

A CONSIDERATION OF LIBYA'S NATIONAL OIL CORPORATION (NOC) POLICY AND PRACTICE IN RESPECT OF OVERSEAS TRAINING PROGRAMMES

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ABSTRACT: This study considers the overseas computer training approach adopted by Libya's National Oil Corporation and affiliated Companies (NOC). In the face of increasing environmental pressure, managerial work in the entire organisation is becoming more complex, and consequently, due attention must be given to the training programmes provided by the NOC for its various personnel. The study aims, therefore, to identify and analyse current training procedures in the NOC, using a case study approach which will allow an evaluation of the policy and practice over the last ten years, with regard to overseas training. Additionally, it aims to identify criteria for the selection of candidates for overseas computer training programmes, for increasing the number of trainees, operating appropriate selection and preparation methods, monitoring overseas programmes to ensure they meet the needs of the NOC, and the improvement of computer systems at the NOC to enable better organisational and international communication. The results discussed in this study were based on data collected through questionnaires administered on a group of Libyan trainees in the UK.

Keywords - Training, Training needs, Training evaluation, Training selection, Libya.

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Libya is an African country with a total area of 1,760,500 square kilometres, and a coastline that borders the Mediterranean Sea for 1,905 kilometres. In the south, it is bordered by Egypt, Sudan borders the east, Chad and Niger border the south, and Algeria and Tunisia border the west. Tripoli is the capital, and most of the population lives there since this area contains the highly fertile Gefara plain. Libya's oil and gas reserves are located outside the economically productive area, in the Sirte basin principally, and also in the south-west near the border with Algeria. The country's major hydrocarbon reserves are located in the central Hamada Al-Hamra zone, and offshore west of Tripoli, where the large Bouri field has been developed (Allan, 1973). Given the stage of national development, construction and building activity forms one of the important economic sectors in Libya, and as with all other sectors, it experiences a need for skilled computer personnel. The approach towards overseas computer training is, therefore, of great interest, and the strategy adopted by the National Oil Corporation of Libya, and its affiliated companies (NOC) is the topic explored in this research.

2. THE NATIONAL OIL CORPORATION AND AFFILIATED COMPANIES

The NOC was established under Law No. 24/1970 of the National Oil Corporation establishment, in order to replace the General Libyan Petroleum Corporation (Official Journal, 1970). In addition to the authorities of the previous corporation, new ones were delegated to NOC. This enabled it to face the massive and rapid development in

the oil industry in a more flexible manner, and to keep abreast of the changes in this international industry. The NOC was reorganised under a decision taken by the General Secretariat of the General People's Congress, No. 10/1979 741 (The General Department of Law, 1988), in an attempt to enable it to achieve the goals of the development plans in the oil sector. The reorganisation was designed to support the national economy through the increase, management and investment of the oil wealth inside and outside Libya, through its fully-owned companies, or in partnership with others.

The latter performs its duties listed in the laws, and by-laws of its inception, through its fully-owned companies which vary in activity from operating and producing companies, to refining, processing and domestic/international marketing companies, to various service companies. Moreover, the NOC performs some of its activities through partnership with foreign exploration, production and specialised oil service companies (Official Journal, 1986).

2.1 Computer Systems in the Oil Sector

The use of computers, which represents the introduction of highly advanced technology and provides the means for upgrading performance, has been another field of confrontation with the international monopolies, and the NOC have succeeded in defeating the embargo through their efforts and plans, detailed as follows: 1) the maintenance of equipment, 2) the establishment of a modern telecommunication network linking the oil companies to their remote locations, 3) the importation of highly advanced computers from different sources, and 4) the training of a large number of personnel in various aspects of computing such as: analysis, design, programming, operation and maintenance. Training activities in the NOC aim to raise the level of competence and efficiency of the manpower both technically and administratively (NOC, 2006).

2.2 Human Resources

Amongst the producing, processing, marketing, distributing and service companies in the Oil Sector, there are approximately 39,086 employees in 2005. The human resource is considered by the NOC as the most important element in the whole production process. As a result, full attention has been paid to the preparation and implementation of continued and varied educational and training programmes. For example, since 1975 the NOC has prepared a number of training programmes in the discovery, exploration, and maintenance areas of the oil industry. These programmes have aimed to reduce the numbers of overseas employees and replace them by Libyan workers. They have also improved living standards and work conditions for Libyan workers, as well as increasing efficiency and productivity in the oil industry. Overall, the training activities of the NOC aimed to raise the level of competence and efficiency of the manpower both technically and administratively. They have ensured awareness and familiarisation with technological developments; and methods and work systems are applied in the oil industry at an international level (NOC, 2006).

