

# **RESEARCH REPORT**

## **STAFF DEVELOPMENT POLICIES AND SERVICE DELIVERY IMPROVEMENT IN THE DEPARTMENT OF HOME AFFAIRS**

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# ***ABSTRACT***

Before 2008, the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) received criticism for the poor level of services it provided and was accused of having high levels of corruption. In 2008, the DHA developed and implemented a turnaround strategy to, among others, improve its service delivery. This strategy appears to have been successful as citizens and critics moved from being highly critical of the department, to openly praising it for efficient service delivery. The implementation of skills development initiatives was a significant aspect of the strategy. The introduction of all new systems and technologies was supported by an elaborate and sustained process of building the capacity of the staff.

This research project sought to determine the extent to which managers in the DHA believed that the implementation of staff development policies has contributed to service delivery improvements in the department and to establish what measures were put in place to sustain the implementation thereof. In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants within the department.

This report therefore, present the perceptions or views of the respondents in relation to the role of skills development, wherein they reported that the strategic focus on skills development during the Turnaround Project was the main reason for the successful improvement in the quality of services rendered by the DHA. They further indicated how, through the turnaround process, an environment conducive to the implementation of skills development was created in the department. Some valuable advice on how the implementation of staff development policies can be improved throughout the Public Service was shared by respondents, including how other departments could learn from the DHA experience of having turned itself around from a department declared dysfunctional by the Cape High Court in 2005, to one receiving special mention as a model of good practice in the National Development Plan Vision -2030.

The main lesson learnt from the DHA case study is that effective implementation of staff development policies in the public service can contribute significantly towards service delivery improvement.

# **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

A significant proportion of South Africans are poor and depend on government services for survival (Kotze and Taylor, 2010:201). It is thus important that public servants possess the necessary skills and competencies to deliver on the promises the government has made to deliver high quality public services . The country's Constitution guarantees of these services to citizens.

The need for a new public service driven by the professional ethos of serving the people has been documented, including the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. In order to enable government to actualise its constitutional mandate of creating a better life for all, the South African government envisaged a public service that is guided by the ethos of service of an excellent quality. It envisaged a public service that is committed to effecting training and career development of all its employees.

Staff development policies have been in place since the dawn of democratic rule, however, there are still concerns raised about lack of skills and capacity in state departments, which manifests itself through poor service delivery. The focus of this research therefore, is on how the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) managed to transform itself from being labelled a dysfunctional department (PSC,2008:11) to the one portrayed as a model department of a developmental state in the National Development Plan and being acknowledged through a Public Service Award for excellence in service delivery. This transformation was initiated through a Turnaround Project implemented between 2007 and 2010. The project included, amongst others, an elaborate skills development component. The aim of this study was to explore the views of senior managers in the DHA regarding the role of skills development in the improvement of service

delivery in their department as well as the systems and procedures put in place to ensure the sustainability of skills development-related successes achieved during the Turnaround Project.

## **1.2 BACKGROUND/ CONTEXT**

Upon coming to power in 1994, the democratic South African government envisaged, through the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act No.108 of 1996) a Public Service that is guided by the ethos of service and committed to the provision of service of an excellent quality to the citizens. The Constitution envisages a Public Service that is committed to the effective training and career development of all its employees. The policy framework for such a desired Public Service has been laid down through the promulgation of a number of Regulations, Acts and White Papers such as the:

- Reconstruction and Development Programme of 1994
- White Paper on the Transformation of Public Service of 1995
- White Paper on the Transformation of Public Service Delivery (Batho Pele Principles) of 1997
- White Paper on Public Service Training and Education of 1997
- White Paper on Human Resource Management in the Public Service, 1997
- Skills Development Act of 1998
- HRD Strategy Framework Vision 2015

A golden thread running through virtually all these policy documents is the centrality of education and training as the catalyst towards a transformed Public Service, capable of contributing towards the socio-economic upliftment of the majority of the citizens. There is clear understanding and acknowledgement that

a deliberate and well implemented strategy is required to develop the capacity of Public Service employees to deliver on this mandate. Both the White Paper on Public Service Training and Education and the Public Service Regulation of 1999, envisaged a new system of Public Service training and education that is:

- demand driven, needs based and competency based;
- supportive of work performance and career development for all public servants;
- strategically linked to broader process of transformation, institution building and Human Resource Development within the public service; and
- strategically linked to the National Qualification Framework (NQF), the South African Qualification Authority ( SAQA) Framework and the National Skills Development Strategy.

