

COLLABORATIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS FOR PUBLIC SERVICE TRAINING

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Abstract

This article notes significant collaborations and partnerships adopted as training strategies applied for improving national skill development. The discourse followed here critically different roles and functions of structures such as public agencies, academic institutions, private sector and non-governmental training providers regulated by law. Scholars in various fields noted benefits and challenges of collaborative management and partnerships in training and skills development that enhance effective resources management, facilitation and participation of stakeholders in various organisations. Using a qualitative approach, this theoretical article argues that academics played a significant role in collaborating with policy-makers to up-skill the civil force. Even though, there are numerous actors at multi-level governance with diverse training needs and interests, there are still gaps in the model adopted by government to provide training of public officials in South Africa. Therefore it is recommended that the Government through the National School of Government should monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of these collaborations and partnerships to provide continuous improvement.

Keywords: Collective Management, Consultancy, Networks, Training, Skills Development, Stakeholders

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the advent of democracy in South Africa, the government has been criticised for poor performance of public officials due to lack of capacity and professionalism. Despite warnings and reminder for government to support the appointed public officials through training and skill development, the situation was not well managed and monitored (Franks, 2014: 50). Instead, delays resulted to daunting public service challenges emanating from the complex environment in which they function, and brought a variety of public service delivery challenges. The new Government of National Unity (GNU) had to re-direct the political structures into new forms of governance that will prepare newly appointed officials to govern. The restructuring of public service and the innovative ideas of the new public management (NPM) increased the need for the improvement of public service performance through public-private partnerships. There is an assertion that collaborative public management can be adopted by Government to improve its performance by minimising working with other public employees and including more partners and collaborators (Goldsmith and Eggers, 2005).

The move to adopt collaborative public management (CPM) and partnerships by various leaders provide grounds for some scholars to align collaborative training with accountability while providing services and goods to communities (McGuire 2006). The current debates about the public sector approach to training and skills development has highlighted the need for a learning

society focusing on professional training that will produce competencies to benefit both the individual public official and the organisation (Van der Westhuizen and Wessels, 2011). As institutions of higher learning are expected to respond to the needs of the public by aligning their curriculum for learning programmes with national goals, there seems to be a natural potential synergy between academic institutions and public agencies like the National School of Government (NSG).

Collaborative training is perceived as one of the strategies that can advance the performance level of public service through public-private partnership, twinning, outsourcing and issue networks (Miles and Trot, 2005). Goldsmith and Eggers (2004) posit that the society can harness changes that resulted from collaborative management while being interdependent to government and other organisations that provide services. The use of multi-stakeholders in decision-making in various public agencies have been lauded for being effective, efficient enhance equity (Buffardi, Cabello and Garcia, 2010). The current training of public service has been conducted by the National School of Government (NSG), the Sectoral Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), private service providers and the country's universities. In view of their experience and expertise in teaching and learning, universities are important training providers. These organisations are required to respond to regional and national needs in order to keep up with the public service development agenda and contribute to the development of the economy in South Africa. The policy developments such as the National Skills Development Strategy (1994) compel government institutions and other stakeholders to

respond to training needs in the public sector while also implementing the transformation agenda on equity democracy. This article will assess the effectiveness of collaborative public management in training and skills development in South Africa; by providing the problem background, theoretical framework, research methodology, training structures, discussion and recommendations.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM

This article seeks to assess the effectiveness of collaborations and partnership in public service training. The workplace in South Africa is rapidly transforming due to changes in value systems, increased local and international competitiveness, emerging technology, participative management, and the changing socio-economic environment. The current economy also dictates the kinds of supply and demand for skills needed to be absorbed by the economy; hence these are compelling reasons why institutions of higher learning in South Africa should invest in human resource training and development (HRD). South Africa is challenged with skills gaps, with an ageing skill force (Kiley, Botha and Truman, 2009:4). According to Wessels (1999) the increasing demand for high-level skills poses doubts about the current education, knowledge and skills offered by universities.

The current challenges faced by universities is to produce graduates that can be absorbed by the industry and possess relevant and credible professions and qualifications with competencies needed by the public sector and the industry. The Government is currently experiencing a severe backlog in providing training to public servants. It is alleged that training matters in South Africa are still associated with the legacy of the apartheid regime and the current political patronage (NSG, 2013). Maphunye (2009) also agree that training and human resources development standards in Africa and South Africa are low as compared to some parts of the world.

