

# Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Staff Development

## ***In-Service Training - Meeting the needs of the knowledge Economy***

### **Introduction**

This paper has been prepared based on observations, interviews conducted and experiences undergone by Mr Alpheas Chipapa Shindi. These experiences and observations span over the following countries: Zimbabwe, Namibia, Uganda, Kenya, Ghana, Kuwait, Afghanistan and Abu Dhabi. During compilation of this paper some representatives from organisations which were interviewed declined to be quoted and for their organisations to be named, while some representatives remained indifferent.

In-service training continues to dog many organisations as they try to figure out how to embark, sustain and improve in-service implementation. Though there is a general agreement that in-service training should be conducted, there are mixed views on how in-service training should be implemented. Some organisations are even calling in-service training different names but the ends and means are the same. Most organisations share the belief that in-service training is a necessity to keep them on their feet and in line with technological advancement as well as the new ways of conducting business. The constant challenge of closing the skills gap has been likened to the dynamism of a changing economy. Economy, in general, is not static. It is always changing with the variations of market demands. Similar demands as in the occur in skills gap as the technological innovations create a knowledge and skills void.

### **Change factor**

Change is the main driver in propelling in-service training. This change is influenced by the technological innovations as well as new ways of conducting business. Technological change inevitably ranks the highest in driving in-service training. Re-engineering and re-organisation are also drivers for in-service training.

Technological innovation came to simplify the otherwise complex and difficult tasks as well as to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of machines. Machines and equipment being used to carry out job tasks are constantly being upgraded, modified, changed and in some cases replaced. The telecoms industry is one such industry with lightening strike changes. Experiences and observations made in Zimbabwe, Namibia, Uganda and Afghanistan have shown that the world is certainly a global village. Communication through voice and data has come through rapid transformation. The transport industry has not been spared by this transformation. Aircrafts, ships, trains, buses, cars, motorcycles and other forms of transportation have gone through modifications and improvements in the last decade. These modifications in the design and efficiency did not necessarily result in making the service personnel redundant but from the observations, there has been some evidence of re-training and re-orientation for adoption and adaptation.

Re-engineering and re-organisation has brought in a fair share on the wave of change. Customers and clients are constantly coming with a barrage of demands and expectations. These demands and expectations have kept the service providers on their toes and on the run to keep their customers and clients satisfied. Unfortunately, the satisfaction is just for a moment before there are other new demands and new expectations. Re-engineering and re-organisation has not necessarily meant the introduction of new machinery and equipment, but has ushered a blending and in some cases streamlining of job activities to make the organisation more efficient and effective. The blending and streamlining has called for some kind of training or orientation for the incumbent, in order to meet the needs of the new dispensation.

### **Selection**

The term selection, under the banner of In-Service Training, stretch from selection of training programmes, selection of training providers including and not limited to selection of personnel to be trained. Choice of training programme is mostly determined by the organisation. Some organisations commission a needs assessment and use the results of such a survey to identify and prioritise the training programmes to be undertaken. Such a survey was once done at Harare Polytechnic, Zimbabwe in the early 1990. The exercise identified and selected lecturers for further training in the USA, United Kingdom, Germany and Canada. A certain hospitality and tourism organisation in Abu Dhabi has a standing arrangement of allowing its employees to identify short-term training programmes in line with their jobs and approved them yearly. In this situation an employee is in charge of their continuous staff development programme.

In some organisations, selection for training is based on the incumbent's skills gap. These skills gap surface during work execution, as the job incumbent discharge their duty. The skills gap might not necessarily be from failure to efficiently perform the task competently but might not be meeting the expected standard. In many interviews, interviewees claim to be able to do many sorts of tasks which they will have difficulty in demonstrating evidence. In the majority of situations, the claim would not be a misrepresentation but a fact that, at the point of assessment to get certification, they would have demonstrated competence. A certain milk processing plant in Zimbabwe trains its technicians on the job as the new machinery is being installed. Training is done by the technicians who install the new machine. Usually the training is two-fold, one for the operators and one for the resident technicians. In this organisation there is no room for training off the job since the organisation considers training to be expensive.

