

# USING FORMAL ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGIES TO ENSURE A SUSTAINABLE POOL OF MANAGERS

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## ABSTRACT

**H**uman resource development is an important function contributing to a country's growth potential. During periods of transformation, organizations are in particular need of an adequate supply of leaders and managers. In order to ensure the constant supply of qualified and experienced individuals with leadership and management skills, organizations design their own development interventions to suit their needs. Creating a sustainable pool of qualified and experienced managers will facilitate the achievement of equitable representation of designated groups in middle and senior management echelons.

The creation of a sustainable pool of managers has to be guided by an objective assessment of current available management and leadership skills versus future requirements. This assessment should be based on a competency framework, ensuring the effective determination of real needs.

The paper suggests that formalized assessment not only contributes to a more objective evaluation of development programmes, but also will ensure appropriate placement of employees in critical managerial and leadership positions. Creating a pool of sustainable managers would enable the public service to fill their key senior positions with internal employees instead of having to buy external skills. Specific realities will impact of the research including:

- legislative reality impacting on employee composition and profile
- ability of public service to retain qualified employees
- integration of a 'sustainable pools policy' with the human resource function

The paper will investigate the applicability of the proposed policy framework for management development, while focusing on the applicability of formal assessment methodologies to ensure sustainable pools of managers

## INTRODUCTION

People are the most important resource of any organisation. This statement highlights the importance of effective and efficient utilisation of human resources in order to satisfy organisational demands. Human resource development cannot be implemented without ensuring appropriate assessment and evaluation of development efforts and human resource development cannot be guaranteed if programmes and courses are not strategically linked to organisational performance indicators. The following paper investigates the missing link in ensuring successful implementation of management development efforts, namely assessment and evaluation.

Creating a sustainable pool of qualified and experienced managers will facilitate the achievement of equitable representation of designated groups in middle and senior management echelons. Middle managers play a pivotal role in any organisation, but much more in the Public Service since they are responsible and accountable for the effective and efficient utilisation of scarce human, physical and financial resources. They have to interpret, operationalise and evaluate strategic plans and objectives. Middle managers act as the change agents and provide technical expertise in the cost-effective delivery of public services. Jointly, middle and senior managers, have to initiate and develop policy, while keeping in mind the different interests of clients weighed against organisational realities.

## CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS AND TERMS

### Human Resource Management

The management of human resources is not just a clerical function but according to Hilliard & Wissink (1999:1), it should be done professionally. Harris & DeSimone define human resource management as the effective utilisation of employees with the main aim of effectively achieving the goals and strategies of a department. Ulrich (1998:2) maintains that human resource management focuses on improving human resource practices, upgrading human resource professionals and restructuring the human resource departments or units in a department.

In the discussion of human resource management, it is important to the foundation of this research to note that human resource management is defined as the encompassing management function comprising all the different human resource functions, including human resource development and training.

### Human resource development

Human resource development is described as the integrated use of training and development, organisational development and career development to improve individual, group and departmental effectiveness. The focus of training and development is to ensure, identify and help develop the key competencies that enable individuals to perform current and future jobs. The focus of organisational development is to ensure inter- and intra-unit

relationships and to help groups initiate and manage change. Career development is aimed at ensuring and aligning individual career planning and departmental career management processes, in order to help match the individual needs with the needs of a department (Harris & DeSimone 1994:9).

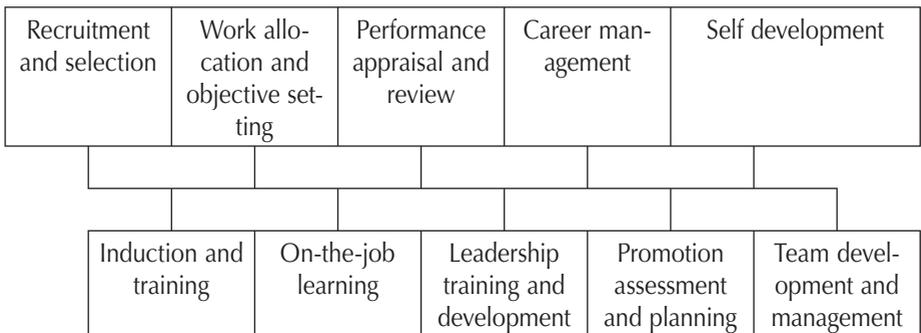
Harrison (1993:300) defines human resource development as the planned learning and development of employees as individuals and as groups to the benefit of a department as well as its employees. Horwitz *et al.* (1996:138) take the concept further by stating that human resource development would not only benefit the individual in his or her job performance, but will also enable and skill them in other social, cultural, intellectual and political roles that society demands from them. Human resource development should be aimed at overcoming labour market segregation by addressing past inequalities based on race, gender and class. Human resource development is an investment and not a cost because departments link their human resource objectives with their overall departmental objectives and strategies.