Training provision in South Africa is regarded as a lucrative business by service providers, hence it is difficult to manage the training structures effectively. However, there have been some complaints from institutions regarding the poor quality, lack of accountability and less compliance to supply-chain regulations by various training providers (De Wet, 2010:20). This paper argue that collaboration in training can yield better management of training structures and organisations involved in providing public service training, there will be a continuing culture of ineffective training and loss of money in government institutions. According to Miles and Trott (2011) government can insist on a collaborative management approach by leading in facilitating training. It is also imperative for Government to enter into contractual agreements and memoranda of understanding by holding collaborators and partners accountable for their actions while providing training.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This article is a theoretical paper, that has used secondary data drawn from various accredited

journals indexed by search engines such as ProQuest, Sabinet, Google scholar, Elsevier, Wiley online library and government agencies websites. Referred accredited articles are drawn from knowledge areas of public administration, human resources management, skills development and management of training. While these search engines accelerate identification of relevant journals with articles related to the title, scanning of a journal table of contents has been a useful way to pinpoint others not caught by key words sieve. The fundamental question asked here is 'to what extent are collaborations and partnerships are effective in the training of public managers. The question therefore is whether the present training model in South Africa is necessary or even particularly desirable for improving the performance of public agencies. The NPM model and collaborative management influences the epistemological discourse that reflects on the current training model in South Africa. There is an assumption that proper monitoring of collaborations and partnerships in training can improve the performance of public officials when they discharge their duties for the public good.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to establish whether the collaborative efforts of training are effective or not, this article maps out collaborations and partnerships in training through literature review. The contribution of literature to this study is in three folds; it focuses on the theories that informs this study, training structures, practitioners and academic interface, discussions and conclusion.

4.1. Theoretical Framework

4.1.1. The New Public Management

The increasing popularity of the NPM in diverse countries has resulted to early initiatives on skills development and training provision in the public sector. The NPM model which informed this article has emerged as a radical challenge to inefficient public services (Denhardt, 2003). The NPM sought to introduce result-oriented and performance-related operating principles to keep bureaucracy lean and mean (Williams, Rayner and Allinson 2012). On the other hand, the NPM, which sought to palliate old public management (OPM) accountability deficits through the introduction of market-based mechanisms, considered a 'shorter' and more reliable route than the 'long route' of democratic accountability (Chipkin and Lipietz 2012).

Advocates of NPM, Osborne and Gaebler (1992) sort to present a paradigm shift to re-invent the wheel from the New Deal paradigm of the 1930s to the 1960s toward the "entrepreneurial government" model which advocated for efficiency in public service. Furthermore, NPM implied that government should replace the in-house arrangement by private service providers and partnership. The notion of efficiency was diffused to various government machinery world-wide and gained acceptance in both theory and in practice by civil servants. In South Africa as well, the ANC led government adopted the principles of NPM to restructure the

South African public service and dismantled the former apartheid structures of governance.

The NPM is not a piece-meal approach; hence it is labelled as having a range of practices, policies and theories rather than providing a coherent theoretical model (Rayner and Allinson, 2012). In short, the NPM minimise the role of the state, since the difference between the public and private sector has become blurred. The government has relieved itself from the burden of public personnel provision, by contracting out and privatising some of the public services. Arrangements such public and private partnerships (PPP) and collaborations were introduced to provide services such as skills development and training. Raising the country's skills profile is in two folds; to address the immediate skills gaps, and longer solutions of addressing the structural imbalances in the labour market (Botha, Kiley & Truman, 2009).

4.1.2. Collaborative Management

Collaborative management is perceived as the process of facilitating training and co-operating with various actors in order to remedy the problems that cannot be solved or solved easily by a single organisation (McGuire 2006). Public managers are assumed to be among the leading stakeholders in collaborative governance, without necessarily directing the collaborative efforts, but are still accountable for public welfare where public good or service is provided. Government cannot address all the existing problems alone, especially issues such as disaster management, poverty alleviation, climate change and human development. However, the notion of collaboration and partnerships emerged from the principles of NPM in regard to invitation of other stakeholders to participate in the transformation of public service. Collaborative governance fits very well with skills development and the provision of training in the public sector.