2.3 Overseas Training

As a result of the lack of local training programmes, the NOC seriously began to consider overseas training programmes in 1975, since which time, it has aimed to benefit from any international modern technical training which helps to develop exploitation, operations, and maintenance fields, and thereby improves the oil industry. Because the Libyan industry has been characterised by complicated technology and a management structure which witnessed many changes and constant development, as already indicated, it became important to utilise whatever overseas advanced training opportunities were identified as appropriate, and consequently, many Libyan nationals have benefited from such training programmes in different technical fields.

3. THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The NOC has given priority to training those employees in the technical fields, and although it prepares comprehensive annual training plans to achieve its objectives in this respect, included in which are plans to ensure adequate financing, as can be seen in Table 1 below, the allocations for computer training are still very limited in comparison with other training activities.

Table 1: The Overseas Training Programmes

| Year | Training Programmes Allocations | Total No of Trainees | C. T. Programmes Allocations | No of Trainees | % |
|-------------|--|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------|
| 1991 | 753.000 LD | 1004 | 37.500 LD | 50 | 4.98 |
| 1994 | 8.836.200 LD | 1169 | 491.400 LD | 65 | 5.56 |
| 1999 | 8.788.640 LD | 1094 | 309.680 LD | 39 | 3.56 |
| 2004 | 19.370.883 LD | 1718 | 573.015 LD | 53 | 3 |

(General annual plans)

As already indicated, it is clear from this table that the allocations for computer training programmes, and the numbers of computers used in these companies are low. This is a worrying situation since the NOC covers one of the most important industrial sectors in Libya. Given that the oil industry is the main source of government income from hard currency, the NOC should concentrate on updating the computer systems in all services and activities, and should introduce such systems where they currently do not exist.

There is clearly a deficiency in the investment in computer training programmes, and even where these have been devised and implemented, their effectiveness remains poor because the various departments and other administrative bodies of the NOC are still using old technology, and there are no appropriate computer networks linking them.

Additionally, it is recognised that where there are computer installations, there may be unsuitable recruitment and selection procedures in place which mean that people are asked to work with computers when they do not possess the right skills to enable them to do this effectively. (Khalil, 2004: 11)

This unsatisfactory situation is one of the main motivations for this evaluation of the computer training programmes in the NOC. Consequently, this study paper investigates this state of affairs and attempts to offer practical suggestions to improve the training programmes in the computer departments.

4. TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT IN LIBYAN LEGISLATION

The importance of human resource development in Libya emerged because of its role in facilitating the social and economic development process. People are the target of this process on the one hand, and they are the basic factor in the planning and achievement of its objectives on the other. Developing human resources must be considered as a part of a development programme in order to create employment opportunities for the national manpower, which increases every year. Therefore, intensive efforts are required to prepare, educate and train people by following the best approaches, so that the required quantity and quality of manpower can be prepared at a suitable time. These efforts have been supported by legislation that considers Training Development Programmes as the first career of the manager and the organisation.

In July 1968, Libya, with the help of the UN, established the National Institute of Public Administration, which was the first establishment concerned with Training Development Programmes. Law 41 (1968) identified the objectives, and the activities to be implemented. Through establishing this organisation, Libya started to realise the importance of this activity and, therefore, many laws were issued to define and organise it within the public organisations, for example, Article 1 of Law No. 37 (1973) which was supported by Law No. 97 (1990). These laws stated that: training means preparing, and qualifying individuals by providing them with necessary skills and knowledge, and by altering their attitudes in different activities in order to promote their productivity and to cover quantity and quality shortages which contribute towards achieving the goals of development plans (Al-Zawie, 1991).

Regarding the responsibility for providing training programmes, Libyan legislation defined the management unit, to which employees belong, as having primary responsibility for giving them this opportunity. Law 55 (1976) Article 30 and Law 13 (1981) Article 50 emphasise this requirement, stating that: *“the management unit must give training opportunities to its employees in order to qualify them and enable them to work appropriately, this management unit must train them inside or outside the organisation, according to its abilities and the availability of training opportunities outside the organisation”* (Al-Zawie, 1991, as cited in Agnaia 1996: 36).

It is evident that the Libyan legislation gave important attention to the Training Development Programmes, and in so doing, special attention to investment in human resources. This was made a priority by the establishment of more Management Training Development institutions, and the allocation of more financial support, especially through the 1970s and 1980s.

