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A CRITICAL STUDY ON TRAINING POLICIES AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE OF ONDO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the perception of public servants on training policies and how they contribute to leadership development in the public service of Ondo State. The paper further examines the current landscape of training policies aimed at fostering effective leadership and highlighting how government-led initiatives affects leadership development. A qualitative approach was employed by conducting 30 in-depth interviews with public servants (15 men and 15 women) within the Ondo State public service, to determine their perceptions about training policies and how it affects leadership development in the State. The findings showed that there was no specific training policies geared towards leadership development but there exists vast spectrum of policies on training which may allow aspiring leaders garner leadership experiences in preparation for future leadership roles. Based on the findings, the paper can used as a policy framework that will initiate an up-to-date training policy in Ondo State. It is also to add to knowledge on the need for the institutionalization of training policies that will address leadership development in Nigeria.

Keywords: Perception, Public Servants, Training Policies, Leadership Development, Nigeria Public Service.

Introduction

Training is a critical function within the Human Resources (HR) spectrum, that focuses on developing knowledge, skills, and abilities of employees to enhance their performance and productivity within an organization (Barnu, 2019). The primary goal of training is to bridge the gap between the current skill level of employees and the skills required to meet organizational objectives (Anitha, 2016). The history of training and leadership development policy in Ondo State is rooted in the evolution of workplace training and development practices in Nigeria and around the world. In the 18th and the 19th centuries, young individuals were trained by skilled artisans to learn trades and crafts. This was an informal system of passing on skills and knowledge from one generation to the next, (Mary, 2020). The Nigeria restructuring which led to the creation of Ondo State in 1976 brought significant changes to

the country's work environments as it focuses on unstructured capacity development strategies of personnel who were expected to develop the public service of the various states in Nigeria.

Shortly after the creation of Ondo State, the State government established a training centre called the Staff Development Centre (SDC), for the training of lower and middle-level officers to improve the performance of public servants within Ondo State. The public service of the State has continued to evolve up till 2010 when the Ondo State Public Service Training Institute (PSTI) was created to handle training and retraining of public servants and the production of the first training policy in 2015. State training policies has been adopted to meet the needs of the workforce. However, more than what is operational within the State which centres on employee training for competencies and capabilities, there was the need to raise the bars to accommodate leadership trainings that will prepare civil servants for future leadership positions which would enable them perform better in leadership, politics and other spheres of life, (Izidor, 2018).

Training policies that align with the State's development strategic goals needed to emphasize leadership development as a critical component, (Brett, 2016). The concept for actualization of this feat includes mechanisms for identifying high-potential employees through performance reviews, assessments, and feedback, particularly in recognizing employees who exhibited leadership potential early in their careers (Heather, 2015).

Effective training policies promote a culture of continuous learning, encouraging leaders to regularly update their skills and knowledge, (Happiness, 2014). It is however imperative to enact specific policies within Ondo State that supports leadership and mentorship programs where experienced leaders mentor emerging leaders, providing guidance, support, and knowledge transfer, (Hilde, 2023). State's training policies are fundamental guiding framework that outlines its approach to employee development and learning initiatives. **As a tool for** outlining the responsibilities of various stakeholders involved in the training process (Amer, 2021). **Training** policies describe the process for conducting training needs assessments to identify skill gaps and determine the training requirements of employees, (Iveta, 2015). In another dimension, training and leadership development are closely intertwined processes aimed at enhancing the skills, knowledge, and capabilities of individuals to excel in leadership roles within an organization (Clarke, 2016).

As part of the strategic documents needed for a State's bureaucracy to stimulate their instinct for leadership positions, some countries like Malaysia and Singapore built their economy around the public service which makes it a public sector-driven economy. Such needs a strong and viral public service and a deliberately developed public servants to take strategic positions in leadership, (Michael, 2014). Leadership development often involves creating customized development plans tailored to the unique needs and aspirations of individual leaders, (Alexandre, 2016). In Ondo State public service, training policies play crucial roles by serving as a guiding framework for employee development and learning initiatives. (Joel, 2017). Hence, the policies must ensure that training initiatives contribute directly to achieving the objective, mission and vision of the State, (Ivuoma, 2021). The State empowers people to

lead effectively in pursuit of shared goals and objectives in consonant with the state's vision and mission, (Hasson, 2016). This study delved into available records that shows how effectively the existing training policy has contributed to leadership development in the Ondo state public service.

