






“The impact of training and development on employee performance and service delivery at a local municipality in South Africa”

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THE IMPACT OF TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT ON EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE AND SERVICE DELIVERY AT A LOCAL MUNICIPALITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

Abstract

There is a growing concern about the lack of skilled municipal employees who can deliver essential services to under-resourced local communities in South Africa. However, coaching and mentoring appear underutilized to train municipal employees to improve service delivery to local communities. The study aims to investigate whether coaching and mentoring could capacitate municipal employees whose performance appraisal reveals a lack of skills to provide essential services. A cross-sectional research design was adopted to conduct a survey. The target population comprised 265 municipal employees, and a stratified random sample of 115 employees completed a questionnaire. The employees held positions of general managers, general assistants, and administrators, with varied years of experience. Cronbach's Alpha indicated an overall high 0.8 questionnaire reliability score.

Using a quantitative method, responses from municipal employees were collected to examine their perceptions of the influence of training and development on employee performance and service delivery. Hypotheses were tested using the bivariate inferential statistical tests of correlation (r) and Chi-square (χ^2). The results indicated that training and development were more likely to improve employee performance. Furthermore, the results showed that trained employees were more likely to improve service delivery. In particular, coaching and mentoring could be used to improve performance. Therefore, the study found that the municipality was not providing employees with relevant training and development to enable them to address poor service delivery. Finally, the study recommends that the municipality invests in training and development to enrich employees with new skills and knowledge to improve the quality of service delivery.

Keywords

skills, knowledge, coaching, mentoring, performance management, performance appraisal, direct service delivery

JEL Classification

I28, I31, L25

INTRODUCTION

The public sector has been widely criticized for poor performance and service delivery (Govender, 2017; Fernandes & Fresly, 2017). Mamokhere (2020) affirmed that poor, insufficient, or a complete lack of service delivery remains a significant challenge for local municipalities in an emerging economy like South Africa. Local municipalities that neglect the training and development of employees have the potential to deliver inadequate essential services to communities. In addition, the lack of proper training and development may lead to poor employee performance, as well as the inadequate provision of essential services such as clean water, sanitation, sufficient health services, reliable electricity, and accessible road networks (Hee et al., 2019). Previous research highlighted the contribution of general human resource

management to improved employee performance in the public sector (Zakaria et al., 2017; Mehlape, 2017; Hee et al., 2019; Kareem & Hussein, 2019). However, the role of training and development as a mechanism for employee performance and service delivery in local municipalities is under-researched.

South African local municipalities have been characterized by maladministration, plunder of public resources, nepotism, shortages of skilled employees, corruption, and lack of financial accountability (Govender, 2017; Mamokhere, 2020). Moreover, the lack of investment in training and development coupled with ineffective mentoring and coaching programs aimed at nurturing graduates, as well as creating a pool of experienced technical managers, indicates that broader human resource development is overlooked (Govender, 2016; Ngobese, 2017). Investing in training and development has the potential to enhance employee performance and service delivery at local municipalities.

Lack of timely, effective, and efficient training and development initiatives coupled with corruption and lack of financial accountability and transparency negatively affect employee performance and the provision of essential services. Therefore, there is a need to examine whether adopting training and development interventions such as coaching and mentoring can strengthen employee performance. In addition, trained and developed employees might improve the delivery of essential basic services, particularly needed in developmental states exemplified by South Africa.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite broader human resource development not being recognized as a strategic business partner in the local government sphere, training and development initiatives are vital in ensuring that employees contribute toward the organizational strategy (Chibi, 2017). As a human resource development mechanism, training and development initiatives are used to improve employee skills and knowledge (Heathfield, 2020; Hassan et al., 2019). Asfaw et al. (2015) postulated that training and development enhance employee capabilities, with the goal that organizations can expand the proficiency, efficiency, and effectiveness of human assets, thus performing optimally. However, Ardichvili (2012) highlights that training and development can focus on short-term financial goals, record-keeping, and compliance while ignoring employee potential's holistic development.

