

ORIENTATION TRAINING IN THE GOVERNMENT SERVICE - A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE UP TO 1995

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ABSTRACT

During 1995 a study was undertaken regarding the management of orientation procedures in the central and provincial government services in South Africa.

It transpired that after the dawn of political democracy on 27 April 1994, the South African government service faced a number of major challenges. It had a major role to play by forging ahead with processes of reconciliation and reconstruction to establish an equitable society in the country. To fulfil this role effectively, the government service needed to free itself from its past practices, which were steeped in a policy of separate development, to be transformed into a much more coherent, representative, competent and democratic instrument for executing new government policies and meeting the needs of all citizens.

Those in government were obliged to render community-oriented services to the various peoples of South Africa in order to achieve, maintain and enhance the quality of life of all the inhabitants in particular and the welfare of society in general.

The research that is the basis of this article was based on the assumption that existing orientation training procedures in the South African government service were inadequate for successful orientation of public service personnel on all post levels. It was concluded that an improved approach to that type of training should have been devised and implemented for the common good of the newly integrated society.

The findings and proposals emanating from the abovementioned study are expounded in this article. The article contains a description of the background to the study, requirements for effective, efficient and community-oriented service rendering and a number of proposals that were made on the strength of the research findings.

INTRODUCTION

A research project was undertaken by the authors regarding the above topic over a period of three years.

The research was based on the assumption that existing orientation procedures in the South African central and provincial government services are inadequate for proper induction and orientation of public service personnel on all post levels in the government service.

The abovementioned assumption also included the view that a certain bias exists toward females and the physically disabled that may preclude those groups to compete on an equal basis for available posts or promotion opportunities in the government service.

In order to embark on researching the problem as stated, the broad research goal for the study was determined as an investigation into the management of orientation procedures by senior managers on at least two post levels for the execution of effective public personnel management in a post-apartheid South Africa.

The findings of the empirical research, as well as certain proposals that emanated from the project, are the subject of this article.

REQUIREMENTS FOR EFFECTIVE, EFFICIENT AND COMMUNITY-ORIENTED SERVICE RENDERING

The research is based on the current demographic personnel composition of the management cadres of the central government service, which is inextricably linked to certain attitudes of certain management cadres in the government service. These attitudes are based on the fact that a dominant cultural and ethnic group is currently employed as senior officials in the various central government departments (Bayat and Meyer, 1994:130).

The necessity for an attitude change among public administrators in terms of a new, democratic political dispensation is stressed by Bayat **et al** as follows: " ...

"Public administrators must take cognisance of these developments and make their contributions by changing their attitudes and creating an environment that is conducive to change as South Africa moves towards a post- apartheid society ... " (Bayat in Bayat and Meyer, 1994:9).

It is vital for the successful implementation of public policies that the transformation process is guided by a clear, comprehensive and commonly accepted vision of the steps that need to be taken to address the needs, hopes, aspirations, desires, ambitions, and values of the inhabitants of the country. This vision depends on the willingness of the role-players in public administration on all levels of policy-making, from the political level to the functional level, to function on a community-oriented basis.

South Africa has for too long a period been subjected to an ideological and authoritative approach to the concept of the general welfare. What is needed now is a core of officials, on all post levels, who are willing and able to approach their duties with the aim to be:

- Service-oriented and committed to the provision of high quality services of an excellent quality to all South Africans in an unbiased and impartial manner.
- Responsive to the needs of the public, as well as humane and caring in its dealings with them.
- Representative of all sections and levels of South African society.
- Willing to maintain fair labour practices for all public service workers, irrespective of race, gender or class.
- Geared towards socio-economic development and the reduction of poverty.
- Goal and performance oriented.
- Efficient, effective and productive.
- Committed to the effective training and career development of all staff.
- Holistic, integrated and co-ordinated in their service delivery.
- Democratic in implementing internal procedures and in their relations with the public.
- Respectful of the Rule of Law and human rights.
- Open to popular participation and scrutiny.
- Accessible and informative.
- Honest, transparent and accountable.
- Oriented towards the development of an ethos of service rather than domination.

In order to equip the officials, who will be charged with the responsibility to implement the policies that will bring about normalisation of societal conditions in South Africa in accordance with the directives of the RDP, with knowledge and skills, it is necessary that those officials have to be optimally committed to the ideal of public service rendering with a dedicated and positive attitude.