### **Funding**

How much is the cost of training, who pays for the training and who pays personnel while undergoing training? These have been some of the statements flagged by most Human Resources Managers. Generally organisations do not want to invest in training if they have a choice. They claim that training is expensive. However, it is interesting to note that these are the same organisations that want to enjoy from the fruits of well trained personnel.

Organisations always want to employ the best trained and the most experienced personnel, however, this comes with a price. The cost of in-service training is usually borne the employer while in some organisations there a negotiation, since there will be shared benefits after the training. In some situations there are donors who give scholarships, grants and training loans. Harare Polytechnic was a beneficiary of scholarships from the British Council, CIDA and InWent. Lecturers had their tuition and living allowances paid for while they were studying. Early this year, 2011, some ministry officials of the Afghanistan government benefited from a GIZ project on staff development. This staff development initiative saw these government officers acquire new knowledge and skills in German, for their respective work. GIZ paid for this in-service training which was relevant to officers' work.

### **Facilitating in-service training**

Facilitating in-service training requires the skills and the expert knowledge on the body of knowledge of the materials to be trained. Some organisations like a telecommunications and mining organisations in Namibia have training centres for their personnel. They develop training programmes tailored to train new personnel as well as re-fresher programmes. When new products are introduced, personnel are called from the field and are trained on the new technology.

A reputable automotive service and repair organisation in Windhoek, Namibia subcontracts the training and re-training of its automechanics to a training provider. This training provider is always up to date with the market products and their procedures for service and maintenance. A certain Information Technology organisation in Kuwait is always a step ahead most training organisation because it prepares training packages as soon as new software is developed and launched. They use the product launch materials to develop modules which they train at their premises or at the client's venue. They also tailor make in-service training programmes according to clients needs.

### **Certification and accreditation**

Certification can be viewed as the crowning of the training and accreditation as the certification worthiness to be placed on the country's qualification framework. In principle, an incumbent can participate in a number of in-service training which are modularised and have a credits allocated by a qualification authority. These credits can then be accumulated to resulting in a qualification. In this arrangement there can be linkages between in-service training programmes for career progression or career change. There can also be linkages to "formal" training programmes on the National Qualification Framework.

In most countries in-service training programmes are not on qualification framework. In Namibia most in-service training programmes are considered to be in-house and thus their certificates are not accredited by the Namibia Training Authority or Namibia Qualification Authority. A few training providers are now offering accredited modules as part of in-service training. Some IT organisations in Namibia urge that in-service training are dynamic and are responsive to market immediate demands. The "formal" programmes which are on the Qualification Framework require lengthy procedures for consultation, approval and then

finally being implemented. In-service training programmes can be developed and implemented in a very short space of time.

### **Merits and demerits**

In-service training brings with it a number of merits and de-merits. One of the merits of in-service training is the empowerment of the incumbent to carry out the tasks confidently and efficiently. The other, among some, is that the incumbent becomes marketable with the new skills and knowledge. The organisation benefits from motivated personnel as well as improved productivity or service.

Demerits for an incumbent can be from bonding. Some lecturers from Harare Polytechnic, who went for a 2 year staff development to obtain their masters degrees in the United Kingdom and Canada, were bonded to the government of Zimbabwe for 2 years. From the Employer's perspective, the challenge is in keeping production the same with an incumbent away on training or being trained.

### **Parting word**

From my experience I have observed that in-service training is an inescapable reality. It is conducted in different ways and varying durations. It can be called indifferent names but it is the same. Training and re-orientation is a continuous process and because it is a continuous process, training takes place from the cradle to the grave. It is my dream to see organisations big and small, taking a pro-active stance in terms of establishing the infrastructure and putting together the necessary fabric to facilitate in-service training. It is an ill notion to fixate on making assumptions that personnel are always on the cutting edge and operating efficiently without getting further or re-fresher training.

Though technology moves faster than the development of course materials for training, a deliberate attempt to develop training materials to train incumbents on the job should be initiated. Structures and procedures should be put in place to facilitate training for hand-over, when someone leaves the organisation, transfers from one department, is promoted or when there is new technology. Training should be structured and some form of recognition given to the training, no matter how short the training would be. This would serve as evidence of achieved competence to be later used for RPL (recognised prior learning). Qualification authorities should be able to link the acquired competence into some package for a qualification.