Literature Review

Leadership development draws upon various theories and models from psychology, management, and organizational behaviour to understand how leaders can be developed and nurtured, (Storey, 2016). The trait theory of leadership is one of the earliest approaches to leadership studies and development. It posits that certain individuals are born with innate traits that make them leaders. These inherent characteristics are thought to distinguish leaders from non-leaders, (David, 2014).

Historically, the trait theory has its roots in the Great Man Theory, which suggested that great leaders are born, not made, (Ellen, 2019). Historical figures like Alexander the Great and Napoleon were often cited as examples. **Early studies** in the early 20th century, such as the work by Thomas Carlyle and Francis Galton, sought to identify the specific traits that leaders possess. This theory of leadership has provided a foundational understanding of the qualities that can contribute to effective leadership, (Majd, 2020).

Behavioural theories emphasize that leadership can be learned through observation, imitation, and reinforcement of specific behaviours, (Vivek, 2020). Leadership development programs based on behavioural theory focuses on teaching leader's specific skills and behaviours, such as communication, delegation, and conflict resolution. This theory posits that effective leadership is based on definable, learnable behaviours rather than innate qualities (Kim - 2016).

Unlike the trait theory, behavioural theory emphasizes what leaders do rather than who they are. It focuses on the actions and behaviours that contribute to effective leadership. Leadership behaviours can be learned and developed through training and experience, suggesting that anyone has the potential to become a leader, (Mary, 2018). The most common categories are task-oriented behaviours and people-oriented behaviours. Part of these is showing empathy, communicating effectively, and providing support, (Dinibutun, 2020).

Historically, researches in the mid-20th century, particularly by Kurt Lewin and his colleagues, identified different leadership styles (authoritarian, democratic, and laissez-faire) based on behaviours. **Ohio State Studies** in the 1940s and 1950s, researchers at Ohio State University identified two key dimensions of leader behaviour: Consideration (people-oriented) and Initiating Structure - task-oriented, (Thaddeus. 2018).

Transformational leadership theory is a modern approach to leadership that emphasizes inspiring and motivating followers to achieve extraordinary outcomes and, in the process, develop their own leadership capacity, (Mostafa, 2015). Transformational leaders are characterized by their ability to bring about significant changes in both followers and organizations through vision, inspiration, and a focus on higher-order intrinsic needs. They

encourage creativity and innovation by challenging assumptions, fostering new ideas, and promoting problem-solving and critical thinking, (Zakeer, 2016).

James MacGregor Burn idea about the concept of transformational leadership was first introduced by Burns in 1978 and the 1980s, Bass expanded on Burns' ideas, developing the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) to measure transformational leadership, (McCleskey, 2014). Transformational leadership theory emphasizes the importance of vision, inspiration, and personal development in effective leadership (Izhak, 2016). Leadership development programs based on this theory focus on teaching leaders how to set clear expectations, provide feedback, and reward desired behaviours (Kristina. 2016).

Historically, **researchers** opined that the concept of transactional leadership is rooted in Max Weber's theory of bureaucratic leadership, which emphasizes structured, rule-based management. **James MacGregor Burns** is also known for developing transformational leadership theory, he also identified transactional leadership as a distinct style based on exchanges and rewards (Jens, 2014). It is a leadership approach that focuses on the exchanges or transactions between leaders and followers. Leaders provide clear expectations and rewards for meeting these expectations, (Primadi, 2023). Transactional leadership theory focuses on the exchanges between leaders and followers, emphasizing clear structure, performance metrics, and rewards or punishments based on performance, (Cynthia, 2020).

Situational leadership theory posits that effective leaders adapt their leadership style to the specific needs of the situation and the maturity level of their followers, (Bashir, 2022). **According to Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard, t**he theory was first introduced in their book "Management of Organizational Behaviour" in the late 1960s. The model has since been refined and expanded, becoming a widely used framework in leadership training and development (McCleskey, 2014).

This theory was developed by Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard and has been widely used in various leadership development programs (Debra, 2018). The theory categorizes followers based on their competence and commitment, suggesting that the appropriate leadership style depends on the followers' developmental levels (Muftahu, 2019).

The model can be complex to apply in real-life situations, as accurately assessing the developmental level of followers and adapting leadership style accordingly can be challenging, (Walls, 2019). Many leadership development programs incorporate situational leadership to train managers and leaders in adaptive leadership skills, (Bosse, 2017). This theory offers a versatile framework for adapting leadership styles to the needs of followers and the demands of different situations (Deborah 2014).