Pressman and Wildasky (1984) were cautious about the multiplicity of actors involved in policy implementation; their concern was that too many actors can stifle the progress of shared administration for the public good. They argued that different actors would have different interests that might not yield better results for the programme or the effort of improving government performance. Vangen (2012) contends that it is imperative to understand the way collaborative efforts may provide value when diverse groups are accepted in public-sector organisations. This view also implies that partners are important in collaboration efforts, and vital for the effective delivery of partnerships for sustainable development. Miles and Trott (2011) consider the following principles for making collaboration work:

- Hold partners to account and make sure that they are be liable for their actions.
- Resolve new ways of thinking instead of sticking to the old ways.
- Build political backing.
- Appreciate service users' perspectives.

The above-mentioned principles make sense and can yield better results when adhered to. If these principles are adhered to, collaborative efforts can be successful through bringing about holistic services rather than fragmented ones.

Increasingly, collaborations and partnerships are becoming a feature of the landscape of public management in government agencies depending on the nature of services offered between partners, so does the range, size and purpose of collaboration and partnership. Agranoff (2006:56) argues that the focus of public management collaboration involves networks that go beyond studies of informal and intra-organisational networking among individuals to include multi-level governance resulting from intergovernmental and extra-governmental entities. NGO-government partnerships also come very close to collaborative governance in which public agencies may engage in partnerships with civil society and NGOs in what has been termed collaborative governance.

Partnership is understood as consisting of components of a large puzzle, rather than as stand-alone approaches in government organisations (McGuire, 2006). McGuire (2010) asserts that partnerships may be effective under certain conditions, but they need to be approached in an incremental fashion as an integral part in a broader context. Partnerships are common in practices of specialisation, where experts understand their interests as common. However, McGuire (2010) warns against a standardisation process, when experts and professional managers reduce accountability to local beneficiaries and marginalise their participation. However, there is potential for regulating training through effective partnerships and collaborations between academics and practitioners that, developing open dialogues and discourses for a better decision-making. It should also be noted that partnerships between practitioners and highly specialised academics can result in knowledge externalisation (Kolk, 2014). Austin and Seitanidi (2015) are also sceptical of partnerships based on the misunderstandings of partnerships; misallocation of costs and benefits; mismatches of power; lack of complementary skills, resources, and effective decision-making styles; and mismatching of time scales and mistrust. It is therefore suggested that partnerships should be managed and regulated through policies and agreements that are legally binding to avoid abuse and corruption by partners. In the following section an account is given of training provision in the South African public sector.

4.2. Collaborative structures

Collaborative training and partnerships occurs in different levels of the government between national, provincial and local, and at horizontal level between different training providers between public agencies, non-governmental sectors and private sectors. However, in broad terms, state, non-governmental and private partnerships and collaborations can be defined as cross sectoral interactions whose purpose is to achieve convergent objectives through the combined efforts of both sets of actors, but where the respective roles and responsibilities of the actors involved remain distinct (McGuire, 2006). The current training system is comprised of structures such as the Sector Education and Training Agencies (21 SETAs), quality monitoring associations such as South African Qualification Authority (SAQA), Department of Higher Education and Training

(DHET) - and in particular the DHET Skills Branch; various national structures such as the National School of Government (NSG), Universities and private service providers.

Training is the way in which the organisation uses a systematic process to modify the knowledge, skill, and behaviour of employees that will enable it to achieve its objectives (Nel et al. 2008). The crucial aims of training are to ensure that all the trainees are given the competency standard test, and also that the standards attained must fit the needs of the organisation. It goes without saying that training is directed towards the empowerment of the workforce that aims at improving the economy. Collaborative training is considered where various organisations are involved in implementing the national skills development strategy and addressing training needs in the public sector. In August 1999 the Minister of Labour launched the Labour Market Skills Development Strategy, a three-year development project funded by the European Union (EU) that immediately boosted the capacity of the government to manage the difficult establishment and implementation phase of the skills development strategy. Furthermore, the culture of the university links with industry has established a multi-context learning portfolios that include the training of industry employees, postgraduate placements in the industry, internships, service learning and adjunct faculty academics.

Early initiatives for human resource development were welcomed when the National Skills Development Strategy (1994) which was launched in support of the human resource development strategy. It focused mainly on the prioritisation and communication of critical skills for sustainable growth and equity, promoting and accelerating sustainable livelihood through skills development (Erasmus, Loedolff, Mda and Nel, 2010). The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) was also established in 1997 to approve quality standards and the certification of qualifications and service standards within the country's national qualifications framework (NQF). The NQF is based on the credit system for achieving learning outcomes for various qualifications approved by the SAQA and the national department of higher education (DHET). All the qualifications-offering institutions are expected to comply with SAQA's requirements for programmes to be accredited and for their unit standards to be registered.