The speed with which the technological revolution has happened could never have been predicted. In just twenty years, technology has moved on to such an extent that there are now very few areas of our lives that it does not touch. For the most part the effect on the average person has been minimal and has involved little preparation or training, but this could not be more different in the workplace, in which respect Chisholm and Burns (1999: 237) state that *“the rapid pace of technological change*

has highlighted the need for continuous learning to provide a much more flexible workforce for the future".

Moreover, researchers, such as for instance those by Harrison (2000), Reid and Barrington (1997), Mabey et al, (1998), and Stewart (1999), found that many of the reported studies revolve around the importance of the training. These writers all pointed to the significant role of training and some have come to the common-sense conclusion that if an organisation employs adequately trained workers and more importantly, if that organisation implements human resource development policies, which produce adequately trained workers, then not only that company, or the individual worker will benefit, but the country as a whole will reap rewards as it maintains a position where it can compete with any of the other Advanced Industrialised Countries.

5. METHODOLOGY

After a careful review of the literature relating to research methods in social science generally, and in management in particular, it was found that the case study was an appropriate and flexible approach for almost all research designs (Hakim,1987:.61.

Therefore, a case study was chosen to explore the impact of these factors on the computer training programmes in the NOC. The strategy for this research is, therefore, to use a case study of the attitudes of employees and management at the NOC. Furthermore, it includes a questionnaire-survey to evaluate the existing training provision, and to ascertain the general feeling about management attitudes to training and development. This exercise was conducted through the use of two questionnaires, one for managers and one for trainees, both of which were totally confidential and could be completed anonymously as they only required ticks.

With regard to obtaining information from NOC trainees, there are large numbers of such people in the UK following various programmes, and this research required obtaining answers to questions from a representative population of those trainees. In actual fact, the sample used was a group of 50 members of staff who were undertaking training in the UK. Fifty questionnaires were sent to a college in the north west of England, with a request for Libyan nationals who were following training there, to complete the questionnaire. Forty-one (41) questionnaires were completed and returned, constituting 82% of the total. The aim of the questionnaire was to establish the value of the respondents' training programmes, through asking questions regarding the nature of the course, whether the training was related to their jobs, what form of learning took place, and whether any specific training had been provided to help them adjust to the different culture. Additionally, respondents were asked to comment on what benefits they felt they were getting from being trained or developed abroad.

A separate questionnaire was also designed for managers/heads of departments at the NOC to gain an insight into their feelings about the usefulness and effectiveness of training people abroad. This questionnaire which was aimed at those managers and department heads involved in deciding which staff were sent abroad for training, was designed to discover and investigate the selection process, how effective it was for companies to send trainees abroad, and what organisational benefits accrued from such a policy. Respondents were also asked how they evaluated the knowledge or experience that was brought back to the company, and implicitly about the methods used to assess the trainee. Additionally, these departmental heads were asked

questions about their experience when trainees returned from overseas programmes, and specifically about any problems surrounding the retention of these personnel. Finally, the respondents were asked some personal questions, and other questions related to the training process. In total, eight department heads were approached to complete the questionnaire and all of them participated, returning their questionnaires on completion.

6. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

From the investigation of the case study organisation - the NOC – it is clear that a large amount of money is allocated for training overseas, and that although much of this is directed towards computer training, progress in this respect remains slow. This presents a problematic situation for the NOC as the computer usage and implementation needs have increased substantially with advancements in communication, and therefore it is becoming more significant and important in all industrial fields, especially in the oil industry, which is the backbone of Libya's economy. The NOC has recognised that the training of its nationals by organisations in the developed countries such as Great Britain has been important in the effort to develop highly qualified workers able to engage with new technological developments in the sector. It has been acknowledged that following a strategy like this will definitely improve production and the service in this sensitive field.

Internal training usually focuses on the development of basic skills and it can be done by on-the-job or off-the-job training, whereas, external training is often conducted by organisations with the intention of developing workers to perform specific jobs which require a level of expertise that cannot be developed in-house. Certainly, the most important benefit to the NOC of overseas training has been the specialist knowledge that the trainees have acquired and the experience which they have gained from the time spent away. It is important to note that trainees who have received training abroad are in a position to introduce improved working systems because of the new and innovative ideas to which they have been exposed, and are also better able to communicate with other organisations elsewhere in the world because of their improved language skills. These higher levels of academic and theoretical expertise can often not be provided locally (Caruth et al, 1990) and most organisations have a need to bring in fresh blood to prevent stagnation.