Methodology

The research design was phenomenological as it helped to explore the experiences of respondents who can relate with training and training policies over the years in Ondo State Civil Service. Grounded theory was also used to formulate frameworks which explained the adopted phenomenon. The 30 respondents were selected from 15 Ministries, Departments

and Agencies (MDAs), at two (2) respondents per MDA, all the MDAs are from the Public Service of Ondo State as shown in the table below:

S/n	MDAs	Gender (s)	Ages(s)	Grade-Level(s)
1.	Government House & Protocol	Respondent (i)- Male Respondent (ii)- Female	50 36	GL. 13 GL. 12
2.	Office of the Deputy Governor	Respondent (i)- Male Respondent (ii)- Female	45 40	GL. 14 GL. 10
3.	Government House & Protocol	Respondent (i)- Male Respondent (ii)- Female	30 51	GL. 12 GL. 13
4.	Cabinet and Special Services	Respondent (i)- Male Respondent (ii)- Female	42 51	GL. 12 GL. 14
5	General Administration Dept	Respondent (i)- Male Respondent (ii)- Female	48 40	GL. 13 GL. 13
6	Office of the Head of Service	Respondent (i)- Male Respondent (ii)- Female	46 46	GL. 12 GL. 10
7	Office of Establishments	Respondent (i)- Male Respondent (ii)- Female	45 38	GL. 14 GL. 13
8	Political & Economic Affairs	Respondent (i)- Male Respondent (ii)- Female	45 38	GL. 13 GL. 12
9	Service Matters Department	Respondent (i)- Male Respondent (ii)- Female	50 34	GL. 14 GL. 12
10	Public Service Reform Office	Respondent (i)- Male Respondent (ii)- Female	49 48	GL. 13 GL. 13
11	Public Service Training Institute	Respondent (i)- Male Respondent (ii)- Female	52 51	GL. 15 GL. 15
12	Health Contributory Commission	Respondent (i)- Male Respondent (ii)- Female	56 50	GL. 15 GL. 14
13	Football Agency	Respondent (i)- Male Respondent (ii)- Female	43 38	GL. 12 GL. 10
14	Ondo State power Company	Respondent (i)- Male Respondent (ii)- Female	50 48	GL. 14 GL. 13
15	Ondo State Agribusiness	Respondent (i)- Male Respondent (ii)- Female	45 43	GL. 13 GL. 13

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

The semi-structured interviews were conducted in English language with each section lasting between 30-45 minutes. The interviews were recorded with the permission of the respondents. After 30 interview sections, emerging views on leadership training were re-occurring. The thematic Analysis Procedure was used to analyse all transcribed data. The Researcher engaged an analytical coding system through a cross-comparison and validated codes were censored to arrive at the main themes.

Findings and Discussion

Observable findings from the research conducted revealed that there existed training opportunities for the public servants in Ondo State, ranging from human resource management to leadership training. The respondents whose ages ranges from 30-58 were considered to be active workers and have put in an average of 10-25 years in the Ondo State Public Service. They were also between Grade-Levels 13-15 and some of them have attended some management and leadership trainings sponsored by the Ondo State government. A list of all MDAs was received from the Office of Establishments and Training which also reflected the staff strength of each MDAs. The respondent's views are as reflected as follows:

Training and Development

Findings revealed that a good number of the respondents has actually being in formal training programmes aimed at achieving competencies on the job (Sahar, 2019). Interviewees explained that apart from the conferences organized by their different professional bodies, the state government had sponsored them for some other management trainings to improve their management skills and competencies (Bafaneli, 2015). These sets of officers' range between grade-Levels 10-13. Below are some of the quotations which reflects their views:

> *Although, I belong to some professional bodies, where I pay certain amount of money as subscriptions every year and attend their conferences, the government has also sponsor me for some management trainings, especially when I was between grade-levels 10 to 13. (Participants 5).*
>
> *Sometimes, the government late release of funds hinders my training and I have to source for funds on my own to attend some of the trainings before the government makes reimbursements. (Participants 8).*
>
> *I enjoyed some of the trainings sponsored by the government when I was a new entrant into the service. Most of these trainings came with my induction and on-boarding. The training seems to be narrowing down as I advance the ladder to management level. I suspect it must be due to government lean resources (Participants 12).*

Above responses is aligns with the findings of Kosovka, (2015) with respect to on-the job-training programmes. It specifically confirms that some of the respondents have enjoyed government sponsored trainings which were meant to address some identified gaps in management. According to Danvila, (2019), the author revealed in a bibliometric analysis that human capital development can be accumulated over the years with intensive training and capacity building agendas.