The National Skills Authority established the Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) to develop a sector skills plan and to ensure the implementation of the sectors skills plan by establishing learning programmes, approving annual training reports, and allocating grants in the prescribed manner, mentoring and monitoring education and training providers and workers. (Erasmus et al. 2010). The formation of SETAs as intermediary organisations resulted in the accreditation of training providers and the collapsing of unregistered industry training boards and centres. The evolution of a new learnership system linked to the NQF was characterised by module-based courses with outcomes combining generic and technical skills to replace the old apprenticeship model (Erasmus et al, 2010).

SETAs, Especially the Education Training and Development practices Sector (ETDP), it has to assist with the training and development of employees and while departments are required to allocate at least 1% of their personnel budgets to support skills development, the return on investment does not always appear to be adequate. The ETDP brought higher education (HE) and local government on board through collaborations in providing learnerships. A learnership is a mode of delivering a learning programme that integrates workplace experience with structured learning (Erasmus et al., 2010). Learnerships prepared the apprentice for the world of work, by receiving training in a particular professional work needed by public agents. Local government, public enterprises and private sectors hired few recipients trained by universities and FTEs through SETA funded short courses.

Partnerships and joint efforts of academic research in pursuit of improving public service performance should be noted as advancing towards the improvement of public service performance. Notable, the Winelands Conference, which continues as a biennial conference, was launched in Stellenbosch in 1987 with the theme 'South African Public Administration - Past, Present and Future'. In 1990, the 'Co-ordinating and Consulting Working Conference on the Teaching of Public Administration in South Africa', funded by Liberty Life, facilitated discussion on new forms of public administration teaching (McLennan 2007). These initiatives and the adoption of the New Public Administration principles led to the formation of initiative and the Joint Universities Public Management Education Trust (JUPMET). Later, in 1991, Mount Grace I and II were launched and provided input from academics and practitioners on the new status of public administration. The programme of JUPMET was funded by the European Union to train public managers. It dominated academic consultancy, and gave opportunity only to those departments in public management that were there (Subban and Vyas-Doorgapersad: 2014).

Cameron and Minle (2009) assert that a number of professional bodies were emerging after 2009, when ANC was unbanned and Mandela was released from prison. Prior to that, international scholars through their professional organisations raised serious issues concerning the transformation of the field of Public Administration, particularly on the need for skills development and training in public service. To mention the few, the National American Society in Public Administration (NSPA), the National Forum of Black Public Administrators (NFBPA), the Public Administration Theory Network and the Australian Association of Public Administration have paved a way to follow-up on the discussions relating to change from the New Public Administration (NPA) to the New Public Management (NPM).

In 1990, the old Association of Teachers in public administration (SAIPA) was transformed and gave birth to the South African Association of Public Administration (SAAPAM), with a more representative body, it also was a prelude towards the practitioners and academics interface. The formation of the academic association of public administrators promoted exchange of ideas and needs for training between academics and practitioners (Cameron and Minle, 2009). Later, there

was a formation of the Association of Southern African Schools and Departments of Public Administration and Management (ASSADPAM) in 2001 to promote the interests of academic scholars and researchers in the field of PAM (Cloete, 2008:36–37, ASSADPAM, 2009). However, Mathebula (2013) notes how scholarship in public administration generated new knowledge that altered epistemological stance that triggered the repositioning of public service. Nkomo (1997) as one of the academics who spear-headed the path of professional association formation, alluded on the challenge of advancing human resources in South Africa as based on the understand of country's context of development needs and its global competitiveness. On his inaugural lecture, Nkomo (1997) canvassed for the formation of academic partnerships and collaborations between South African scholars and others abroad in order to import knowledge that will improve the public service performance. Another development was the Harvard/Otis workshop initiated by the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, with funding from Otis Elevator Limited, and trained public management academics and practitioners in case study and other interactive methods of teaching and learning so as to prepare people for the new public service and its challenges (Franks, 2010). These developments strengthened ties and collaboration between academics and practitioners in working together towards public service capacity improvement.

