

DEVELOPMENT OF A TRAINING POLICY

As the majority of developing countries appear to manage their training function without a formally-documented training policy, one might ask whether it really does serve a useful purpose. Our view is that it does. A policy document is no more than a tool. In itself it is nothing, but in the hands of those capable and determined to make use of it, a well-formed policy can strengthen the hands of human resource developers. We identify six purposes.

- (a) *Commitment.* A policy statement that declares government's commitment to training can be quoted as an authority for training proposals. Few managers object to training in the abstract but when times are difficult and resources scarce, training is one of the first activities to be cut. Training is concerned with developing people for the future and in a crisis situation the emphasis is on the present. Thus, training initiatives tend to need all the official backing they can get to be accepted by managers with other priorities on their minds.
- (b) *Focus.* By reflecting the overall policies of government, a training policy statement can provide a focus for training in line with government priorities in other fields. It is not uncommon for governments to declare certain national policies such as increasing opportunities for women, concentrating on food production, decentralisation of government or the privatisation of state-owned enterprises. Such policy declarations usually provide the foundation for the national economic and social development plan. They should also provide the platform upon which a training policy can be built. This helps to ensure that training has a sense of direction in keeping with government's policies. Using the above examples, preference would be given to women to undergo training, resources would be steered towards agricultural programmes and for local government, and training designed to assist privatisation would be given priority.
- (c) *Priorities.* Priority guidelines as to who should receive training, how and where. "Who" means the level – senior, middle or junior; the sector – private, central civil service, local government or public enterprises; and possibly key functional areas such as agriculture, health or education. "How" might indicate whether emphasis should be given to management development within the organisation – using organisation development (OD) techniques or training on-the-job; by establishing local training institutes; or through distance learning methods. "Where" is primarily concerned with whether training should be done at home or abroad, and the criteria for each. Without policy guidelines, however broad, there is a

danger that training is conducted on an *ad hoc* basis, leading to duplication, lack of direction and the dissipation of scarce resources.

- (d) *Role Clarification.* A policy should help to clarify the roles of managers and trainers in human resource development. This can be especially helpful in emphasising the responsibility of managers for the development of personnel within their organisations. Typically, training is regarded as the exclusive business of professional trainers. Yet, if it is to make a contribution to increasing organisational performance, it must be taken seriously by the managers as it is they, and only they, who can ensure that the most appropriate officers are selected, that the training meets their needs and that it is properly utilised by the organisation. Indeed, managers could actually do some training themselves.
- (e) *Organisation and Co-ordination.* It should clarify the institutional framework for managing public service training: define the roles and responsibilities of each agency and the means of co-ordination. For example, it might well stipulate which government agency is to be ultimately responsible for public service training, how it might be organised in each ministry or department, and the co-ordinating mechanisms and broad responsibilities of each training establishment. Such stipulations are unlikely to eliminate empire-building, the desire to hang on to sources of power and patronage, and rivalry between different organisations but they should help to establish some sense of order and who does what.
- (f) *Strengths and Limitations.* A training policy document can usefully point out the strengths and limitations of training. Paradoxically, training is declared as a waste of time and a panacea for the problems of an organisation almost in the same breath. Of course it is neither. Training can make a most valuable contribution to both individual and organisational development but at best it can only be a partial solution. A statement of the realistic objectives of training can help to publicise this important message.

CONTENTS OF A NATIONAL TRAINING POLICY

General observations

The content and style of a national training policy depends on so many variables peculiar to a particular country that it would be misleading to try to provide a blueprint. Despite the need for a tailor-made approach, we have noticed how often models are taken from other countries whether or not they are strictly appropriate. Therefore, instead of presenting a model, we suggest below a number of elements

that we have found useful as a checklist. Some may already be included elsewhere, in a law, regulation, administrative instruction, another policy document or in the national plan. If they are covered elsewhere there may be no need to repeat them. Alternatively, it might be useful to make at least a brief reference to all the relevant elements in a single document.

The style in which national policy statements are written is often rather legalistic or flamboyant. Below is an example taken from an actual policy document:

"with the trend towards a properly planned economy manifest in the four year national development plan, the government continues to demonstrate its commitment to action and results oriented development. It does this on the basis of its full realisation and faith in its natural endowment of manpower as a basis for the stimulation and promotion of the action programme activities for the attainment of the objectives of the plan"

The statement continues in the same style for several more sentences! We are not suggesting that this is wrong and it may be a cultural preference, but something shorter and more direct would probably be more effective:

"In line with the national development plan government endorses its commitment to the developments of skilled human resources through training."

We refer to policies at national level but remind readers that similar principles would apply to training policies at levels below, such as the civil service or local government service or for a single organisation.

ELEMENTS OF A NATIONAL TRAINING POLICY

Style, order and emphasis is a matter of choice. The following is a summary of the main elements that we have found useful to consider when drafting a policy statement.