However, there is a need for research into the cost benefits and effects of organisations pursuing a policy of sending employees around the globe either on assignments or to train, since this practice has never been greater. As new work practices and the need for greater competitiveness within companies, combines with continuing globalisation, there has been a growing interest in the field of international human resource management, and as Joynt and Morton (1999) state, the human resources of many organisations are simply one of the many resources, which now flow freely across international borders. The Libyan government has issued legislation related to training and development (Law no. 88\1990) that defined the concept of the Libyan administrative development in training. Additionally, there has been the decision of the General Popular Committee for the formation and vocational training no: 128\1991 which defined the government policies towards training in all fields and sectors. Through this decision all sectors must request and establish annual training plans to a target of training from 15% to 20% of their workers. Despite the NOC establishment of annual plans in the period from 1990-2004, a decrease in the

use of the computers is evident, possibly a result of problems that Libya has experienced for the last 15 years with some western countries that possess technology in computer systems, and for this reason a shortcoming has existed during this time (The Reports of the training plans in Libya 1991-2004, translated from the Arabic language). Storey (2001) believes that there are still great shortages in the supply of adequately trained and skilled international managers and as this research shows, the need to acquire or create managers of quality and the policy of sending trainees abroad to attain this quality has become increasingly important to Libya. But this author believes that there are important factors, which must be considered carefully in order for this policy, which promotes the exercise of sending employees abroad for any reason, to be of benefit to everyone concerned. This leads us to the importance of the selection of qualified managers who have sufficient knowledge in the field of human resources management and the ability towards the development of responsibility, and who can follow-up advancements in computer systems, as well as being able to participate effectively in the design of effective training programmes, in the selection of trainees, with in the preparation of the covering budget.

The NOC has tried to compensate for the shortcomings in this respect by providing external training to meet the rapid development in Libya. However, there has been a decrease in the number of graduates inside Libya from universities and specialised upper institutes in the field of computing, and this may be due to the decline in work opportunities in this field. Nevertheless, this does not justify the absence of computer training at the NOC which has become apparent from this research that has revealed that the majority of respondents are qualified (only 7% are not) and despite this, the NOC has not made training in computer systems a big priority. The fact that only small numbers of NOC employees can be sent abroad to train, brings into question the selection process, and, therefore, both the people responsible for sending trainees abroad as well as the trainees themselves, were asked what their perceptions were of how that process operated, in order to clarify the selection procedure. From the responses it is apparent that the managers decide what training is necessary and where it is needed, and then take the next decision of who should be trained.

For the NOC, this question is crucial, because training an employee is expensive and it is important to carefully select who will be trained. Also, training programmes should be designed to consider the ability of the employee to learn the material and to use it effectively, and to make the most efficient use of resources possible. It is also important that employees be motivated by the training experience. Employee failure in the programme is not only damaging to the employee but a waste of money as well. In the light of these observations, selecting the right trainees is important to the success of any training programmes commissioned by the NOC.

Furthermore, the goals of the training programme should relate directly to the needs determined by the assessment process. Course objectives should clearly state what behaviour or skill will be changed as a result of the training and should relate to the mission and strategic plan of the company. Goals should include milestones to help take the employee from where he or she is today, to where the firm wants him or her to be in the future. Setting goals helps to evaluate the training programme and also to motivate employees, and allowing employees to participate in setting those goals increases the probability of success.

It seems that the way in which the NOC trainees are selected is by their managers choosing them on the basis of their existing qualifications, experience and by taking a special examination. However, there are clearly some selections that are made

without any transparent reason, and this seems to be one obstacle, since if the right candidates are not chosen, the training will not actually be designed for them. It is very important for workers that their development should take place continuously because in the information technology field, changes occur rapidly and frequently, and the constant updating of knowledge and skill is necessary to keep abreast of new techniques and know how to get the best out of computer systems.

Table 2 Selection for training/qualification Cross Tabulation

| Qualification | Unqualified | Qualified | Highly qualified |
|-----------------------|--------------------|------------------|-------------------------|
| Pass an external exam | 0 | 100. % | 0 |
| By experience | 8.3% | 75. % | 16.7% |
| By qualification | 0 | 74.1% | 25.9% |
| Other means | 0 | 100. % | 0 |

In this research, it was found that the most of the trainees and managers accepted the importance of training, but that the opportunities for training, and its frequency, were not many. For instance, 61% of all trainees had only had one opportunity to train overseas, and 39% had had no previous training. Of those who had received the chance to learn abroad, 92% of them believed that this opportunity usually came after four years of working with the NOC. Moreover, the figures indicating that 48% of trainees had received one opportunity, and 40% two chances, and those relating to the last time when such training took place (24 months previously), showed that the NOC did not keep up with developments in the field. Clearly, there are reasons for this lack of commitment, and managerial and financial problems were highlighted as possible obstacles in this respect. .