5. EXPOSITION AND FINDINGS

In terms of the principles of Miles and Trott (2011), partners in collaborative efforts must be held accountable and liable for their actions. Collaborative efforts between training structures is loosely arranged since the accountability is acquired through agreements they sign among each other. It is not clear how compliance and understanding of policy requirements affect these structures. However, the shared benefit indicate clearly that these training organisations are aware of clients' needs and are striving towards their satisfaction. Some of the challenges experienced by other public agencies includes budget cuts and non-affordability to procure training for the public officials. However, there are challenges and situations that inhibit collaborations and partnerships to perform effectively. The Public Service Commission (PSC, 2011) assert that the training courses offered by the NSG are not always affordable and as such, departments opted to utilise the services of tertiary institutions which they found credible. Despite various innovative measures to improve performance through training, there were pockets of capacity challenges. However, not all the universities are involved in training, only those located in main cities are able to solicit training funds through their provincial training centres.

During Mbeki administration, a reflection of poor service delivery resulted to an appointment of a FOSAD tasked to review the capacity and organisation of the State, and a report was presented to Cabinet in April (PSC, 2014). Out of proposals made, the emphasis was on the development of capacity for economic planning, recommendations

regarding the political-administrative interface, the establishment of a National Planning Framework, the harmonisation of monitoring and evaluation among coordinating departments (Report on the improvement of performance of public service, 2007).

It has emerged that these collaborative efforts were also not managed well and private service providers were not accountable, there were inconsistencies in appointing officials with the required competencies and capabilities; high turnover of key staff and failure to strategically manage learning and development (NSG, 2013). Notable, if training is effective in improving the skills of employees (specifically senior managers) there should be a positive change in the performance of public officials, especially senior officials. According to the Presidency of South Africa (2013), the 2012/13 assessments of public service show that, whilst some departments made some strides, there is less improvement in the level of compliance with regulatory frameworks and policies, and this correlates with the findings of the Auditor-General. These views implies that more efforts should be channelled towards monitoring and evaluation of collaborations during the implementation of training projects and programmes, with the NSG at the centre of these debates since it is a legitimate government training agency.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This article noted the milestones traversed through collaborations and partnerships that have enhanced training and skills development programmes to improve the expertise and skills of employees in South Africa. Collaborative training may have positive impact on public officials when newly acquired knowledge, skills and behaviors are transferred to their daily work activities, and recognise their existing contextual challenges. It is evident that training provision in the SA public sector have been transformed from its central functioning to a decentralised function that have embraced academics and other key role players. However, training structures are regulated, but still experiencing challenges in providing training for public officials. While participants such as the NSG, higher education, SETAs, non-governmental organisations and service providers seem to be exposed to a well-organised collaborative structure co-ordinated by government, not all the institutions of higher learning are involved. Some institutions were left out during apartheid era, and are still not properly connected to the mainstream of short course and accredited training programmes. It is imperative that monitoring and evaluation takes place. Participants are to be reminded to meet deadlines and use resources such as money, information and time efficiently. Relations between the NSG and universities have potential and the diverse expertise and infrastructure of academics can be harnessed for training and education. Large budgets that are allocated from government in these training programmes can motivate interested parties to facilitate and provide training and skills development in the public service. During collaboration there is interdependence of these

institutions and other stakeholders in view of resources that are needed, such as money, information, time and human resources. Management of the process is challenging due to multi-level governance and diverse interests of stakeholders who could pull in different directions and might be prone to corruption and non-compliance towards supply chain regulations. Notable, diffusion of the resource-based perspective and academic contributions in disciplines such as Public Administration has made important contributions in public service training and development in South Africa.

It is recommended that government should monitor all training participants and their programmes in a more transparent manner that can be communicated to the public. Caution should be taken on the use of consultants and private service providers, especially in their involvement in tender awarding and supply chain. Quality bodies should continuously review and monitor the quality assurance and compliance of those organisations offering formal and non-formal training programmes and unit standards. Training is a lucrative business; therefore all the stakeholders must be represented in the decision-making processes and policy development of training initiatives. Communication with local beneficiaries is vital to avoid their marginalisation in the process. Ethics, professionalism and accountability are important aspects that can enhance credible collaborative training in South Africa. Academics and practitioners in Public Management and Development should be united and take a leading role on collaborating with the NSG and other service providers in facilitating training that contributes to the public agency performance. Government, through the NSG, can set up network managers in each province and manage collaborations through those network managers. It is suggested that further research can be conducted to assess the contribution and impact of various networks in collaborative training.

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