

NASC's Role in Staff Training and Trainer Development

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Abstract

An efficient and effective administrative machinery is a sine quo non for any economic development programme. Staff training is the obvious means to fulfil such a need. The main aim of this paper, as we perceive it, is to present a picture of a National Level Training Institution like the Nepal Administrative Staff College (NASC) and relate it to public and non-public organizations which consume its services and development opportunities. This paper is split into three main parts, first, Introduction to NASC, second, General Staff Training and finally, Trainer Development. It makes an attempt to generate and promote ideas concerned with the concept, processes, and methods of training (ToT included) and administration.

I. An Introduction to NASC

There is an urgent need for the staff from both the public and private sectors to develop new knowledge, new skills and new attitudes for achieving competence improvement in managerial performance. Training is the best way to fulfil such needs. Hence a special emphasis has been given to staff training elsewhere in the public service.

Training programmes cannot be effectively organized without skilled and competent trainers. Linked into this issue is the development of a professional caliber of trainers. Nowadays, the Nepal Administrative Staff College (NASC) is responsible for the provision of management training along with the training of trainers for both public and non-public staff in order to augment their performance, improving competence.

NASC has often been described inside and outside the country as a National Level Training Institution established to provide both public and non-public sector staff with consultancy services, and a wide range of management training and trainer development opportunities.

While training addresses discreet skills to be applied in the workplace, they have limited uses. Technical and other changes are transforming the occupational

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structure of organizations and technical efficiency on the part of trainers (computer technology and internet services for instance) makes it necessary to upgrade the operations of training organizations for keeping abreast with changing times. Those who have had training need to be retrained again and again. Periodic training is very much like a booster (shot) in the arm of the staff. NASC since its inception in 1982 has provided training and retraining (as on 15 July 2008) for some 21000 officer level staff from different public and private sector organizations. Of the 21000 officer level staff, over 938 are among those who have joined the training for trainers programme. (NASC Annual Reports)

Besides NASC, various ministries and government departments give sectoral training to their staff to equip them with the necessary skills for the skilful performance of their function. For instance the Ministry of Foreign Affairs gives training to orientate its staff better on various diplomatic functions. The Revenue Training Centre offers enrichment programmes in revenue administration to revenue officials. The Local Development Training Centre arranges practical training courses to provide training to local development workers on their related fields. A host of other institutions also run training programmes for improving the job functions of their employees. The nature and pattern of institutional training differs from institution to institution; this is to make sure that the training programmes cater to the particular training needs of the target population.

National Level Human Resource Development Institution

A person occupying a certain position in an organisation may not have all the elements of expertise required for effectively performing the jobs of that position. The need for training arises on account of the requirement to fill the gap between organizationally required competencies and existing levels of knowledge and skills possessed by that person..

General staff training provides trainees with an opportunity to acquire the knowledge to develop the skills and attitudes for the efficient discharge of their responsibilities. Training for trainers, on the other hand, provides trainers an opportunity to develop and extend their capabilities in the application of systematic approaches to training, that is, to specify training needs, to carry out and manage training activities and to access the results of training.

One thing that concerns the top-cadres in the Nepalese Civil Service, veteran policy makers and planners is the fact that present day Nepal is still lacking in a

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National Level Human Resource Development Institution to which mandate has been given to formulate national policy on training and to identify training needs in various fields of national endeavour including the general administration of the government and management of public enterprises. This lapse has adversely impacted staff training all across the country. (National Training Policy 2058)

Training and development are only means to an end, the end being an improvement in management capabilities of public administration. Training and development within the national and public service sectors requires a route-map for their future roles. This along with a number of other features will help ensure its success. The overall national training policy tends to be based on certain guidelines (A proposal for NASC Project 1981). Those would include:

- Training will be an integral part of personnel administration
- Career-development oriented in-service training will be compulsory to all gazetted or equivalent officers. In-service training will also be provided to administrative assistants
- Pre-service training will be compulsory to all class III gazetted level officers
- There will be regular mutual exchange of experienced individuals from administration, education and any other fields required to make the staff training programmes more practical and job oriented
- Problem orientated research, consultancy, and information services will be conducted to bring feedback to the training and also to prepare training materials based on a Nepalese context
- Necessary activities will be undertaken with the objective of motivating the personnels involved in training fields.

