In supporting the view of Ugwu (2002), Okpara (2005) posits that principles of learning are said to be conducive to gaining maximum efficiency in a learning situation, but blind adherence to this principle can often cause more harm than good.

The implication of the various learning principles to training is that if we follow strictly the learning principles of feedback, for instance, one might find that the situation in Nigeria negates the very essence of feedback. If worker ‘A’ is told that he is not doing very well, he turns around to find out whether the person giving the feedback is from his own ethnic group or not. Consequently, the person giving the feedback might be misconstrued as finding fault. Our sense of trust and of sincere criticism still lacks objectivity that it can be dangerous to let a worker know how well he is doing in order to improve him.

Take also the case of transfer of learning, we find that in most cases, it can be absolutely impossible to transfer learning. Because the basis for the transfer does not exist and even where it exists, the infrastructural elements which can aid transfer are not available. For transfer to be effective, the organization where the trainee is to return (especially in management training schemes) must show definite signs of change, changes in attitudes, in perception, in orientation etc, to enable the returnee adapt himself to the new changed situation (Okpara, 1984).

### **Critique of Training as Agent of Change**

There is no gainsaying that effective and efficient employee training has always translated into huge gains to the organization through enhanced service delivery. Nevertheless, it is important to posit that training if not properly conducted using some objective procedure may fail to achieve desired results hence the abuses it has suffered in recent years in Nigeria.

The focal point of this paper at this juncture is not to learn to criticize but to be able to correct the faults that are found. Okpara (1980), posits that the method of sending workers to attend conferences, seminars or workshops has become popular methods of personnel training in Nigerian organizations. However, he argued that some of these workshops may last only a few days, while others may take longer periods of three months. Again, training at times is used as a last resort strategy of punishing and pushing aside some envisaged stubborn employees, who are suspected stumbling blocks to their chief executives or superiors. A typical example of this in Nigeria is the case of Assistant Commissioner of Police, Nuhu

Ribadu, who was a former Chairman of Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) who was mandatorily sent on compulsory training at Kuru, Jos, as a strategy of removing and punishing him. By doing so, the superior would have a safe ride in his attempt to manipulate some situations to his selfish advantage.

In the same vein, there are some other forms of training that do not conform with the training needs of the organizations. Such a training could just be an avenue to siphon money belonging to the organization in form of expenses spent on haphazard and ill prepared training (Okpara, 2005). Also, Okpara (2000), posited that at times trainings are given to the wrong employees leaving the right caliber of staff. For instance, training duly meant for managing directors could be wrongly conducted for their deputies. This kind of situation could give rise to difficulties in implementing what have been learnt since the Deputy Managing Director cannot impose policies on his boss. Instead, such training should have been undergone by the Managing Director who will make implementation easier since he is the overall head in the organization. Again, employees could run into difficulties after training because of being unable to impact what they have been taught because such employees do not have the enabling powers for implementation. Thus, such training could just be a mere ritual. In other words, for training to be effective and efficient in realizing the objectives of the organization, there must be evaluation of training programmes.

In summary, it is being argued that ideally training is not bad in its entirety. The purpose of training is to achieve organizational and employee change. Nevertheless, it is pertinent to point out that the good intentions of training cannot be achieved by disregarding the objective procedure for enunciating training programme.

Nevertheless, it is in the light of these that some abuses have been noted which call for critical appraisal of the instrument of training to enable it achieve its well intended objectives. Today, some organizations have adopted training as a mere instrument to favour or punish envisaged co-employees. Also it could be used at times by some managers to enrich themselves or their appendages in office as a result of huge amount of funds voted for employee training/development by organizations.

In summary, it is being argued that training is not bad in its entirety and ideally, the purpose of training is to achieve organizational and employee behaviour change. Nevertheless, it is pertinent to point out that the good intentions of training cannot be achieved by disregarding the objective procedure for enunciating training programmes. Finally, performance appraisal must be conducted at the end of training exercise to access the success or otherwise of training exercises. This is the surest way of nipping abuses in the bud.

### **Abuse of Training as Change Agent**

The first source is the social psychological data relating to the nature of resistance to change at the work place. Okpara (2005), succinctly argues that, if you are trying to change the way organizations operate, one of the things that will impede your progress is the inbuilt resistance to change by people in organizations. Since as it were, resistance to change is associated with a personality trait, the solution to overcoming resistance to change is to apply some form of training. The relevant research data seems to support this contention. It is perfectly true that research studies over the years have indicated that much resistance to change at work-place can be explained by reference to characteristics which are individual phenomena (Leavitt, 1965). The data are most responsible and involve ideas associated with

homeostasis, habit, selective perception, remembering, insecurity and regression. Even the Freudian concept of super-ego may come into the act.

For instance, in one study of the Xerox organization in the U.S.A, it was found that the failure was due to the age of the work-force and their belief that they could not be taught a new paper-making technology. The adage “you can’t teach an old dog new tricks” springs readily in mind.