To achieve a situation where government officials fully understand their place and role in the service of the community, intensive and continuous orientation training programmes will have to be presented to all officials on all post levels. The primary training function, before the commencement of any other training (which is regarded as no less important), has to be orientation training, in order to prepare the officials to be receptive and willing to undergo the other types of training.

The empirical survey has shown that the majority of those surveyed support the concept of orientation training, particularly regarding orientation training as a mechanism that can improve morale and **esprit de corps** among officials.

It was also found, from the results of the analysis of the empirical survey, that orientation programmes help to instil feelings of security, pride and confidence in new as well as in existing officials.

With the conviction that serious consideration should be given to affording a much higher priority to orientation training in the government service than is presently the case, the proposals set out on the pages that follow, are proposed in terms of the findings of this study. This should be viewed in conjunction with a proposed normative model (illustrated as fig. 1 on the next page).

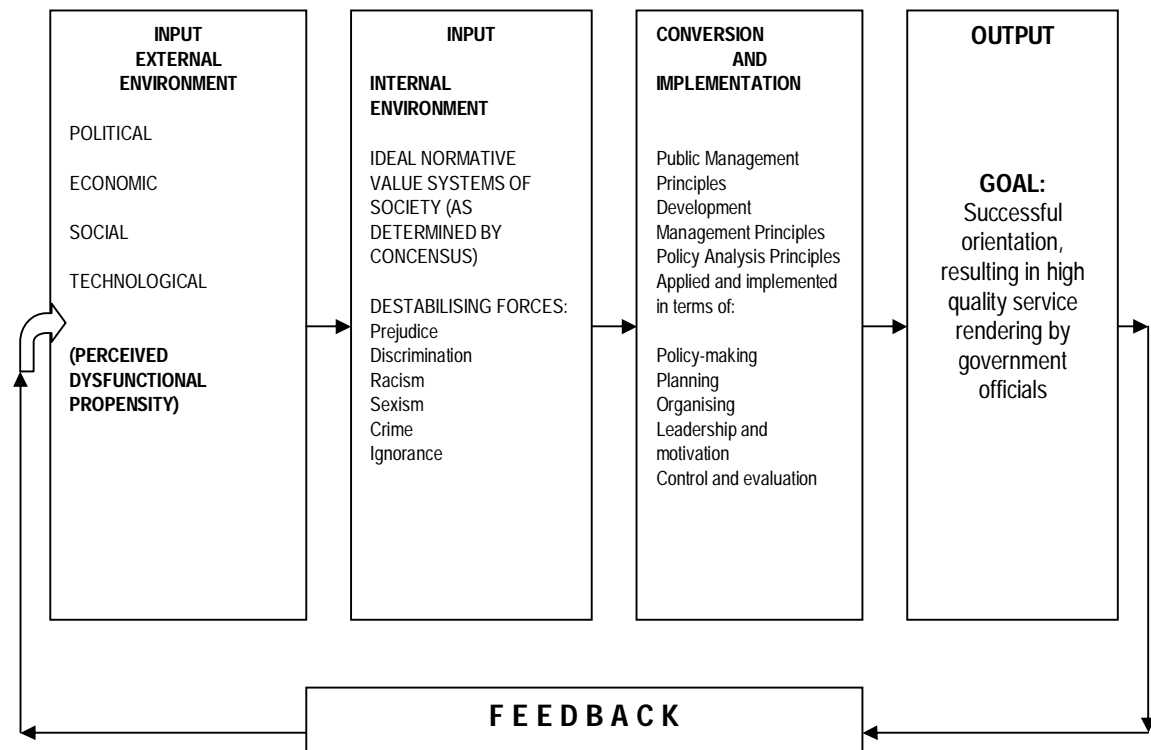


Fig. 1 - Normative model for the management of orientation procedures

The above model takes as its point of departure a perceived general environment consisting of various sub-environments, for instance political, social, economic, and technological. These sub-environments are only examples of possible environments. Those mentioned are taken as being representative of most facets of contemporary human existence and its need-generating elements.

Fox *et al* (1991:3-4) as well as Wissink (1992:30) shows a specific environment, within the general environment, that consists of suppliers, competitors, regulators and consumers. The interaction between the components of the general environment and the factors of the specific environment are then regulated by certain functions, skills and applications.

The above model can be transposed as a framework for the management of orientation procedures for effective public personnel administration in a post-apartheid South Africa.