- (a) *Government commitment to training.* A short yet clear statement of government's (or the top management's in the case of an organisation) commitment to manpower development and training. Brief reasons and a general statement as to how this is to be achieved might be appropriate. This commitment might also be linked to other statements of government policy and the national development plan.
- (b) *Definition of Training.* Clarification of what is covered and not covered by the use of the word "training". For instance, a distinction between training

and education on the one hand and personal development through job rotation and other personnel policies on the other.

- (c) *Objectives of training.* A statement of what is seen by government as the primary objectives of training expressed in practical and realistic terms. Three prime areas might be:
- (i) improving the efficiency and effectiveness of organisations by improving the performance of individuals in their jobs;
 - (ii) preparing individuals for future jobs; and
 - (iii) assisting the development of individuals for the sake of their careers and personal fulfilment.
- (d) *Strengths and limitations of training.* For the sake of the majority who probably have little idea of what training can and cannot achieve, it is wise to indicate the role of training in improving performance. As a part of a national training policy this can hardly be comprehensive but as a concise explanation it should help to clarify how training can assist in the acquisition of knowledge, development of skills and shift of attitudes. It should also emphasise that training cannot cope with problems such as the lack of material resources, poor selection, political interference or other numerous barriers to progress.
- (e) *Manager's responsibilities.* Emphasising that it is the responsibility of line managers to train and develop the staff of their organisation could be a most valuable element in a policy paper. It is an area that many managers tend to leave to their personnel management and training staff, yet it should be one of their primary responsibilities. Training specialists can be agents and advisers but they cannot take responsibility for the line managers' personnel and this needs to be understood.
- (f) *Trainer's responsibilities.* To complement the section on the manager's responsibilities and obligations to training, there should be a section describing the trainer's role. This needs to be in broad terms only as later sections should deal in more detail with the different categories of trainer. The point of this section would be to emphasise the role of the trainer as providing a service to the line manager. It might dwell on the function of the trainer being to facilitate the learning process.
- (g) *Training and change.* A reminder that the purpose of training is to bring about change: changing the way people behave and how things are done. This could be included under the heading of objectives but as a separate element it might add emphasise to the importance of training for the future.

- (h) *Managers of training.* A section should be set up to provide a framework for the appointment of officers within various ministries, departments, agencies and authorities as well as at the centre who would be responsible for the management and administration of training.
- (i) *Direct trainers.* A statement on who will do the training – which training institutes will be responsible for what. This is particularly important where there are several institutes with overlapping functions as one way of limiting unnecessary duplication and the disputes which can all too easily arise over the extent of different institutes' functions. Additionally, it might be useful to explain briefly why the different institutes have been selected to take responsibility for specific aspects of training.
- (j) *Co-ordinating machinery.* Policy regarding the appointment of the most senior training co-ordinators and co-ordinating committees and their respective responsibilities. While avoiding detail, which can be left to an administrative directive, it should provide guidance on issues such as the level of appointments, the powers of the officers and committees and the scope of their operations to ensure that they have a chance of being effective.
- (k) *Professionalism in training.* A statement on the importance of persuading both the managers of training and direct trainers to establish professional standards within the training function.
- (l) *Government's priorities for training.* Since resources are unlikely to be adequate to meet every identified need, it would help to have government's view of its priorities. Who is to receive preference for training: men or women; senior, middle or junior staff; the private sector; civil service; local government; or public enterprises. What are the priority subjects: general management; financial management; or the management of agriculture.
- (m) *Approaches and methods of training.* There are many different ways of providing training, including organisation development (OD) and "performance improvement and planning" (PIP) techniques; training on-the-job; departmental instruction; the use of itinerant training teams; institutional training done centrally or using regional training centres; through university programmes; by using visits of observation or practical attachments; or by making use of offers of training overseas. There is no single best approach. Each has its place. For example, the OD and PIP approach can be one of the most effective methods of improving management within an organisation but it requires heavy managerial commitment and highly-trained facilitators, either of which may not be available. Training within the country is likely to be cheaper and more relevant than overseas training but the necessary expertise may not exist

locally. It can be useful to have an official policy on what approach should be used and in what circumstances.

- (n) *Finance for training.* There are several ways of funding training. Government can allocate funds in the normal annual budget; training levies can be imposed; institutes can charge fees; and financing can be obtained through development projects. A training policy can provide guidance on the available methods.
- (o) *Qualifications.* Government should lay the foundations for a system to determine the standards of any qualifications such as certificates or diplomas being offered. Unless there is a mechanism that can be monitored, there is a danger that testing and awards become meaningless.
- (p) *Training and promotion.* Training can be encouraged by officially relating it to promotion and other aspects of an individual's career such as salary increments or opportunities for personal development. A policy statement recognising this relationship can be valuable. It may require the setting up of an executive development scheme, which in some countries has proved very beneficial. However, linking training with increments and promotion can have its dangers so this policy initiative would need to be carefully considered in relation to local circumstances.
- (q) *Selection of trainees.* This is another area that can easily get out of hand and become subject to personal or political influence. Policy direction may not solve the problems but it can help to establish a system of selection on the basis of need or merit.
- (r) *Obligations of trainees.* Trainees may need to be reminded of their obligations and duties both during and after training. Such issues as bonding could be stipulated here.