Relevant training activities and programs give superior employee performance and improved service delivery (Fuente & Bartram, 2018; Hee et al., 2019). Ballies (2009), Ngobese (2017), and Mehlape (2017) posited that it is of paramount importance to conduct training thoroughly as well as to ensure that training initiatives are evaluated and tailor-made to enable employees to grow, be competent, and perform optimally. However, municipalities seem to provide irrele-

vant training due to poor needs analysis, a lack of management and employee commitment, and the necessary knowledge and skills for training practitioners to empower employees (Abdullah, 2009; Beer et al., 2016).

On-the-job training is exemplified by classroom lectures, simulation exercises, coaching, mentoring, induction, apprenticeship, workshops and conferences, formal training, and development courses. These examples have the potential to increase employee performance and enable workers to develop specific knowledge and skills to perform a job task. Durham (2017) states that on-the-job training and development involve developing employees with common tools and equipment for specific tasks and activities. Tabassi et al. (2011) posited that on-the-job training is probably the most common method of employee development employed at various levels, particularly in the public sector. In addition, increasing attention should be drawn to internal training and the use of on-the-job training rather than off-the-job training. Tabassi et al. (2011) further affirmed that conducting on-the-job training is cost-effective. Hence, relevant on-the-job training like coaching and mentoring can be offered to municipal employees.

While employee coaching may historically derive from different roots, more recently, the concepts were deemed to be primarily similar (Lues,

2016; Mason, 2021). Lues (2016) further argues that “employee coaching refers to planned one-to-one instruction where a coach explains tasks, addresses questions, and offers counsel to the employee.” In the same vein, Mabope (2018) emphasized that coaching and regular feedback should be used to manage employee performance in municipalities. Therefore, employees ought to be developed through employee coaching as a training and development initiative. Similarly, Grosseck (2014) espoused that employee coaching exemplifies promoting behavior at work to improve skills, knowledge, and abilities, which may result in improved employee performance and service delivery. However, care needs to be taken, especially in weak internal cultures, where managers are not dependent on external coaches (Garvey et al., 2017; Mabope, 2018) and mentors.

Mentoring relationships occur within a constellation of formal mentors, informal mentors, peer mentors, supervisory mentors, and other developmental relationships within and outside the workplace (Ragins, 2016). Mentoring relationships are projected to deliver exceptional results that advance employees, enhance competence, and propel careers (Lapointe & Vandenberghe, 2017). Mabope (2018) perceives “mentoring as a popular mechanism to develop a talent pool of employees and transfer essential job-related skills, behaviors, and attitudes.” In the same vein, Salter (2014) highlights that the potential for the transferability of skills from mentoring and coaching programs is under-researched.

A theory by Garvey et al. (2017) proposed that coaching and mentoring were training and development strategies that could be used to enhance employee performance, knowledge, and nurture skills. Similarly, Coetzee et al. (2013) noted that coaching underscores the relationship between a manager and an individual employee. Mentoring refers to a relationship in which an expert in the field gives guidance, advice, and friendship to a younger, less experienced employee. The coaching and mentoring strategy aims to develop and enhance employee performance. For instance, the municipality may allocate mentors and coaches to employees who underperform to improve performance and overall productivity.

Training and development initiatives are vital for improving employee performance. According to Pawirosumarto et al. (2017), employee performance entails creativity, innovation, commitment, and the single result of an employee’s work. Hee et al. (2019) found that formal and informal training that focuses on basic skills and management skills development improves employee performance. Training and development require assessment tools to identify organizational and individual development areas. Without proper assessment strategies and the ability to predict employee competencies through performance appraisals, organizations may become unclear about necessary competencies (Hussein, 2019). By implementing assessment strategies and processes correctly, organizations ought to measure critical competencies and take steps to address areas that need development. In addition, practical training and development should increase employee job performance through performance appraisal and management to enable employees to develop the required knowledge and skills.