Fox **et al** (1991:5) identifies five possible enabling **functions** that can serve as a conversion mechanism for goal achievement, namely **policy-making, planning, organising, leadership and motivation**, and **control and evaluation**. These functions are situation bound and could change as the needs of the particular environment fluctuate.

In order to execute the functions described above, certain skills, applications and supportive technology and techniques are needed.

The skills referred to above are aspects such as decision-making, communication, management of change, management of conflict and negotiation.

The applications referred to above are aspects such as policy analysis, strategic management and organisation development.

The supportive technology and techniques referred to above include aspects such as computer technology, information management and specific techniques for public management which would include an awareness of the service-rendering nature of public management, with the necessity of a goal-directed approach; the goal in this instance being the achievement, maintenance and enhancement of the general welfare.

Management of change

Regarding the **management of change** aspect of the **skills** described in Fox **et al** (1991:163-172), certain critical areas are identified that could be made applicable to the management of orientation procedures for effective and efficient public personnel administration in a post-apartheid South Africa (adapted from the Draft White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service. 1995. Government Gazette no 16414, 15 May, pp. 9-10).

In working successfully towards the normalisation of government service policy implementation, it is vital that the transformation process is guided by a clear, comprehensive and commonly accepted vision of certain fundamental principles to guide the composition and operation of the new government service. These fundamental principles are summarised here (adapted from the Draft White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service. 1995. Government Gazette no 16414, 15 May, pp. 9-10).

- A service orientated commitment to the provision of high quality services to all South Africans in an unbiased and impartial manner.
- Responsiveness to the needs of all the inhabitants of the country.
- Representativity of all sections and levels of South African society.
- The maintenance of fair labour practices for all public service workers irrespective of race, gender or physical appearance or disability.
- Goal and performance orientated service.
- Efficient, effective and productive service.
- Commitment to the effective training and career development of all staff;
- Holistic, integrated and co-ordinated service delivery;
- Pursuance of democracy in its internal procedures and in its relations with the public;
- Respectful of the Rule of Law and human rights;
- Open to popular participation and scrutiny;
- Accessible and informative;
- Honest, transparent and accountable;
- Oriented towards the development of an ethos of service rather than domination;
- Faithful to the Constitution, non-partisan and loyal to the Government of the day.

These principles and the collective vision that they represent are based upon the relevant provisions of the Interim Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1993, (Act 200 of 1993), (Section 212 (2) (b) and Principle XXX of Schedule 4), as well as chapter 5 of the RDP White Paper (1994). These

principles should comprise the nucleus of any orientation program that is going to be devised for the orientation of officials in the post-apartheid government service.

In addition to the above, the following aspects as described in the Draft White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service (1995:Government Gazette no 16414, 15 May, pp.10-32) have specific bearing on a possible course outline of an orientation program for government officials:

- Meeting basic needs through improved service delivery.
- Achieving representativeness through affirmative action.
- Institution building and management.
- Restructuring and rationalisation.
- Improving pay and employment conditions.
- Promoting effective labour relations.
- Developing a professional ethos.
- Democratising the state.
- The effective management of human resource development.
- Monitoring and evaluation.
- Acceptance of the necessity for training and retraining, particularly orientation training, as a vehicle to equip officials to pursue, maintain and enhance the general welfare of the inhabitants of this country.

The above aspects are described comprehensively in the Draft White Paper mentioned above.

PROPOSALS

Representativity

Demographic representation must improve (affirmative action essential). Analysis of the survey response to this problem indicated that while 11.17% of the respondents were undecided, 68.93% of the respondents supported the statement. In this respect it is proposed that officials with 20 years' or longer service and who are over 50 years old should be given the opportunity to accept early retirement in order to vacate posts for affirmative action appointments.

Female representation

Female representation must improve (affirmative action essential). Analysis of the survey response pertaining to this problem indicated that while 8.74% of the respondents were undecided, 63.1% of the respondents supported the statement. Females should be encouraged to strive for promotion posts. Orientation programmes presented to females should include training to overcome the traditional limitations of female employment such as pregnancy, child care and post-menstruation depression (PMS).

Disabled representation

Disabled representation must improve (affirmative action essential). Analysis of the survey response pertaining to this problem indicated that while 6.80% of the respondents were undecided, 90.78% of the respondents supported the statement. The disabled should be encouraged to strive for promotion posts. Orientation programmes presented to the disabled should include training to overcome the traditional limitations of disabled employment such as lack of acceptance by colleagues, ergonomics, lack of self-esteem, as well as entrenchment of the fact that the disabled employee is able to make a useful contribution to the goals of the institution.