Leadership Development

Findings also revealed that there were so many challenges inhibiting leadership development in the State. It shows that if an organization does not value leadership development, it is unlikely to invest time, money, or resources needed to develop its leaders, (Imsal, 2016). This can include a lack of funding for training programs, a lack of mentorship opportunities, and a lack of clear career paths for aspiring leaders. Some of the responses of the participants are as captured below:

> *I was supposed to attend a leadership development programme in Malaysia in 2023 but due to lack of funds, I couldn't go. Although, some of my colleagues were able to raise funds on their*

> *own but I couldn't. It was actually painful but I am hopeful that I will still attend one of these foreign leadership development programmes at the nearest future. (Participants 15).*
> *I believe that there are many challenges of leadership development in Nigeria. For instance, I was billed to travel in 2020 for a leadership training but due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I couldn't as all travelling were barred. I know this is not a man-made problem but a natural disaster; but it was not a pleasant experience for me. (Participant 20).*

Leadership development as a process that requires effort and commitment from the individual, (Amos, 2015). If someone is not motivated to develop their leadership skills, they are unlikely to make career progression. This can be due to a lack of self-awareness, a lack of confidence, or a lack of interest in leadership.

Another discovery is that there are also varieties of training policies which serves as a guide to all the forms of training but there are no specific policies for leadership development were future leaders can be specifically trained in the act of leadership (Ansari, 2015). Current leaders in the State emerge with the experiences garnered on the job and rise to the pinnacles of their careers.

Corporate Interventions for Leadership Development

The findings also revealed that corporate interventions for leadership development are structured activities and programs designed to enhance leadership capabilities within an organization, (Garvey, 2021). The interventions should be made to improve the skills and knowledge of individuals in leadership positions, as well as those identified as having high leadership potential. Some of the participants granted interviews on the corporate interventions in leadership development:

> *I attended the basic and the advance development training with the Center for Management Development (CMD), Abuja in 2024. The training was so interesting and impactful. The training was capital intensive but because of the intervention of my agency, I was able to participate (Participant 22).*

> *As an Establishment Officer, I have attended several meetings of the National Council on Establishments (NCE) which actually could be categorized as leadership development trainings but they were never tagged so. I've heard about a training policy that the government did for all public servants in Ondo State but I've never seen one. Anyway, since it was the government that sponsored all the national council meetings, I can refer to that as the institutional intervention to leadership development (Participant 25).*

From the above responses carefully selected from all the responses, it critically reveals that there were training policies in Ondo State but the available policies were not harmonized to align with leadership trainings and leadership development were not entrenched in the hearts of Ondo State public servants.

Study, Conclusion and avenue for further studies

In summary the entire study practically reflects the level of importance and preparedness of public servants in Ondo State to assume leadership positions and to lead well in their areas of

concerns. The need for the human resource department to invest more in leadership development by creating policies that will enforce leadership trainings in all ramifications (Mastura, 2020). During the interview sessions, the responses from the interviewees reflects the need for such policies at all levels of the State's public service as an antidote to bad leadership currently confronting Nigeria (Lisa, 2021).

There is a need for more rigorous research on the effectiveness of different leadership development interventions and 360-degree feedback within the State. This future research may examine the impact of these interventions on a variety of outcomes, such as leadership behaviour, team performance, and organizational effectiveness.

Not everyone benefits from leadership development interventions in the same way (Tatiana, 2020). Research is needed to identify the individual differences that predict who is most likely to benefit from different types of interventions. This information can be used to institutionalize leadership development programs and make them more effective in the State (Hrusa, 2022). Research is also needed to explore how technology can be used to enhance training policies as well as leadership development in Ondo State. This will not just focus on short-term outcomes but the long-term impact of leadership development interventions on public servants.

In conclusion, this study however has some limitations. For instance, the study was based on a small sample size and the methodology was qualitative which made generalization of findings difficult. Future research can also consider a more reliable measures of leadership development. This will allow researchers to effectively track the progress of individuals and organizations as they participate in leadership development programs. Finally, it will give a better outcome to study Nigeria as whole in terms of leadership development rather than a selected State within the country.

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