The main purpose of the Skills Development Act of 1998, which led to the establishment of the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), is to develop the skills and competencies of the South African workforce. Within the Public Service, it was envisaged that, through the implementation of the Act, the workplaces would become active learning organisations to allow for the development of critical skills required to enhance the capacity to implement public policies and programmes as well as to improve the delivery of social services.

In terms of the above framework, the Public Service is required to assess the capacity of each employee to perform, to develop a plan to address any capacity gaps identified, as well as to ensure the implementation of personal development plans (PDPs). The needs of each department need to be collated into a Workplace Skills Plan to be submitted to the Public Sector Education and Training Authority (PSETA). Departments are also required to compile Human Resource (HR) Plans outlining, among others, the skills development initiatives

and how the department plans to deal with skills development issues. HR Plans are to be submitted to the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA). Lastly, departments are required to submit HRD Plans reflecting their skills needs and plans to address these. The HRD Plans are also to be submitted to the DPSA.

### **1.2.1 The Department of Home Affairs (DHA)**

The DHA interacts with citizens from birth to death. It is charged with the responsibility to ensure that all citizens, immigrants and all other people entering and leaving the country, be it temporarily or permanently, have the necessary documents. The documents from the department are needed, amongst others, for children to access education and social support; for adults to get jobs and/or social support; for pension claims; for legal burials and insurance claims, to rent or buy property and to sort out the estates of deceased persons. The department is thus central and to a large extent, determines whether citizens can access basic government services or not.

Failure to deliver services on the part of the department defeats the pro-poor objectives of the developmental state South Africa is attempting to become. This could explain the high level of attention the department attracted, together with the highly critical comments directed at it. These include, amongst others, a judgment by the Cape High Court declaring it “dysfunctional” in 2005 (PSC, 2008:11) and the then Minister of Home Affairs, Ms N Mapisa-Nqakula admitting in her 2006 Budget Speech that the department was facing serious service delivery challenges (PSC, 2008b:12).

In its Annual Ministers’ Score Cards, the Mail and Guardian newspaper rated the department at an average of “F” level of performance in 2006, describing the performance of the department as “dismal” and stating several reasons for this rating. In 2007, the rating improved slightly to an “E” average, still declaring the

department to have failed to deliver adequate and citizen-friendly service to the citizens and others who wish to be in the country on a temporary or permanent basis like tourists, immigrants, refugees and asylum-seekers (*Mail and Guardian*, 2007, 21 December).

The context of the poor performance needs to be clearly understood. When the democratic government was established in 1994 and the configuration of departments were reviewed to facilitate the delivery of services based on the mandate the new government had set for itself, the DHA inherited several functions that were previously in other departments. For instance, the registering of births, marriages and deaths were previously in the Department of Justice. The DHA further inherited significantly big agencies like the Government Printing Works and the Film and Publication Board. The mandate of the department had been expanded significantly without the necessary amendments to its structure and resources. This state of affairs continued without a systematic attempt to fix it for almost 10 years and the department was rendered practically dysfunctional (DHA, 2010:3).

### **1.2.2 The DHA Turnaround Project**

By 2004, when the Ten Year Review was conducted, the DHA was still largely untransformed and dysfunctional (DHA, 2010:1). In that same year, Minister Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula took over the reins as the Minister of the DHA. The Minister supported the call for an elaborate transformation programme. Several initiatives were implemented to address the burning issues. These initiatives achieved very limited success and it soon became clear that a more intense and well-conceived intervention was necessary to address the systemic challenges the department was still facing at that time. The Minister then appointed what was referred to as a “Support Intervention Team” and charged it with the responsibility to investigate the root causes of the dysfunctionality of the

department, as well as to come up with some practical recommendations on how to remedy the situation. This was the beginning of what is now commonly referred to as the “DHA Turnaround Project” (DHA, 2010:1).