Orientation training for management

Orientation training should include management training to address lack of knowledge and insight of administration and community matters.

Priority of orientation training

Orientation training should receive a higher priority than is presently the case. Current corruptive and other practices in the government service of South Africa, on central as well as on provincial government level, necessitate an expeditious approach to the implementation and maintenance of orientation training for all officials on all post levels.

Various deficiencies in government service have been identified in the study. Affording a higher priority to orientation training than is presently the case, while improving the level of service delivery of all officials, will contribute to a more productive implementation of the RDP.

Budgeting for orientation training

Budgeting should allow for the allocation of funds to orientation training institutions which should include aspects such as maintenance of specific orientation programmes, suitable venues for training as well as for the employment of high-quality training officers.

It is understood that the training function of the government service has to compete for funds with other areas that need fund allocation. However, it should be borne in mind that if the officials (manpower) charged with the implementation of comprehensive public policy programmes, such as the RDP, are not fully committed to the ideals of such programmes, successful implementation may not take place.

Analysis of the survey response to the problem regarding attitudes towards the successful implementation of the RDP indicated that while a markedly large number of respondents (41.26%) were undecided, (the largest number of undecided responses of the survey) only 29.13% of the respondents supported the statement. This is indicative of the negative viewpoint being held by certain senior officials regarding this issue.

Making funds available for sophisticated orientation training facilities will be an investment that may contribute to a considerable cost-saving as a result of the judicious implementation actions that will be followed after training by committed officials.

Different orientation programmes for new and existing officials

According to the results of the statistical analysis, 73.78% of the respondents to the empirical survey on this question favoured the concept of different orientation programmes for new and existing officials, with only a 3% undecided factor. In this respect the orientation of existing officials should be embarked upon without delay.

Co-ordination of orientation programmes

Orientation training should be co-ordinated centrally, but each government department should manage an orientation program suited to its own requirements. This view was upheld by the analysis of the survey response to this question. The analysis indicated that while 52.4% of the respondents supported the idea of orientation programmes being co-ordinated centrally, 62.61% of the respondents supported the principle that each government department should manage an orientation program suited to its own requirements.

Uniformity of orientation training

Analysis of the survey response to the question of different orientation programmes for different population groups indicated that while only 8.74% of the respondents were undecided, 69.41% responded negatively to the issue. This particular statement yielded the most extreme negative response of the survey, indicating that the respondents were predominantly opposed to the idea of

differentiation in the presentation of orientation training programmes to different population groups.

Orientation training should, in the light of the above, be identical for all population groups, with slight adjustments to compensate for the abnormality caused by apartheid. This could include training in cross-cultural communication, personal growth and self-development, goal achievement and goal directedness. Also aspects such as ethnic tolerance as well as national pride should form part and parcel of orientation programmes.

Assistance by senior officials with orientation training

Senior officials should assist with orientation training.

Analysis of the survey response to this problem indicated that while 11.65% of the respondents were undecided on this issue, 62.61% of the respondents supported the statement.

It is proposed that senior officials, with their superior experience and insight, should take part in presenting orientation training programmes. This contribution should not be detrimental to their time management schedules, but should be regarded as important in the sense that an investment is made in positive attitudes that may result in higher productivity and improved employer/employee relations in the long term.

Frequency of orientation training

Analysis of the survey response to this problem indicated that while 15.53% of the respondents were undecided on this issue, 63.6% of the respondents supported the statement. This is indicative of the fact that the majority of respondents to the statement is of the opinion that regular orientation training for existing officials will be beneficial in terms of optimal execution of their official duties.

It is proposed that orientation training should be offered regularly for all officials, irrespective of rank, although the most senior officials should be able to schedule their training lectures as it suits them.

Time of orientation training

Orientation training for new appointees should take place immediately after commencement of service.

Analysis of the survey response to this problem indicated that while only 3.4% of the respondents were undecided, 85.92% of the respondents supported the statement. This result should be viewed in conjunction with the analysis to the response to statement 9 (orientation training should take place after a few weeks of service), which indicated that while 8.74% of the respondents were undecided, only 34.00% of the respondents supported the statement.

The overall result suggests that a strong opinion exists among those surveyed that orientation training should take place immediately after commencement of service.

