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# **Strategic manpower planning and development**

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# 6

## **Data management for effective manpower planning**

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### **Introduction**

*Manpower planning* is a concept that involves critical analysis of supply, demand, surplus, shortages, wastage and the utilization of human resources. Its primary goal is the adoption of policy actions and strategies which will not be stressful and/or be a negation of endeavours to balance the equation of supply and demand of manpower required for the socio-economic and political development of a nation. Manpower planning is concerned also with the development of critical human competence, skills, and attitudes, which match occupational, professional, administrative, and technical demands for the national and sectoral development of all the socially desirable activities of a nation. The overriding understanding of this process is the fact that manpower planning has, as its value, the development of skills, concepts, and abilities for the national economic objectives of public and private institutions (Ogunniyi, 1992).

Manpower planning has two phases – planning at the national level (macro) and planning at the organizational level (micro). The two planning functions are, of course, interrelated. The two phases of manpower planning also have one important feature in common. Planning manpower at the organizational level deals with both the rational appraisal of human resources in-flow and out-flow. Both are concerned with estimating demand and supply phenomena. This is a continuous process involving predictions about gross and net analysis of manpower, having taken cognizance of existing manpower stock. Thus,

in general, the common basis between manpower planning at the public level and at the organizational level is the inevitable task of appraising human capital formation, making forecasts about utilization, demands and developing strategy for manpower development and utilization.

The nature of macro planning of manpower at the national level is such that greater attention is given to the aggregate demand phenomenon than is given to manpower demand for private companies. Macro-manpower planning is based on either information given by the public sector or is motivated by feedback promoted by government officials who demand such information from private companies.

In their self-enlightened interests, a number of organizations have established their own systems for manpower planning. This is a personnel function, which is handled by top management, guided by corporate policies and objectives.

Part of the criteria for measuring the efficiency of any organization is the relative ease with which one can access information (data) in the organization. These data include information on the organization itself, on trends and changes, on the personnel, on external relations, and programmes. This information, which is contained in different types of records kept in all departments of the organization, relates to manpower planning. Records ensure easy continuity of administration in times of a change of baton. Records also facilitate personnel management functions if the cardinal personnel principles of need, equity, and democracy must be achieved.

But a survey of several areas of the operational management weaknesses in the local government system indicates that personnel data management, which is a crucial activity in an organization's pursuit of excellence, is a priority problem area. During some surveys, for instance, it was difficult for some local governments to produce instant information on their staff profile. In extreme cases, some local governments did not have desk information on the number of staff on the ground. Embarrassing enough, some staff personal files contained no information on the staff except the appointment letter and annual leave forms. The problem of record keeping assumes further dimension if a look is taken at the Planning, Research and Statistics (PRS) unit. Not only do some PRS units not have adequate information, but some local governments do not have a well-staffed PRS unit at all. Without adequate records, planning, including manpower planning, is cumbersome.

The objective of this paper is, therefore, to address data management problems in the local government system and to demonstrate how its management relates to effective manpower planning.

### **Purpose and types of records/data**

**Purpose** Records, according to Durham (1961), have three purposes, namely:

- To store information about employees and events connected with them and to give an immediate, reliable, and up-to-date picture of each employee. The application form and staff personal data form, for instance, give a detailed history of the employees before they join the organization and other events thereafter.
- To provide statistical information which will form the basis of policy decisions. Records are also useful as a measure of success of the organization's personnel policies. Such statistics include employee strength, labour turnover rate, absence rate, and sickness rate. The health of an organization can be diagnosed where accurate data are kept.
- Forms, which are also records, are used to request, authorize, or assist actions for the standardization of routine administration.

**Types** The types of records and data which an organization keeps will depend on the nature of its functions over what information is really important in achieving its goal and objectives. For example, the personnel department of a typical government concern would, among other things, keep detailed records of the particulars of each member of staff; informatic.. on approved staff strength (required establishment); nominal roll, seniority list, manpower inventory (present job, qualification and skills, experience, age, salary, gender, etc.); conditions of service; pension or superannuating scheme; accommodation; guidelines on personnel issues, etc.

A technical unit would, in addition, keep records such as description of equipment in use, their locations, conditions, and lifespan. Records are kept in written form or through mechanical devices such as the computer and microfilms.

Personnel records and information management involve several processes of which filing is one. Storage and retrieval of files could prove difficult if the wrong type of filing equipment is used.

**Personnel data and manpower planning nexus** Personnel records, according to Opeodu (1992), provide the basic information for manpower policies, plans, and procedures. They enable management to know more about their workforce and the knowledge and skill available, in order to maintain and improve upon their level of performance. Adequate information can, among other things, help keep career officers to:

- base decisions on facts rather than guesswork
- match production schedules with available manpower resources
- assess individual level of performance
- detect and have better control over problems of recruitment, labour turnover, lateness, sickness, accidents, absenteeism, promotion, transfer and disciplinary procedures
- provide essential data for manpower planning and forecasting, education and career training, pay administration, death, safety, and general organizational health
- provide data for rendering returns to the headquarters, state and federal government.

The present is often much more meaningful when we have a better understanding of the past. This can only be made possible with good record keeping containing reliable data.

Data management is the art of preserving essential records accurately in an organization and subsequent speedy retrieval for decision-making. Data management is as important as other resources such as manpower and finance. It is so important that on it depends the success of other management activities such as human resources, finance, and policy-making.