The turnaround commenced in earnest, in 2008. At that time, skills development was lacking both at individual employee level and at the broader organisational level. Training interventions were not taking place as desired. People were thus employed without proper induction; some were promoted without any further formal training to be effective in more senior positions and the lack of opportunities for personal development resulted in low morale amongst employees (DHA, 2010:53).

At an organizational level, there was no common understanding on what skills development meant for the department. The training policies of the department, developed by the HRD team, were neither aligned to the capacity needs of the different business units nor to the strategic direction the department had set for itself. There was no process of identifying scarce and critical skills. There was also no information management system consolidating information on training or further development provided for employees. At an individual employee level, training was based on personal preferences and was taking place without any strategic focus on what skills were required by the department nor in consideration of individual employees’ PDPs (DHA, 2010: 53).

In outlining the historical context of the service delivery challenges in the DHA, the PSC identified, among others, the fact that the Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) of the Public Service was not being implemented adequately and recommended that this be corrected with immediate effect to ensure that senior managers are subjected to competency assessments before being employed as well as to conduct periodic assessment of performance and capacity gaps (PSC, 2008b: 16).

As part of the Turnaround Project, the department was transformed into a serious learning organisation. In just a year after the turnaround was initiated, almost 11 000 training interventions (number of people trained X number of courses) had been conducted (DHA, 2010:54). Interventions included the following:

- The Induction programme for the department was improved to focus more on the roles and responsibilities of the department and all its different sections. Officials recruited thereafter underwent induction using the new programme.
- Front Office staff were trained using a Civic Service Induction Programme developed as part of the turnaround.
- Skills Development Plans were developed for each role, level, division and branches within the department.
- The concept and implementation plan for a Learning Centre to better meet the learning needs of the department.
- An “SMS on-board” training programme was developed and implemented for senior managers to instil commitment to service excellence (ibid:55)

From personal experiences and based on anecdotal reports from associates and the mass media, dealing with the department has changed from a previously dreaded experience to a mostly positive one. Public perceptions have improved and while the department still attracts some negative publicity from time to time, it is nothing compared to what the situation was before the turnaround.

The improvements over time are more adequately captured in the Annual Ministers Scorecard. From being the most consistent critic of the department, the Annual Ministers’ Score Cards have, since 2008, reported improvement in service delivery at the DHA. In 2008, the Minister for Home Affairs received an

average rating of “C”, with an admission that things were getting better in the department (*Mail and Guardian*, 2008, 22 December).

By 2009, under the political leadership of Minister Dlamini-Zuma, the Minister’s rating had improved further to a “B”. The greatly reduced turnaround time for Identity Document (ID) applications to between 4-6 weeks; the immediate issuing of temporary IDs as well as the SMS notifications on the status of applications for documents were cited as the reasons for the improved rating (*Mail and Guardian*, 2009, 23 December). The 2010 Score Card in 2010 again rated the department as “B”, citing the further reduction of the ID application turnaround period to below 2 weeks; the more citizen-friendly and modern interface with the public and other positive factors as reasons for the rating (*Mail and Guardian*, 2010, 23 December).

The improvements brought about by the turnaround have resulted in the DHA ‘s overall media rating improving from a negative 48% to a negative 4% by the end of 2009. During the same year, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa awarded the department first prize Public Service Award for Technology in Government in Africa (DHA, 2010:65).

### **1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The Department of Home Affairs (DHA) can be likened to the gateway to public services in the country. For citizens to access social services, education, housing, jobs and other basic rights guaranteed through the constitution, documents from the DHA are required and lack of the necessary documents literally means lack of access to these. Despite its centrality in determining access to government services or lack thereof, the DHA has received a lot of criticism across all mass-media platforms over the recent past years. The department has been singled out by the public and politicians alike as having the

worst service delivery standards as well as being one of the most corrupt departments. This prompted the department to implement a turn-around project between 2008 and 2010 (DHA, 2010:3).