Public managers have to implement policies that would increase productivity in terms of effective, efficient and responsive delivery of services. The only way to realise this objective, is through placing the appropriate employee in the appropriate position, providing an enabling environment for training and development and ensuring that training and development efforts address departmental training priorities.

## Management development

Management development is aimed at making good managers out of good engineers or teachers or nurses (for instance). In today's competitive global environment, the Public Service needs managers who can develop business, and not just administer it. Margerison (1991:2-3) suggests a continuum for management development that comprises all aspects between recruitment and selection to self-development. The continuum can be illustrated as follows:

**Figure 1: Management development continuum**



Source: Margerison C. 1991. *Making Management Development Work: Achieving Success in the Nineties*. London: McGraw-Hill Book Company. p.2

Management development is meant to improve productivity and performance. It is a learning process applied to all aspects of work from recruitment and selection through to the delivery of a service. Management development is an integrated approach to improving individual, team and organisational performance. Management development will not take place in a coordinated manner if all the different components of the organisational system are not integrated. Management development is a key management function because continuous improvement of all organisational systems and products is a strategic reality for all organisations.

However, this research intends to prove that management development taking place without a proper formal assessment, will not contribute to individual development in an organisational context. Thus, if development takes place, but the development is not properly assessed and evaluated, organisations will have no way of tracking their excellent employees and thus developing a sustainable pool of managers.

## FUNDAMENTALS OF EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

Critten (1995:157-158) states that defining evaluation can be equated with trying to define quality – you can recognise the outcome, but defining it is not an easy task. Evaluation deals with determining the total value of a training course. It does not validate the implementation of a training course in terms of its deliverables. Evaluation draws attention to the judgement about the effect of putting the training objectives into practice. Validation becomes part of evaluation in terms of determining the appropriateness and practical applicability of a chosen training course.

Lewis & Thornhill (1994:25) based on the work of Kennedy & Reid (1986) propose the five levels of evaluation emphasising organisational value, including:

- level 1 – reactions to the training regarding its use, interest and value
- level 2 – learning effected by training
- level 3 – change in job behaviour caused by training
- level 4 – effects on the department/unit
- level 5 – effects on the whole organisation

The purpose of evaluation is three-fold. Firstly, to gather information that would provide a framework for the improvement of future management development initiatives regarding the same development needs (formative role). Secondly, judgements will be made based on the management development initiative's value in terms of its total effects (summative role) and thirdly, a learning role, in order to ensure that challenges identified during the implementation of the management development initiative are not duplicated (Critten 1995:158). Rowe (2001:17-18) calls this double-loop learning, where the emphasis is on determining whether the original objectives are still the objectives in order to review its applicability and implementation. Thus, refocusing on the fundamental questions regarding development – what is it trying to achieve? What is the organisational philosophy behind it? Should it be taking place and at what cost and what value? Rowe (2001:19-22) maintains that the size of a budget usually indicates how important development is

perceived. Development evaluation provides a 'feel good' factor to managers but does not greatly influence future decisions regarding similar development interventions.

Thus, evaluation determines the total value of the development intervention. However, determining the value of development initiatives has not been a central concern with either trainers or trainees. Evaluation is described as the fourth step in the training cycle. Without evaluation, determining appropriate performance standards will not be possible and the reciprocal relationship between performance management and appropriate development initiatives will not be applied.

Evaluation has become synonymous with collecting information about development initiatives that have been implemented. The gathering of information will however, not provide the organisation with an evaluation of the development initiative. The information has to be articulated in order to add value to decisions regarding future development initiatives.

## MOTIVATION FOR THE RESEARCH

**T**he Canadian Centre for Management Development implemented the Accelerated Executive Development Program (AEXDP) in order to address the important challenge of identifying the executives (middle and senior management) with exceptional potential in the Public Service and to advance their development and progress toward the senior management echelon. Since 1997 the AEXDP has been utilised to build new capacity in the federal Public Service of Canada. The AEXDP was necessitated due to various challenges that can also be applied in the current South African Public Service, including (Canadian Centre for Management Development 2004:1):

- limited opportunities for transfer and promotion;
- revolutions in technologies;
- new degrees of interdependence between national and global institutions and mechanisms;
- public relationship with private and civil society organisations; and
- diverse pressures to engage citizens in closer accountability and better service delivery.

In the United Kingdom the Civil Service College established the Civil Service Fast Stream Development Programme aimed at civil servants with a graduate qualification, who are selected on their potential to reach the Senior Civil Service. Recruitment standards for both programmes are very high and the graduates from the programmes are deemed experts in the field and practice of public administration and management (Cabinet Office 2004:1-5). The South African Public Service is facing a challenge in ensuring the appropriate placement and selection of well-trained and skilled senior managers. To this end, the research will contribute in determining the relevance in using formal assessment methodologies in the creation of a sustainable pool of middle and senior managers. Through the implementation of formal assessment methodologies, the management profession could also be realised.

## MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

The creation of a sustainable pool of managers has to be guided by an objective assessment of current available management skills versus future requirements. This assessment should be based on a competency framework, ensuring the effective determination of real needs. Developing the projected skills, take place within an environment influenced by a number of factors, including:

- the changing legal framework such as Employment Equity policies; and
- the changing profile and expectations of employees.

The legal framework affects the work design and employee composition in the Public Service. Employment equity regulations expect specific results in the composition of the workforce, affecting employee morale and thus impacting on service delivery. The ability of the Public Service to retain its trained and competent managers, can be questioned. The changing profile and expectations of employees are based on the general observation that those appointed in supervisory positions expect a rapid growth within a limited space of time. When the expectation is not met, employment opportunities are searched for elsewhere. Thus, the Public Service is plagued with the effects of this trend, namely inefficient service delivery due to a general lack of experience and commitment in key managerial functions.

Success in the development of key leadership and management skills is dependent on specific factors comprising (DPSA 2003:5):

- top management support;
- a credible and objective selection process;
- appropriate administrative processes and systems;
- accelerated development programmes based on clearly defined leadership and management competencies;
- using a combination of different learning approaches such as action learning or experiential learning; and
- integration and alignment of the creation of sustainable pools with existing human resource management and development plans.

The inclusion of a sustainable pool policy requires that specific deliverable be in place before such a policy could be implemented. One of the deliverables is the creation of a competency framework, that does not only exist to influence training initiatives, but also serve as a tool to ensure better recruitment, selection, performance management, career management and human resource planning (DPSA 2003). Thus the sustainable pools policy presupposes that the rest of the human resource functions have been integrated to such an extent that the new policy would almost seem to be a normal extension guaranteeing further growth and development. However, development requires assessing the impact not only on individual performance, but more importantly the contribution to the realisation of organisational strategies. Development should be needs-driven, practical and an opportunity within the performance framework should be created to ensure the application of acquired skills.

## CURRENT ASSESSMENT WITHIN MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT

**T**raditionally the selection of employees for training and development was not based on performance review, while a senior manager was a subjectively chosen person (DPSA 2003). Training and development was provided on the discretion and favour of the managers. In the creation of a sustainable pool of competent managers, selection criteria have to be stringently applied. Selection criteria should be linked to the competency framework of the organisation be objective and assessment results informed by a 360-degree feedback. Selection for development needs to be strategically linked to career management and succession planning while evidence of potential to function at the next level is provided.

This paper suggests that formalised assessment not only contributes to a more objective evaluation of training and development, but will also ensure appropriate placement of employees in critical managerial and leadership positions. Creating a pool of sustainable managers would enable the Public Service to fill their key senior positions with internal employees instead of having to buy external skills. Specific realities will impact of the research including (DPSA 2003):

- legislative reality impacting on employee composition and profile;
- ability of Public Service to retain qualified employees;
- integration of sustainable pools policy with the human resource function; and
- contract senior positions affecting retention and assessment.

Assessments of current management development initiatives are conducted within the broader framework of ensuring a sustainable pool system in the Public Service. A report prepared by PriceWaterhouseCoopers (DPSA 2003) proposes that a coordinating unit or component be established within the DPSA to support participants for middle management accelerated development. The middle management competency framework will form the basis of the Sustainable Pools Scheme, while mentors and coaches will contribute to the development of the middle managers. According to the DPSA (2003) the Sustainable Pools Scheme will have the following features, namely:

- The Foundation – a residential programme designed to introduce the scheme and define the road map for the participants.
- Learning Events – structured residential events in which experts impart the latest in management and leadership knowledge. Top management interacts with participants on matters of service delivery, best practices and government policy and strategy.
- Action Learning Groups – participants assigned to geographically determined action learning groups to undertake specific projects for the duration of the scheme.
- Crosscutting Exchanges – participants placed in other government departments or agencies.
- Mentorship and Coaching – the coordinating unit to establish and maintain a database of individuals willing to serve as mentors and coaches for people on development programmes.

A comparison between traditional management development initiatives and more recent programmes show an increase in the formalisation of specific factors, which contribute to

more strategic and meaningful management development. In the past 20 years the emphases in most organisations have been on identifying, not only that management needs development, but also the content of development initiatives. If one looks at the comparison between selection criteria, learning transfer and assessment, it becomes apparent that the emphasis for development is not only the responsibility of the organisation, but also of the learner, which creates the impression that learners themselves take a more active role in participating in management development. The following table indicates the basic differences between traditional and modern management development initiatives.