DeNisi and Murphy (2017) stated that performance management involves various activities, policies, procedures, and interventions established to help employees improve performance. Performance appraisal is the primary step during the performance management process, which includes feedback, goal-setting, and training, as well as reward systems. Performance management is at a turning point with scrutiny and questioning by scholars for being too one-sided, a waste of time, and damaging relationships between managers and subordinates (Moynihan, 2008; Van Dooren et al., 2010; Lawler, 2012; Mackenzie et al., 2019).

Voom et al. (2020) highlighted the difficulty of measuring and monitoring performance in the public sector compared to the private sector since public goals are complex to quantify, and the public sector operates differently from competitive environments. Moreover, human resource departments need assurance that “performance assessment techniques are aimed at identifying employee strengths and weaknesses to execute sustainable corrective measures, when necessary” (Mone & London, 2018). In addition, budget and planning cycles need some consideration when assessing development programs. Kariuki and Reddy (2019)

posited that performance agreements should be developed timeously and investigated and corrected for poor performance.

Performance management discovers the reasons for underperformance as well as suggests ways to improve performance (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017). Receiving feedback about performance increases the motivation to perform better for future performance (Aguinis, 2019). In addition, proper performance management can assist the municipality in improving the quality of service delivery, as this process may be conducted annually. However, the poor implementation of performance management systems may lead to decreased motivation, including the feeling that superior performance is not translated into meaningful tangibles such as increases in pay, promotion, and rewards for personal recognition.

Involving lower-level management in decision-making processes increases employee job satisfaction. In addition, it benefits the municipality by retaining talented and experienced individuals who will be able to deliver coaching and mentoring (on-the-job training) to employees. Furthermore, decentralization is based on the principle of sub-solidarity. In this rule, the provision, production, and delivery of services are devolved to local structures that comply with the requirements and needs of the citizens. Kamara et al. (2017) argue that “decentralized local governance contributes to development to promote participatory development strategies and the establishment of policies for local needs.”

Pradeep (2011) highlights that the decentralization of service delivery functions is widely practiced worldwide, especially in local government structures, and is most recommended for local municipalities. Decentralization is an organization and management philosophy that moves decision-making away from centralized control (higher-level managers) and closer to middle or lower-level managers (Plunket et al., 2008). This approach lets employees know what is expected of them and fosters a smooth provision of services to the public. Furthermore, decentralized authority enables management to make appropriate decisions to run the organization smoothly. Lastly, employees are empowered and involved in the company's decision-making.

According to Pradeep (2011), various public service delivery models can be adopted, namely the direct service delivery model, privatization service delivery model, decentralized service delivery model, and alternative service delivery model. The direct service delivery model refers to when the government assumes full responsibility and accountability in providing services, either directly operating from headquarters or through de-concentrated line agencies. On the other hand, in the privatization service delivery model, the central government delivers public services to private companies' ownership and control (Bauer & Markmann, 2016). In this case, the government has no responsibility or control over distributed services except for monitoring and enforcing the company's compliance with legal codes.

Govender (2016) argues that service delivery comprises multiple networks and organizations that provide services and products to the masses. The South African Constitution (1996) purports that the objectives of municipalities include the provision of essential services sustainably. Municipalities are the primary agents of service delivery to communities through the prioritization of Integrated Development Planning (Koma, 2010). The quality of service depends on the skills, knowledge, abilities, and experience the human resources possess. Quality creates a complex relationship of interactions and interdependencies between service delivery and training interventions. Employee training and development through coaching and mentoring initiatives can result in improved employee performance, ultimately resulting in high quality of service delivery. Hence, the study aims to investigate whether coaching and mentoring can train employees to perform duties that deliver services to communities. The proposed hypotheses are:

H_1 : *Trained and developed employees are more likely to improve performance.*

H_{1a} : *Coached and mentored employees are more likely to increase performance.*

H_{1b} : *Employees who lack coaching and mentoring are less likely to enhance performance.*