There has been improvement in public perceptions and internally regarding the DHA and the quality of service it delivers. The role played by the implementation of skills development in the improvements in the quality of services delivered is of interest. While only the skills development aspects of the DHA Turnaround strategy were included in this study, there were several other interventions implemented as part of the project such as revamping information technology; dealing with corruption, security and risks and reviewing the departmental structure. This study sought to explore the perceived role the implementation of staff development policies has contributed in changing the fortunes of the DHA.

#### **1.4 PURPOSE STATEMENT**

This study focused on understanding the extent to which the senior managers perceive the improvements in service delivery in the DHA to be attributable to the implementation of skills development or training. The levels of compliance with the implementation of the department's current HRMD Strategy (2011 -2013) will be explored. Lastly, the study aimed to document lessons learnt by the DHA to explore what other departments could learn from these. There is no doubt that a lot can be learned from taking a closer look at what the turnaround strategy that worked so well, actually meant for the people working in the DHA before, during and after the strategy was implemented.

## **1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1.5.1 What are the managers' views regarding the role of skills development in improving service delivery during the turnaround of the department.?

1.5.2 What systems and procedures has the DAH put in place to ensure the sustainability of skills development-related successes achieved during the Turnaround Project?

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

With the establishment of the democratic South Africa after the 1994 elections, the ANC-led government promised to continue working towards creating a better life for all South Africans. Bridging the gap between the poor, previously disadvantaged and mostly Black South African and the mostly White and well-off citizens continued to be the promise the newly elected government made to the people (Kotze and Taylor, 2010: 199).

By implication, the government at that time took a conscious decision to be pro-poor. In doing so, the state placed socio-economic upliftment at the core of its mission. This would require that the state provides basic services in a manner that would have a positive impact on the lives of the previously disadvantaged masses in the country. This implies that the country embraced the values of a developmental state which, as Levin argues, is fundamentally about addressing social and economic developmental goals (Levin, 2004:1). A developmental state aims at achieving improved and citizen-centred public services (Levin, 2004:12).

In an attempt to achieve socio-economic upliftment for the poor, the country's political strategy was to build a strong state with the necessary capacity to drive social development; assist the poor and support economic growth, as evidenced by the policies and strategies adopted soon after the democratic new government was put in place in 1994 (Mc Lennan, 2007: 12). The immediate goal for the government at that time was to reduce the disparities in access to basic services so as to allow the majority of the people, who had been disadvantaged over many years, to achieve and maintain a decent standard of living.

The government elected in 1999, under the stewardship of President Thabo Mbeki, promised to develop and implement appropriate service delivery systems to improve the delivery of basic services to the citizens. This was characterized by the growing emphasis on growing the economy and on redistributing available resources to redress the imbalances of the past (Kotze and Taylor, 2010:201), attempting to institutionalize the implementation of performance contracts and through the professionalization of the Public Service (Mc Lennan, 2007:14). To achieve the ideal of improving the lives of the poor citizens of the country, the key government interventions at that time included, among others, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (ANC 1994: 4-7).

## **2.2 SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AS A MEANS TO IMPROVE SERVICE DELIVERY**

Public sector reforms aimed at improving service delivery are mainly driven by economic pressure and increasing expectations from consumers (Kaul, 1998:70). South Africa is faced with both these pressures and thus needs to find ways to constantly improve the services delivered by public institutions. For organisations to continuously improve service delivery, the skills of employees should be developed constantly and kept abreast with the changing demands of the job (Minervini, 2003:112). Owen (1991) supports this view, stating that, to survive in the currently competitive economic environment, "... the business of business is learning and all else will follow." (Owen, 1991: 1).