**Table 1: A comparison of Management Development Initiatives**

Factors	Traditional Management Development	Modern Management Development
Selection of candidates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subjective and not systematic.</li> <li>• Performance review information not considered.</li> <li>• A favour or reward by supervisor.</li> <li>• Senior manager has subjectively earmarked person for leadership.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Based on objective information.</li> <li>• Linked to organisational competency needs.</li> <li>• Objective and approved by top management.</li> <li>• Assessment and development centre results used to inform selection including 360-degree feedback.</li> <li>• Part of career development and succession management.</li> <li>• Evidence of potential to function at the next level.</li> </ul>
Learning transfer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very little.</li> <li>• Driven by candidate.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporated in the programme through work related projects.</li> <li>• Delegates undertake to resolve specific organisational problems and apply skills being learnt during the programme.</li> <li>• Feedback with mentors and coaches reinforce learning.</li> <li>• Driven by management.</li> </ul>
Post-programme activities and assessment of competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Haphazard or none at all.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentation of projects to management.</li> <li>• Submission of assignment or projects to lecturers/faculty.</li> <li>• Post training performance review results.</li> <li>• Impact on the bottom-line or service delivery.</li> </ul>

*(Source: DPSA. 2003. Extension of the Middle Management Competency Framework: Research for proposals for sustainable pools of middle managers – Report 5. Prepared by PricewaterhouseCoopers, p.16-17).*

## WHY ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION ARE NOT PRIORITIES?

**W**exley & Latham (2002:161-162) and Lewis & Thornhill (1994:26-27) identify reasons why the evaluation of development initiatives is contested. Most often, senior management does not require evaluation. If employees stay abreast of new developments and are able to adapt to changes in the environment, then the development must have served its purpose and a formal evaluation is perceived as being unnecessary. Development results are also not easily quantifiable. Senior managers might not want to indicate that they have no idea as to how to conduct the evaluation of development initiatives and they, thus, ignore the issue and hope that the development serves an organisational purpose.

When evaluation does take place, determining exactly what needs to be evaluated could also be perceived as challenging. Thus, senior management might not know if a cost analysis is sufficient, or if the achievement of organisational objectives should also have been considered. Lewis & Thornhill (1994:26) state that when costs outweigh a possible benefit, it becomes doubtful that evaluation will be undertaken. Evaluation is perceived as being a costly and risky exercise and as such, should not be implemented if it will consume additional resources in an already overextended budget.

It could be argued that the perception exists that money would rather be spent on identifying new development initiatives than on realising that money already spent was wasted and did not add value to the effective and efficient functioning of the organisation. Lewis & Thornhill (1994:26-27) identify a number of other reasons, including:

- the 'act of faith effect' stating that training must be good, irrespective of the outcome;
- that evaluation might point towards the ineffectiveness of development and possibly also the trainers; and
- the development not shown in a positive light and, thus, meaning that a decision taken by a senior manager results in 'political suicide'.

The solution to the barriers to obtaining sound evaluation lies in educating senior management on the importance of evaluation and highlighting the organisational benefits that would be gained through the process. Thus, senior managers need to be taught on how to evaluate, what to evaluate and how to determine the degree to which the training goals and objectives of the organisation have been realised. Evaluation needs to be included in the budget so that the financial allocation is specified from the beginning. Continuous evaluation throughout the course would also alleviate the burden of trying to find the right information after the development initiative has already been implemented. The importance and benefits to be gained from evaluation should not be underestimated and commitment on behalf of senior management, would strengthen the process considerably.

Thus, the concern has been raised that not enough development initiatives are being offered to cope with the need to ensure better performance. The lack of formal policy and guidelines for management development hinders the organisation in terms of trying to align their strategic organisational goals and objectives with development goals and objectives.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The importance of the research coincides with current trends within the South African Public Service. The South African Management and Development Institute (SAMDI) has appointed service providers for the successful provision of development initiatives aimed at emerging and middle management levels. The aims of the programmes are to ensure appropriate succession planning for appropriately trained and equipped middle managers to senior management position.

Only through appropriate evaluation of training efforts can human resource development take place. However, one should consider that development does not take place in a vacuum and that organisational priorities and demands should influence the content and presentation of training programmes. In the implementation of evaluation, the role of the manager cannot be emphasised enough. Managers should understand the importance of the individual within the organisation in order to understand the importance of appropriate human resource development. Evaluation should never be seen as merely an extension of a current development initiative but should be part-and-parcel of the original framework for development implementation and executed in order to ensure successful implementation. Through development an organisation will be able to adapt to environmental demands, become a learning organisation that treats its human resources as providing the competitive edge in maintaining organisational excellence.

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