H_2 : *Trained and developed employees are more likely to enhance service delivery.*

2. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a cross-sectional quantitative research design. Data from sample respondents were collected using a closed-ended structured questionnaire. The quantitative approach enabled the paper to test the hypothesized relationships between training and development, employee performance, and service delivery. As shown in Table 1, the target population comprised 20 managers, 132 administrative employees, and 113 general workers at a selected municipality in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. A sample of 12 managers, 77 administrative employees, and 66 general workers was selected using a stratified sampling technique, resulting in 155 respondents. Of the envisaged 155 respondents, only 115 participated and returned the questionnaire, which translated into a 74% response rate.

Table 1. Target population and sample distribution

Job title	Target population	Stratified sample
General Managers	20	12
General Assistants	113	66
Administrative Staff	132	77
Totals	265	155

The collected quantitative data were analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics. The reliability of the study was achieved by calculating Cronbach's Alpha coefficients (Table 2).

Table 2. Questionnaire reliability scores

Variable	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Training and development	15	0.810
Employee performance	15	0.694
Service delivery	15	0.689
Overall	45	0.845

3. RESULTS

The results sections described the statistical procedures and results of the study. Demographic data of respondents was represented through frequencies and percentages. Correlations and chi-square scores were obtained to examine relationships between training and development, employee performance and service delivery. Tables were used

to illustrate the results of the study and whether hypothesis were accepted or rejected.

Table 3. Frequencies and percentages of education levels of respondents

Highest level of education		
Level of education	Frequency	%
Matric/Certificate	36	31.3
Diploma/Bachelor's degree	44	38.2
Honors degree/Bachelor of technology	34	29.6
Masters	1	0.9
Total	115	100

Note: n = 115.

The gender profile of respondents showed more female respondents (56.5%) than males (43.5%). Most respondents had between 1 to 5 years of service (44.3%), while some reported having more than ten years of service (22.6%). For the age category, the majority of respondents were aged between 31 to 40 years (51.31%), and the lowest number was represented by a few respondents aged between 20-25 years (3.47%). Regarding job positions, management constituted 11.43%, administration constituted 45.21%, and general assistant positions constituted 43.48%. As illustrated in Table 3, for academic qualifications, most respondents were degree or diploma holders (38.3%), followed by matric holders (31.3%), while only 0.9% of respondents possessed a Master's degree.

Table 4. Association between training and development and employee performance

Variable	Training and development			Number of valid cases
	Beta coefficient	T value	p-value	
Employee performance	0.672	9.656	0.000	155

A correlation test was conducted on hypothesis one to measure the relationship between training and development and employee performance. Table 4 showed an association between training and development and employee performance. The beta test was at 0.672 with a p-value of 0.000, which showed a significant positive relationship between training and development and employee performance. The result meant that the training and development construct explained up to 44.7% of the variance in employee performance. Hence, hypothesis one was accepted.

Table 5. Relationship between coaching, mentoring, and employee performance

Test	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) (P-value)
Kendall's tau_b	0.349	1.000	0.000
Spearman's rho	0.383	1.000	0.000
Pearson's Chi-Square test	0.395	1	0.000
Number of Valid Cases		115	

Note: Pearson Chi-Square = 0.000, Cut-off parameter: ($p < 0.05$).

Correlation and chi-square tests found a positive relationship between coaching, mentoring, and employee performance. The relationship between coaching and mentoring, as well as employee performance, is depicted in Table 5. The results for the correlation coefficient were ($p < 0.01$); $p = 0.000$ and showed that coaching and mentoring positively affected employee performance. In addition, the results showed a statistically significant relationship between coaching and employee performance ($p = 0.000$). Therefore, hypothesis one (a) and hypothesis one (b) were both accepted.