During the first few years after the historic 1994 elections, the necessary developmental policies had been put in place and what remained was to implement them so as to achieve the desired impact. The Public Service employees, as interpreters and implementers of government policies, were then expected to develop and implement appropriate programmes in line with the

policies. To achieve this, the level of skills and motivation among public servants would have to be harnessed through the implementation of appropriate Human Resource Management and Development (HRMD) policies and programmes (PSC, 2008a: 76).

For organisations to be effective and efficient in delivering on their mandate, a skilled workforce is required. For public sector institutions, effectiveness and efficiency are measured through the ability to render services (Pillay, Juan and Twalo, 2012). For the country to meet its developmental objectives, service delivery by public sector institution must be adequate. These institutions require the necessary skills to deliver adequate services (Pillay, Juan and Twalo, 2012:18).

The relationship between skills development and the ability to perform is supported by Zula and Chermack (2007) who refer to a “Theory of Human Capital” as suggesting that the level of productivity is influenced by the investment in skills development initiatives. They argue that the people’s abilities need to be aligned to the strategic objectives of the organization through the use of appropriate Human Resource Development (HRD) frameworks (Zula and Chermack , 2007: 25).

The Public Service constantly needs to explore ways to generate and retain its own skills base as well as to transform itself into a performance-based organization. This is required to meet the needs of the changing approach to delivering public services through putting the needs of the communities first so as to achieve the objectives of a developmental state. Through the implementation of appropriate HRMD strategies and programmes, skill development for individual employees has to be based on the competencies each one requires to ensure the building of efficient and effective institutions. Managers have to be trained to manage through strategic planning; programme and project management; as well as through performance management (Levin, 2004: 101).

Training forms a critical part of human resource development initiatives. It is also the one approach most likely to be implemented in most organisations, including the Public Service. Bennet and Davis (2002), quoted by Hannagan (2004) submit that training, if successful, will improve and develop knowledge, skills and attitudes of employees. However, if not approached and managed well, training can result in a waste of time and money. The effectiveness of training can be validated by interviewing employees upon completion of the training to establish how relevant the training was, whether they learned anything new and how they think the training will help them do their jobs better (Hannagan, 2004 :293). Phillips and Stone (2002) propose that a culture of result-based training be adopted in organisations to assess the impact of training so as to achieve optimal results from the training offered (Phillips and Stone, 2002:20).

Pillay, Juan and Twalo ( 2012) support Bennet and Davis by stating that, in the public service, skills development has largely been reduced to training. Most departments are spending more than 1% of their annual personnel budget on skills development as mandated through the Skills Development Levies Act (Pillay, Juan and Twalo 2012: :40). Most of the funds are spent on training, however, the impact of training attended on performance are not assessed. As a result, it is not possible to determine the return on the investment in training (Pillay, Juan and Twalo 2012: 73). In most departments, as was the case in the DHA before the Turnaround Strategy was implemented, training is provided on an ad hoc basis and most often bears no relevance to the skills required to enhance job performance.

While there are many approaches to training, Kraak, (2010) suggests that Action Learning (AL) is an appropriate approach to training in the Public Service because AL acknowledges the participants' experience and requires that action should follow the acquisition of new knowledge. In most of the developed countries, AL has become one of the most favoured problem solving tool and a

key approach in developing individuals, teams and organisations (Marquardt, 1999:3). A typical example of AL in the Public Service is Project Khaedu being implemented by the Department Of Public Service and Administration since 2005 (Mogoma Research and Development, 2009:30). This project involves exposing senior managers to the coalface of service delivery at selected service delivery points such as the hospitals, Home Affairs offices, clinics, police stations. The managers, from different departments are then required to use the case study methodology to identify and resolve the service delivery challenges. It is assumed that the participants will then apply the same approach in resolving service delivery challenges in their own departments.

### **2.3 THE IMPACT OF ATTITUDES AND CULTURE ON PERFORMANCE**

In approaching the development of the necessary capacity of the state to deliver appropriate services efficiently, Badat (2008) argues that the current obsession with skills only, needs to be abandoned in favour of a more comprehensive focus on knowledge, skills and attitudes. He argues that skill refers only to specific technical capabilities while, what is needed for social development is appropriate knowledge, technical expertise and the correct attitude. He further argues that performance is not only influenced by knowledge and skills but, also by the organisational culture and other environmental factors. He thus argues for the establishment of an appropriate organisational culture supportive to high performance (Badat, 2008: 6 ).