Orientation for language usage and communication

Language and communication training, specifically in English, should intensify. This could be achieved by regular language bulletins emanating from the central training institution. Training in public speaking should be part of the training programmes for all officials. This proposal is supported by the analysis of the response to statement 17 of the questionnaire, regarding the fluency in English of officials. Analysis of the survey response to this statement indicated that while 5.34% of the respondents were undecided, 78.16% of the respondents supported the statement.

Duration of orientation training

Orientation training should last at least a week, or longer.

Analysis of the survey response to this problem indicated that while 22.33% of the respondents were undecided, 60.68% of the respondents supported the statement.

Locality for orientation training

Orientation training should preferably take place away from the normal place of work.

Analysis of the survey response to this problem indicated that while 12.62% of the respondents were undecided, 48.54% of the respondents supported the statement, and 38.84% responded negatively to the issue.

While orientation training could take place in the workplace **per se**, it is proposed that the initial intensive orientation training programmes should take place away from the normal place of work. This is to allow the trainee to concentrate fully on the concepts being transferred to him or her, as well as placing the employee in a camaraderie-inducing situation with his or her colleagues, which can be beneficial to long-term informal relationships at work.

RDP content of orientation training

Orientation training should include updated information on the RDP. This aspect was supported by 87.38% of the respondents, with only a 6% undecided factor.

This proposal goes hand in hand with proposal 5, and is regarded as of paramount importance for the successful achievement of goals directed to the upliftment of the community.

Statutory basis of orientation training

Orientation training should be statutorily laid down in terms of the Constitution and the RDP guidelines. Directives on orientation training should also be embodied in subordinate legislation, such as the Public Service Act, the Public Service Regulations and the Public Service Staff Code.

This proposal will empower the training structures to negotiate and compete for funding for orientation training programmes. It will also eliminate any arbitrary indecision on the part of management or trainees of whether orientation training programmes should be attended, or not.

Central orientation training committee

A central orientation training committee should be established to co-ordinate, monitor, maintain and enhance orientation training. Such a committee should function under the auspices of the South African Management and Development Institute (SAMDI). Directives on a central orientation training committee should be contained in legislation and subordinate legislation, such as the Public Service Act, the Public Service Regulations and the Public Service Staff Code.

Decentralised orientation units

Each government department should have an orientation training unit, headed by the Head of Training of the department. This proposal should be read in conjunction with proposal 7, regarding the management of orientation programmes by each department in terms of their own requirements.

Regular reporting on progress with orientation training

Monthly reports on orientation training should be submitted to SAMDI by each department. This is necessary for purposes of enforcement and control, particularly if measures regarding orientation training are contained in legislation, as indicated in proposal 18.

Annual reports to parliament on orientation training

SAMDI should report on orientation training in the public service as part of their annual report to Parliament. This is part of the measures Parliament should take to maintain parliamentary control over departmental activities. Should legislation regarding orientation training be promulgated, it is the duty of Parliament to ensure that it is regularly (at least annually) reported to regarding the state of orientation training in the government services.

Urgency of instituting orientation training programmes

The different orientation programmes envisaged should be designed bearing in mind that if the problems outlined above are not addressed urgently, they will seriously compromise the ability of the Government to achieve its major goals of reconstruction and development, nation building and national reconciliation, and community empowerment and democratic participation. A complete transformation of the public service is called for if it is to assist rather than obstruct the achievement of the goals set for the nation by the GNU.

SUMMARY

This article reported on a study on the management of orientation procedures for effective and efficient personnel management in a post-apartheid South Africa.

The present **status quo** in the country has evolved because of a number of historical, political and socio-economic factors that contributed to a societal melting pot that is in the process of producing an equitable and democratic society. The role of the government service in this transformation is indisputable.

The officials who have to shoulder the responsibility of implementing the policies of the representative legislature (the Acts) and to translate those policy guidelines into concrete actions to attempt to bring about the welfare of the community, have to be committed, dedicated, accountable and efficient. In order to produce such individuals, without whom the immense task cannot proceed, proper orientation training is imperative. Without orientation training the fears, the doubts, the prejudices and the ingrained negative viewpoints will remain, and will continue to contaminate the government service culture to the point of non-achievement of important public goals.

This work should be seen a starting point in studies on the topic of orientation. Little have previously been written on this topic. The insights and experience gained during this research as well as the theoretical foundation thereof is viewed as a useful point of departure for continued study and research.

Orientation training should be regarded as a serious matter by the decision-makers of this country. Only when orientation training has succeeded in achieving its rightful place as the most important training function of any training institution, will a first step have been taken to address the numerous problems facing the government services of South Africa.

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