Table 6. Association between training and development and service delivery

Variable	Training and development			Number of valid cases
	Beta coefficient	T value	p-value	
Service delivery	0.271	2.997	0.002	155

A chi-square correlation test was conducted to assess the association between training and development and service delivery. The predictive effect of training development on service delivery was presented in Table 6 through a path regression analysis. The beta value indicated the impact and direction of the relationship, while the p-value estimated the significance of the predictive effect. Therefore, training and development had a positive ($\beta = 0.271$) and statistically significant ($p = 0.002$) impact on service delivery. Hence, hypothesis two was accepted.

4. DISCUSSION

The study examined whether training and development initiatives of coaching and mentoring could enhance employee performance and service

delivery. The study found that training and development were linked to employee performance. This finding is consistent with Hee et al. (2019) and Jubek et al. (2019), who revealed a similar positive relationship. Therefore, quality training and development could result in improved employee performance. In the same vein, Tshishonga (2021) acknowledged that training and development and support programs strengthened and enhanced the employees' capacity to perform. Hence, relevant training and development could transform local government to be responsive, accountable, efficient, and effective. Most respondents received training and development opportunities and were monitored as was the case in Gusnadi and Hermawan (2020). They acknowledged that providing and monitoring training and development played a pivotal role in identifying skill and development gaps for training.

Furthermore, the study found that coaching and mentoring were associated with employee performance. This finding agrees with Grosbeck (2014) and Mabope (2018), who noted that coaching, mentoring, and regular feedback ought to be used as a strategy for developing and managing talent toward positive work behaviors. Voom et al. (2020) describe the difficulty of measuring and monitoring performance in the public sector compared to the private sector since public goals are complex to quantify compared to private sector goals. Additionally, Hussein (2019) reported that effective mentoring and coaching would increase workers' job performance and develop specific knowledge and skills. Moreover, coaching and mentoring played a critical role in maintaining an effective and efficient quality of service delivery (Tabassi et al., 2011).

Finally, the study found a positive relationship between training and development and service delivery. Training and development programs enhance employee capabilities, skills, and performance, as supported by Mehlappe (2017). Similarly, Hee et al. (2019) agree with Fuente and Bartram (2018) that formal and informal employee training activities and programs will ultimately give rise to improved service delivery. The prevalence of corruption, financial mismanagement, and the inadequate provision of essential services by the selected municipality was supported by Mpfu and

Hlatywayo (2015), necessitating a need for relevant employee training and development initiatives. In the same vein, Ngumbela et al. (2019) noted that corruption, lack of accountability and transparency, and maladministration were endemic in local municipalities in the developing world and have negatively affected the efficient and effective provision of essential services.

CONCLUSION

The study examined whether training and development initiatives could improve employee performance and service delivery. Since limited studies have been conducted in South African municipalities, the study contributed to theory and practice on training and development, employee performance, and service delivery.

The paper found a significant relationship between training and development and employee performance. In addition, the study found a relationship between coaching and mentoring as well as employee performance. The findings further revealed a positive association between training and development and service delivery. Therefore, it is recommended that the human resource department continuously revise and update its employee policy to ensure that training and development investments equip employees with the required skills and competencies. It is also recommended that the human resource department continuously conduct an analysis of training needs to identify the required training for employees. In addition, it is recommended that the human resource department provides coaching and mentoring for employees to transfer knowledge, skills, and abilities.

The human resource department should implement a well-structured performance management system to help in the identification of gaps for training and development and enhance employee performance and service delivery. Since the study was conducted at a selected municipality in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, an additional limitation is adopting a quantitative methodology that investigated causal relationships. Since this study could not provide a qualitative approach, future studies may adopt a qualitative or mixed-method research design to compare the influence of training and development on service delivery.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization: Khuselwa Nama.

Funding acquisition: Baphiwe Daweti, Melanie Lourens.

Investigation: Khuselwa Nama, Baphiwe Daweti, Tatenda Chikukwa.

Methodology: Khuselwa Nama, Baphiwe Daweti, Melanie Lourens.

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Writing – review & editing: Khuselwa Nama, Tatenda Chikukwa, Baphiwe Daweti, Melanie Lourens.

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