An organisational culture conducive to learning is also necessary to allow for informal on-the-job learning which complements the formal skills development initiatives managed through the HRMD programme (Woodall, 2000:23). Such an environment, according to Smith (2001), will further enhance the development of skills in that it provides support for employees to implement what they have learnt through formal training initiatives in the workplace, thereby enhancing the value of formal training initiatives. He thus argues for the development of appropriate

processes and policies to support this (Smith, 2001:612). Winterton, Delamare and Stringfellow (2006) support the notion that the application of knowledge and skills in the workplace enhances the ability of individuals to function at an acceptable level of competence (Winterton, Delamare and Stringfellow, 2006: 13).

The Public Service Commission (2010) also acknowledges that the implementation of skills development is critical for the improvement of service delivery by government departments. The PSC further states that poor performance in government departments is a result of work culture issues, person-to-job mismatching, lack of skills, lack of performance standards and a failure to implement the Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) properly.

## **2.4 THE SERVICE DELIVERY CHALLENGE**

In 2004, the government conducted a review of the progress achieved towards meeting its promise of a better life for all citizens and other related priorities in the first 10 years of its existence. Concerns over the slow rate of progress were raised and this was attributed to various reasons, including lack of skills and resources, poor levels of implementing policies as well as from recruiting the wrong people into jobs e.g. through nepotism (GCIS, 2004).

Levin (2004) argues that the reforms that were introduced in the Public Service up to that point, which he refers to as “neo-liberal”, were to blame for the very slow or no improvement in the delivery of public services. He is of the opinion that the strong focus on decentralized human resources and financial management in the context of a weak state has resulted in managers being given delegations without the necessary skills and resources to use these delegations.

Levin argues that this has led to the weaknesses in the implementation of HRMD policies, which continues to make it difficult for the state to provide adequate levels of services to the poor masses (Levin, 2004:13). He further argues that, because skills and management capacity was scarce, adopting a decentralization approach as the state was at the time, could undermine effectiveness because responsibilities were given to managers and systems that were not ready for this and he even cautioned that this could lead to a breakdown in service delivery (Levin 2004:14).

Mc Lennan (2007), however, advances a counter-argument to Levin. She argues that the previously rigid bureaucracy of the apartheid state is in fact to blame for the current poor level of service delivery because, having worked in such a bureaucracy for long, managers are still struggling to accept the responsibility and consequences that go with the power to make independent decisions in a decentralised approach. This, she asserts, is the reason service delivery is slow (Mc Lennan, 2007: 14). Kraak (2000) argues that organisational efficiency requires that managers go beyond old ways of doing things and that they acquire further capabilities by finding new and more effective approaches (Kraak, 2000:5).

Levin (2004) further blames the slow pace or no delivery of public services on the lack of an effective performance management framework that could both promote and monitor some of the developmental policies such as the Batho Pele Principles. While acknowledging that the government was spending lots of money training its employees, he argued that the absence of what he refers to as “impact-monitoring tools” made it impossible to evaluate the efficacy and relevance of skills development intervention, thereby making it difficult to confirm whether the extensive investment in training was resulting in improved service delivery or not (Levin, 2004 : 99).

According to Cameron (2009), the desire to achieve a Public Service that reflects the demographics of the country, in line with the Employment Equity and Affirmative Action legislation has compromised the ability to recruit based on merit. Merit-based appointment is necessary to strengthen the ability of the state to deliver on its mandates and priorities (Cameron, 2009:7). Mc Lennan (2007) supports this view by questioning whether the focus on inclusivity as outlined in the Affirmative Action policies, given the reality that South Africa is not immune to the demands of a global economy, would indeed achieve the ideal of improved service delivery (Mc Lennan, 2007: 14-16). The Public Service Commission (2008a) gives the poaching of skilled staff from the Public Service by the private sector as a reason contributing towards the lack of skills (PSC, 2008a:15).

