



Article

Training and development as a tool for improving basic service delivery; the case of a selected municipality



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 13 February 2014

Accepted 20 October 2015

JEL classification:

001

Keywords:

Employee training and development
Service delivery

Códigos JEL:

001

Palabras clave:

Formación y desarrollo de los empleados
Dotación de servicios

ABSTRACT

Municipal employees have come under fire for poor performance and conduct in their work as some engage in corruption and others are not qualified enough to discharge their duties to the required levels. Employee training and development has become one of the key aspects in improving employee performance in organisations, thus leading to improved organizational performance and growth. The study investigated the relationship between the quality of employee training and development on service delivery in a selected municipality with data collected from 150 employees. The results indicated the need for effective employee training and development systems and processes to achieve improved employee performance thus improved provision of basic services to the communities.

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Formación y desarrollo como herramienta de mejora de la dotación de servicios básicos; el caso de un municipio seleccionado

RESUMEN

Los empleados municipales han sufrido despidos debido al bajo rendimiento de su trabajo, ya que muchos de ellos caen en corrupción y otros no están lo suficientemente calificados para cumplir con sus obligaciones en el nivel requerido. La formación y desarrollo del personal se ha convertido en uno de los aspectos clave para mejorar su desempeño en las organizaciones y lograr el mayor rendimiento y crecimiento de estas. El estudio investigó la relación entre la calidad de la formación y el desarrollo del personal y la dotación de servicios en un municipio seleccionado, recogiendo información de 150 empleados. Los resultados mostraron la necesidad de contar con sistemas y procesos de formación y desarrollo del personal, para el logro de una mejora de su desempeño, lo que redundará en una mejor dotación de servicios básicos a las comunidades.

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1. Background

Poor performance and corruption by the workers of municipalities has been established as one of the major problems in the efficient provision of basic services by municipalities; the performance and conduct of municipal employees needs to be improved so as to improve the provision of basic services to the populous. Stredwick (2005) emphasised that improving an employee's performance and conduct is one, amongst many solutions, towards the

efficient and reliable provision of basic services by municipalities to the public.

Service delivery by local municipal authorities has proven to be a major problem in South Africa. Problems associated with service delivery have been highlighted by the widespread protests that have characterized South African communities (Service delivery Protests, 2011). The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), in reference to the functions and roles of municipalities, highlights that municipalities must structure and manage their administration, budgeting, and planning processes in order to prioritize the basic needs of the community and to promote the social and economic development of it. Thus, the provision of basic services to the masses has proven to be a significant priority of the

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municipalities' charter, including that of the selected municipality in this study. Municipalities are, therefore, faced with the challenge of how best to improve the provision of basic services to their communities.

Stredwick (2005) notes that the most important role in human resources is to help employees improve their performance (through employee training and development) and, by doing so, to improve the performance of the organisation. Employee training and development has become one of the key aspects in improving employee performance in organisations, thus leading to improved organizational performance and growth. Marquardt, Nissley, Ozag, and Taylor (2000) highlight the significance of employee training and development and the subsequent benefits for the organisation when they note that, in future, organisations will depend on well trained employees who will accomplish tasks and successfully operate in the global environment. Kuvaas and Dysvik (2009) add that when organizations offer organizational inducements in the form of developmental opportunities, employees become motivated to expend their efforts in order to benefit the organisation.

The provision of essential services by local municipalities has been in the spotlight for a long period of time, with many municipal employees caught up in the snare. Municipal employees have come under fire for poor performance and conduct in their work as some engage in corruption and others are not qualified enough to discharge their duties to the required levels. This is supported by Burger (2010) who suggests that the many reasons for poor service delivery, rampant corruption, nepotism and the deployment of 'comrades' to positions for which they are not qualified within local government structures, has led to the inefficient provision of basic services to the masses, by municipalities.

The problem of poor service delivery, which is evident in significant levels of dissatisfaction with the lack of delivery of basic municipal services such as running water, electricity and toilets, especially in informal settlements, unemployment (officially at around 23%), high levels of poverty, poor infrastructure and the lack of houses can, to some extent, be solved by the efficiency of municipalities (Burger, 2010). Competent municipalities are those that employ, skilled and qualified managerial and non managerial staff offering efficient and reliable essential services to the masses.

The challenges of poor provision of basic services by local municipalities are complex. However, much of the blame has been uniquely directed at the performance and conduct of the employees and management of these municipalities, which has led to the poor provision of basic services to the communities. The problem lies in the context of how these employees' skills, performance and conduct can be improved in order to improve service delivery. The improvement of employees' skills and performance, through quality employee training and development, will lead to improved performance by municipal employees. This will allow the selected municipality a greater opportunity to provide its residents with efficient and reliable basic services.

2. Objectives

The objectives of the study are:

- To investigate the relationship between the quality of employee training and development on service delivery in the selected municipality.
- To establish recommendations on the importance and use of quality employee training and development strategies and the benefits thereof in the efficient provision of essential basic services, within the selected municipality.

3. Literature review

3.1. Employee training and development

Nisha (2009) notes the need for, and appreciation of employee training and development and contends that it ensures that the organisation functions according to promulgated government regulations and has skilled competent staff, this is supported by Marquardt et al. (2000) who highlight that employee training and development are playing an increasingly important and strategic role in the economic success of the U.S. organizations which recognize that they now operate in a new global economy, an economy that involves the use of advanced technology and increased responsiveness to customer needs. Nutting (2000) adds that employers should develop training or learning paths for employees based on criteria such as their status, title, or job description.

3.2. Service delivery

Palmer (1998) contends that services are described by their distinctive features. These are: intangibility, inseparability, variability (heterogeneity), perishability and the inability to own a service. The above characteristics apply to all services regardless of the type of service offered. Intangibility implies that the services cannot be touched or tested and inseparability means that the time of production and time of consumption are very close, or that these happen simultaneously. Hollensen (2003) explains that variability infers that services are rarely the same because they involve interactions with people.

Lamb (2004) perceive of a service as a result of both human and mechanical effort focused on people or objects. In the context of this study, services refer to the efficient and effective provision of basic services that the selected municipality should provide to its citizens. Matarirano (2005) elaborates by stating that services are deeds, performances or efforts that cannot physically be possessed.

3.3. Methodology

A quantitative approach was adopted, using a survey questionnaire to test hypotheses. The sample of the study consisted of 150 employees. Information was elicited using questionnaires. A pilot study was deemed necessary to ensure operational administration, validity and reliability of the questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was computed to assess internal consistency. The questionnaire for the employees of the selected municipality computed a Cronbach's alpha of 0.824943. ANOVA was used to analyze the data.

4. Empirical results

4.1. Employees' analysis of variance report-one way Anova

There was a significant difference between the mean scores of respondents from the department of water and scientific and those from the department of housing. Following analysis of results in the table below employees from the water and scientific department showed knowledge of municipal management's set employee training and development objectives, in comparison to employees from the housing division (Mean score 3.777778 vs. 2.833333, $c-t = 3.9417$, $df = 90$ and $P = 0.014350^*$).

Employees from the water and scientific services department agreed to the perception that the municipality's Human Resources (HR) department was equipped with enough resources in personnel and finance to administer effective and efficient employee training and development programmes. On the other hand employees

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