Coordination of Training

Various training providers are running public service trainings but they are lacking in quality standards and accountability. The crucial issue at the present time is how best to coordinate and consolidate training, and upgrade its quality for achieving the improvement of skilful performance in a wide range of organizations. It has been the declared policy of the government of Nepal to appoint the National Level Human Resource Development Council as the Statutory Body for the coordination of all training efforts for all public and non-public organizations for the entire country. The creation of the council is yet to be done. Pending the appointment of the Council, a Committee constituted for the special purpose of Article 40 kha (3) of the Nepal Civil Service Act 2049

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(including subsequent amendments) has been designated to coordinate, monitor and evaluate the training efforts across the service.

It may surely be pertinent to mention here that mere representation of NASC in the National Level Human Resource Development Council by its Executive Director is not adequate enough. There is a sound basis for NASC to be the secretariat to such a council for two main reasons. In the first place, the College is blessed with enviable physical resources, secondly the basic policy guiding the activities of the College has been mandated (by its Act) to make training an integral part of the personnel administration and development programmes of the government along with those of public enterprises (Tuladhar, 2007).

It may also be noted in this regard that when the idea to establish the Nepal Administrative Staff College (NASC) was conceived, it was envisaged that its functions would be:

- To formulate an integrated national policy on training
- To coordinate various training programmes at National Level
- To identify training needs
- To conduct trainings, seminars and conferences for civil servants, officials of public enterprises or trainers involved in various kinds of training programmes
- To work as liaison with international institutions on training
- To identify training needs and
- To conduct research on various fields of national endeavour.

Nowadays NASC has a new motto: "..... devoted to making differences positively" and it is committed to be seen as an active force for change to raising the performance quality and output of the services that training organizations all across the country provide, through training development and other management development programmes. Currently the College is executing various training and other programmes to upgrade the skills and knowledge of personnel working in governmental and other organizations in such various areas as leadership development, development administration, project planning and management, human resource management, financial management, strategic management, procurement management and contract administration, social inclusion and gender perspective in development, executive development, district administration, local institution development, trainer development and training management, secretarial skills training etc.

II. General Staff Training

Since management is about solving problems, public employees placed on management training programmes should work on the real task of tackling their complex management problems by learning with and from each other. Active participation in the discussion on real problems encountered by the course members is a primary characteristic of the management training course held by present-day staff training agencies.

One can gain a great deal from the exchange of ideas on training courses. The combined experience and knowledge of the course participants helps them to identify ways of improving their efficiency with the job situation.

Active participation from administrators on a formal training course not only refreshes their expertise but also gives them tested techniques developed through experience. Those participating in an in-service training programme, seminar, or specialist short course bring with them a rich wealth of experience and expertise which they share with one another to the benefit of them all as a whole.

Adult Learning Practice

There are always many ways of looking at any problem. Open discussion by course members and acceptance of each other's viewpoints constitutes a major asset in the learning process. In an attempt to promote open discussion the trainees are brought together to identify some major problems causing them concern, discuss them and come up with some observations and recommendations. They are provoked to do so through syndicate discussions followed by plenary sessions. Through other forms of interactions too the spirit of mutual collaboration is promoted to solve management problems. It is on these lines of participatory style that the training programmes in recent years are conducted in staff training institutions.

Some trainers concern themselves a great deal with the arrangement of the materials which they wish to present. This is certainly important but of limited value if they do not also concern themselves with the minds that are to receive the materials.

The lecture is a "one directional" flow of information from instructor to the group. In this method there is a lack of group activity and participation from individuals and hence can lead to boredom.

It has been found that simply lecturing to administrators on how to be more efficient and effective may be an exercise in futility. They should be given the opportunity to work on the real task of improving efficiency and effectiveness. Adult learners very often resent a lecture or instructional session given in a classroom atmosphere. For these reasons nowadays trainers tend to use minimum of lectures as a training technique in training colleges.

III. Trainer Development

The speed with which a training scheme can develop depends on the availability of competent trainers. The availability of competent trainers is of primary importance. Non-availability of adequately trained trainers presents a serious constraint to the successful conduct of training programmes. Traditional didactic method of instruction is used by many trainers in the training institutions in spite of its ineffectiveness as a training methodology for public servants. Thus there is a great need for sufficient supply of trainers adequately equipped with the modern knowledge of the learning process for the task of training public servants.