However, since the end of the second world war, a great deal of data have piled up that indicate, with some clarity, that resistance to change within organization is as much a function of group behaviour as it is of individual behaviour (Warr, Burd & Rackham, 1970). The research evidence has been available for many years and it seems that practitioners have ignored it. In our own country Nigeria, teacher trainers and others have engaged in a highly vociferous debate about how, when, where, and for how long teachers should be trained (Okpara, 2005). Yet, consistently since about 1960, research studies seem to show that however effective the training, something strange seems to happen not very long after the teacher enters a school. It has been firmly stressed that expressed attitudes during training are followed by changes in the opposite direction during the first year of actual teaching on-the-job.

Fleischman (1953) reported a study in the International Harvester Organization. He showed that despite first-class training of supervisory personnel, the greatest influence upon how that supervisor actually behaved back home was the prevailing leadership style of the trainees boss, Fleischman says:

An implication of these results seems to be that if the old way of doing things in the plant situation is still the shortest path to approval by the boss, then this is what the foreman really learns. Existing behaviour patterns are part of and are moulded by the culture of the work situation. In order to effectively produce changes in the foreman’s behaviour some changes back home in the plant environment would also seem to be necessary. The training alone cannot do it.

This Scenario remains a fundamental truth about changing behaviour in organization. Fleischman discovered that although there were desirable changes in foremen’s behaviour immediately after training, they soon settled back into their earlier ways.

Katz and Kahn (1966) recognized this truth when they said:

The essential weakness of the individual approach is the psychological fallacy of concentrating upon individuals without regard to the role relationship that constitute the social systems of which they are part. The assumption has been made that since the organization is made up of individuals, we can change the organization by changing the individuals. This is not so much an illogical proposition as it is an over-simplification which neglects the inter-relationship of people in an organizational structure and fails to point to aspects of individual behaviour which need to be changed.

Okpara (1982), conducted a training session a couple of years ago where he asked a group of managers from the old Anambra State (present Enugu, Ebonyi, Anambra) who returned from management training courses which he participated as a trainer at Onitsha, for their views on the programme. He got replies like: “well, I found it very interesting, but I don’t see how it can play any part in what I have to do here”. Another said, “yes, it was all well and good, but you know I should not have been in the course, they should have sent my boss. He’s the one they should have been talking to”. Another said, “The problem is not the training programme, it is the application of the training in my work. They won’t let me”.

Can we change organizations simply by changing individual representatives of that organization? This is the myth of the hero innovator. The fact is that we have lived in bureaucratic organization known as the Nigerian Civil Service for as long as the birth of Nigeria. A whole envelope of hostility surrounds the administrative system in Nigeria, if not in the whole of Africa. Perhaps the most important part of it represents the dissatisfaction of the general populace. This group has had steadily rising level of aspirations, particularly for services by government, but has found its aspiration constantly frustrated. These clients with some reasons believe that such training as the bureaucrats have had cannot be effective or directed to the right ends. Yet another group which regards the governmental administrative system with disfavour and some times with contempt is made up of members of the new elite group who have been trained overseas in the norms and values of entrepreneurial society (Graves, 1973). Our Civil Service remains today one top-heavy establishment, with minimal productive capacity, inspite of all training facilities provided.

This is not to say that administrative training per se is totally useless or at least has little role to play in producing an effective administrative system. Training is only one within the overall administrative system. All the systems are closely linked (Salinas, 1971). Its ultimate success must depend to a large extent upon the provision of other sub-systems.

Training, no matter how much effort is put into it and how inspired its practitioners, can only be meaningful and useful if the administrative systems have such elements as an adequate goal- setting sub –system, adequate human inputs, conversion of sub-systems which are cybernetically controlled. Without these pre-requisites, the effectiveness of the training is likely to be reduced greatly and without training such pre-requisites are unlikely to be provided (Salinas, 1971).

### **Recommendations**

From available research studies presented in this work, we make the following recommendations:

In order for training to be effective and efficient it must be accompanied by careful and continuous research to find out the efficient and suitability of different training techniques to different organizational needs and goals.

Secondly, performance appraisal must be conducted at the end of training exercise to access the success or otherwise of training exercises. This is the surest way of nipping abuses in the bud.

Similarly, management should always ensure merit and due process in selection of employee and status of employees for training.

Lastly, it must be taken into cognizance that each country has its own unique system which alone is relevant to it and training cannot be relevant if it is not rooted in it (Onyemelukwe, 1973; 1982; Ubeku, 1977).

### **Conclusion**

Based on the review presented in this work, it is evident that the training field has been beset by various fads in Nigeria over the years, most of which have failed to achieve their goals. There has been limited hard-fisted evaluation of Training Programmes. It is in the light of this that some abuses have been noted which call for strict appraisal of the instrument of training to enable it achieve its well intended objectives. Again, time has come, therefore, for radical change if training is going to take its rightful place in assisting managers and employees to face the most uncomfortable fact of managerial or administrative life and in general industrial and organizational efficiency, effectiveness and productivity.

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