### **Data management problems in the local government**

1 The commonest system in the local government of maintaining, storing, and retrieval of personnel records and information is the use of files in the registries. Most of these registries are usually dingy places, ill-equipped, poorly staffed, and poorly ventilated. The records room is usually neglected and therefore occupies a low position in maintenance priorities. Yet it is supposed to be the nerve centre of the organization.

2 Local governments still employ antiquated methods of record keeping. With the growing number of the workforce and the consequent accumulation of papers, record keeping becomes tedious. Only modern

management techniques, including the provision of appropriate filing equipment, classification, indexing and systemization, can adequately address the increasing records problems

3 Inadequate accommodation: Filing equipment is a serious data management problem in the system. Most local governments do not have steel cabinets to shore up their records. Lack of equipment also hampers the retrieval of records.

4 Most scheduled officers in charge of records are not properly trained on their job. As a result, they perform their duties haphazardly to the detriment of the overall efficiency of the system.

5 Some officers indulge in hoarding needed files. Very often, they extract information from files by removing some pages without leaving a note in such files to denote the action they have taken. If and when data are needed, the files become useless as the information needed has been extracted elsewhere without any record to aid its speedy retrieval. Apart from removing some parts of a file containing vital records, some senior officers lock up files in their inaccessible rooms for reasons related to foul play. At times such files are not recorded in the file movement register.

6 Sometimes, heads of department keep circulars pertaining to their work as private reference documents. As a result, the officers serving under them are not kept abreast of development in the system. Circulars are public documents and should be treated as such.

7 Information in personal files should be complete and wholesome. The situation now is that the information is not only scanty but also inaccurate. Besides the need for full information for the headquarters, in this case, the Local Government Service Commission or the State Primary Education Board (SPEB), as the case may be, is compromised. Since the Commission takes decisions on staff and also makes policies, it is important that all matters and events concerning a member of staff must be reflected in his or her records with the LGSC.

8 Data in the files are to be consumed by people who need them. They should be given to people on a "need to know basis." At times we find staff personal files in the hands of their owners. This unbecoming situation creates problems for record keeping.

9 Some of the files, especially general files, are old and the enclosed documents are unnumbered. Officers avoid these hazardous files only to pick convenient but partial information. This does not make for an incisive analysis of events that would facilitate planning.

**The rule of thumb in effective data management**

The following package serves as a guide and recommendation for effective data management in the local government system. It is to be looked at as the "dos" and "don'ts" of data management.

1 *Location of files* Files should be located in central places – the central records office within an organization. The range of records kept and the uses to which these records are put also determine the convenient location of the personnel information records office. These factors would result in maximum utility of time and energy in use of the central personnel information office. Returns to this office would be made with ease, and cross-checking records would not be difficult. The central records office would, therefore, be able to keep up-to-date records, thereby enhancing efficiency. A 'morning list' of files should also be taken daily by staff of the records unit to make for easy location of files outside the file room.

2 *Staff access to records* The personnel records system must, to a certain extent, be accorded a degree of confidentiality. This implies that no unauthorized person(s) would have access to the records. The non-access is usually maintained by the keeping of records in physically secured rooms and cabinets. As a further safeguard of the confidentiality of information, the staff in the records registry must be thoroughly screened and trained to be honest and responsible workers. A situation where nearly everybody has access to the records must not be allowed. In the same way contractors must not have access to official records. Furthermore, nobody is allowed to make any extract from the records without permission.

3 *Necessary procedures for gathering, recording, retrieving, and disseminating information* The procedures for gathering, recording, retrieving, updating, and disseminating information should be laid down at the design stage so that everyone knows what to do and when and how to do what. However, note should be taken that action on information is generated by schedule officers when they pass down information to the records section or the registry for either recording or updating existing information or for necessary dissemination. Updating information, for example, is either carried out on a notification basis or at fixed intervals. Retrieving information may arise when such information is required to supplement a matter under consideration or when information is required for the sake of adequate knowledge. This is especially the case during



recruitment, selection, training and promotion exercises, or other exercises related to manpower planning.

I feel that the "ideal" situation discussed above is definitely practicable and should be adopted by all local governments in their record management and information storage and retrieval systems. There could be local variations owing to differences in the environment, but local governments should urgently review their record keeping system to make for efficiency. It is a neglected area which could embarrass the system.

I am hesitant to recommend the mechanical Management Information System (MIS) and complete computerization of record keeping for local governments because of the associated disadvantages of costs, inflexibility, lack of adequate manpower, etc. Besides, most local governments do not have electricity supply to sustain such appliances and the necessary networking. However, as time goes on, the local government system should think about computerizing the system for more efficient data management and output. Meanwhile, local governments that can afford microcomputers should acquire and instal them in relevant units, especially in the PRS unit to facilitate the storage and retrieval of information.

### **Conclusion**

The measurement of the efficiency of any information system is the timely answer to inquiries, no matter the volume and frequency of demand on the system. The information system output, like recording the dates of appointments, confirmations, promotions, transfers and so on, is usually on individual files, and inquiries on them can only be up-to-date when information is put into the system correctly and in time.

Constant retraining and practice can strengthen the human mind that is frail. Periodic training of officers handling records is therefore emphasized. In addition, the centrality and sensitivity of data to manpower planning calls for thorough screening of people to be put in charge of records.

Manual systems, made up of files, present particular problems of storage, handling and, above all, retrieval. We can overcome this by taking extra pains to ensure that our records are kept well. An additional way of overcoming the problem is to maintain a separate statistical record covering items of information, which are most commonly required for management decisions or statistical purposes. If this record

is kept in an index or punched cards to facilitate handling and sorting, it can form a good basis for a future computer system.

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