In recent years there has been an increasing recognition of the need for skilled trainers to raise the professional credibility of staff training centres. A major factor for the success and failure of a training programme is undoubtedly the trainer.

The quality and capabilities of trainers can best be developed through trainer development schemes. Training for trainers schemes are conducted to equip them with the necessary skills for efficient performance of their training functions. The overall purpose of such training should be to extend their capabilities in the application of systematic approach to training from their actual experience in the training event itself.

In our schools and colleges, where teacher-student relationship is not dialogical, communication is largely one way. The students tend to become passive, untalkative and expect the teachers to do all the work. One painfully obvious result of this is that they develop a habit of thinking that the sole responsibility for learning lies with the teacher. They fail to recognize that they also are capable of directing their own learning if they have the opportunity.

Knowledge was traditionally viewed as a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider know nothing. The

trainees listened to the trainers speaking and their role was simply receptive and passive. The trainers emphasized their own conclusions and conceptualizations.

In the present day training, the trainees are expected to learn with and from each other. Sometimes they take the floor and play leading roles. At other times when others are leading, they play learning roles. All the trainees share in the responsibility of contributing actively to the learning of others. Active and equal participation is intended as a principal characteristic of the present day training programme. The trainers and trainees come to the training colleges not as teachers and pupils but as colleagues coming together in a spirit of mutual collaboration.

The assumption here is that a meaningful learning experience is more likely to occur from doing rather than from talking. The trainer instead of being a transmitter of knowledge has become a resource to the process of self directed enquiry by the learner.

Experimental Training

The practical learning comes from the participant learner himself through direct and first hand experiences. The normal process of learning comprises four modes of experiences, namely, concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation.

The technique of experiential learning is concerned with meaningful learning. This the learner achieves by sorting out facts for himself. An experiential learning approach focuses the attention on personal, interpersonal or group behaviour. The meaning of any experience comes from the learner himself. The technique of experiential learning includes four steps and they are experiencing, sharing or processing, generalizing and applying. The participant first becomes involved in some activity and shares reactions and observations with others. The shared reactions and observations are then integrated so that the dynamics of the activities can be explored and discussed. Thereafter, the underlying principles of the experiences are extracted Participants finally plan applications of the principles derived from the experiences. Here the trainer is a facilitator, counselor or coordinator trying to get participants to discover things for themselves rather than a traditional trainer having them look and listen to him. (Kolb 1976).

Practical involvement in activities provides direct and first hand experience. No amount of explanation will enable a person who has no tasted wine to know what it tastes like. It is only when he tastes wine that he knows. Judged by the standard of learning outcomes, concrete experience is the best of all modes of learning experiences. But other standards also may render other judgements. For example, some of the direct experiences are remote, too costly or not available, so vicarious learning experience becomes a necessity in some cases.

Systematic Training

A fair knowledge about the target group must be acquired before conducting any training for trainers. For this purpose, each participant may be asked to bring along with him written "reflections" on recent training experiences that highlight problems and successes worthy of examination. With the "reflections" thus secured, the participants can be led to think about why they are coming to the training. The subject matter to be covered in the training can grow out of this.

Identification of training needs, the formulation of training objectives, designing training courses, implementing training activities and assessing their effectiveness are five major components of a systematic training approach. In conducting training for trainers, the stress should primarily be on the practical implementation of these five components.

Each of these components will have to be brought home to participants in the training event through their actual involvement by means of work-bench situations. They themselves should consider the areas of greatest concern to them, select the appropriate methods in the learning process and then proceed to implement their learning activities. By learning from the direct experiences of organizing, designing, conducting and assessing the training themselves, participants learn the general principles of the systematic approach to training to be put into practice in their training centres.

IV. Concluding Remarks

Nearly three decades have passed since NASC provided training courses for public servants. Although NASC has the practice of involving users in the follow-up of its training programmes, the impact of training on public performance is still not clear. The efficiency and effectiveness of training providers cannot be evident unless there is marked improvement in the process of service delivery to the people and organisation development as a result of training. No effort, however, seems to have been carried out by the government

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to assess the impact of training on public performance. For this reason this scribe welcomes NASC's view that now is the right time for the government to assess the impact of training i.e. to evaluate the overall progress made by public and non-public sector organizations from training. (NASC Report, 2008) The implementation of the governments' own such initiative will hopefully receive active cooperation from all across the service including course participants, past and present.

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