The NOC has many qualified employees, and this fact places it in a good position, but there are some features of its workforce which may well affect any training initiatives overseas, such as for instance, the difficulties encountered by employees in learning the English language. Such a problem can prevent much learning, and indeed it has become clear from the responses rating overseas training programmes, that whilst the majority of employees rated them as good, 27% did not, and this is a large slice of the sample that can not be ignored.

It is interesting that a similar percentage, 29%, indicated that they had received no preparation before embarking upon their overseas training course and it may well be that there is a correlation between lack of preparation and the feeling that the training programme was poor. Clearly, this is an issue worthy of further research.

When the managers were asked about the computer systems used by the companies, there were various responses, with some believing there was a mainframe network, others believing there was a finance network, others a management network, and yet others believing that there were only personal computers.

In the question for managers, relating to the value of overseas training, most insisted that this experience made the employees more active in their jobs and promoted more job satisfaction, with the result that they are more prepared and qualified to deal with the problems which may occur at work. This outcome of training is what makes the training function so important in the well-known industrial and technical countries.

It was also apparent that whilst the NOC sends trainees abroad for both technical and behavioural training, in some programmes there is a concentration on only one of these types of training. This is an issue that should be addressed since behavioural

training can make the difference to whether a skill is performed in a positive or negative way.

In terms of evaluating trainees, most of the managers who answered this question, believed that the trainees should first pass the overseas organisation's pre-qualification examination to enable them to train abroad.

As far as being evaluated by the overseas organisation was concerned, the respondents indicated that most trainees submitted written format tests and some of them said that they had only practice tests, while yet others said that tests took place in both formats. On the same theme, most of the managers felt that trainees should pass the examinations that are held for them, and only few of them believed that it was not important if they passed them or not. Hence, it may be that this test is only for language qualification or as a short activation course. Finally, all managers confirmed that all trainees should be evaluated by questionnaires when they return to the NOC. To sum up, it is clear from the results above that there must be flexibility in order to deal with training issues.

Finally, manpower training and development in the Libyan oil industry aims to raise the level of competence and efficiency of the employees, both technically and administratively. This ensures awareness and familiarisation with technological developments, methods, and work systems applied in the oil industry at an international level. To achieve this goal, training programmes are adopted to meet the diverse requirements in different fields. The computer programmes concentrate on technical aspects that have a direct relationship with the development of techniques of the oil industry.

From the findings based upon the analysis of the data collected from the managers and the employees who were trained in the UK, the following major findings emerge:

- . There is a need for experienced people in the field of manpower training and development in Libya, and in the oil industry in particular.
- . Most companies do not require their new employees to receive orientation training before they start their duties, which suggest that these companies are unaware of the importance of the training and employees may not have sufficient experience to perform their duties in an acceptable way.
- . The match between the training needs and the training possibilities of the oil industry in Libya was far from perfect at the very outset. Today there is still no national education policy in operation for the sector other than the normal imperative requiring the industry skills. This lack of good public educational strategy for the future supply of specialised and well-trained personnel is an impediment to the oil industry's rapid expansion and take-up of the advanced process technology required for its effective operation.
- . There is a need for the oil industry in Libya to respond to the new challenges of the twenty first century by a broad emphasis on training, retraining and developing its employees at all levels to adapt to changes.
- . Rapid technological change drives industries to constantly update and rethink their training strategies. The oil industry in Libya should regularly review and if necessary update its training strategy and policies to meet changed circumstances.
- . Supervisors need to be more aware of their duties to assist their subordinates in developing their careers, improving their work performance and enabling them to accept increased responsibility.

In providing training programmes outside Libya, the industry should look closely at different business practices in order to be able to apply those which are suited to the Libyan environment and business practices, so that training is valued and worth its costs.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the above discussion, it is possible to put forward some recommendations:

1. As the availability of more qualified personnel is crucial for a rational development of Libya's oil resources, the educational system must have the capacity to meet the demand for personnel with higher education and thereby qualify the required personnel for the computer systems and programmes in oil industry employment.
2. Consideration should be given to establishing more capable central units responsible for training and developing Libya's human resources in order that the country can achieve real control of its natural resources, and to enable the NOC to cope with rapid technological change especially in the computer field.
3. Consideration should be given to the specific training needs of the computer systems and programmes in the NOC which are likely to fall in the following main areas:
 - a. Specific skills for the new tasks within the industry's sphere of operation.
 - b. System skills covering information requirements.
 - c. Diagnostic skills for identifying training problems, their causes and their solutions.
 - d. Interpersonal skills for communicating with and motivating others.
 - e. Development of individual workers' aptitudes to equip them for any changing circumstances.

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