However, Badat (2008) suggests that the issue of lack of skills should not only be viewed from a quantitative perspective which focuses on the numbers of skilled or qualified individuals. He argues that, in the South African context, the quality of existing skills should also be taken into consideration when addressing the challenge of lack of competent people (Badat, 2008:7).

Service delivery protests started in 2004 when, 10 years into the democratic dispensation, citizens were becoming disillusioned about the promised better life. The protests, according to Kotze and Taylor (2010) are sparked mainly by poor service delivery by municipalities but, also extend to other core issues like poverty, unemployment and other basic services and have continued to become more common. It is estimated that by the end of 2005, an average of 15 protest actions were held per day across South Africa (Kotze and Taylor, 2010: 202).

Under President Mbeki's leadership, the notion of a developmental state formally became introduced into mainstream South African politics in 2005 with the realisation that the system of government had, up to then, failed to bridge the gap between the poor and the rich of the country (Kotze and Taylor, 2010: 198).

Levin (2007) argues that the administration of a developmental state has to be strong and capable of channelling societal resources towards resolving national developmental challenges. He argues that such a state has to be integrated at service delivery sites to ensure that services are brought closer to the people and further argues that a unified or single public service, which brings together all spheres of government, is critical for the achievement of a fully developmental state (Levin, 2007:14). He thus blames the current organisation of the Public Service, which puts Local Government outside the Public Service, for the less than ideal standards of services delivery.

The PSC (2010), however, identifies lack of implementation of capacity building initiatives as the reason for poor service delivery in the Public Service. In an assessment that focused mainly on the state of Human Resources Management in the public service, the PSC reported that, while mentoring and coaching were in place for senior managers who mostly possessed the necessary qualifications for their jobs, there was a lack of management training to equip them with the necessary skills to function adequately (PSC, 2010: 21). The PSC concluded that Personal Development Plans (PDPs) required for all senior managers as part of their performance contracts, were completed only to comply and were hardly ever used as they were intended. The PSC further concluded that, despite the existence of a clear framework for this, there are serious problems in implementing the Human Resource Development Strategic Framework (PSC, 2009/2010).

Service delivery remains a critical challenge, despite the existence of skills development frameworks in the Public Service. The evidence presented here suggests that the mere existence of these policies has not succeeded in ensuring that the Public Service has the necessary skills to ensure the efficient delivery of services. This evidence seems to suggest that these policies are not being implemented. Cloete and Wissink (2000) identify communication, resources, disposition and bureaucratic structures among the critical factors that determine

the failure or success in implementing policies. They argue that even the most perfectly structured and resourced policies will not be implemented if the implementers are unwilling or unable to do so (Cloete F. and Wissink H, 2000: 177).

According to Hill (2003), the level of implementation of policies is influenced by the meaning derived from such policies. Hill warns against the assumption that the same meaning of policies is shared by all those responsible for implementing them. She argues that available literature suggests that there is a need to reach consensus on what the implementation of policies means to the different implementing partners in terms of their everyday practice (Hill, 2003: 276). This view is supported by the PSC which submits that the level of implementation of government policies depends directly on the manner in which these are interpreted by public servants, which is in turn influenced by their level of skills and motivation (PSC, 2008: 76).

While the arguments and counter arguments on why the well-crafted developmental policies of the democratic government were not being implemented continued in the academic and other circles, the level of dissatisfaction with the inadequate levels of public service delivery continued in communities. The frustration was displayed in various manners, including through the repeated service delivery protests across the country. The government institutions, including government departments, continued to attract increasing levels of criticisms.

## **2.5 SERVICE DELIVERY IMPROVEMENT (SDI)**

Dichter (1991) and Kiernan(1993) suggest that organisations that are successful in achieving SDI have a few defining characteristics. These include:

- (i) a common vision;
- (ii) a defined culture;
- (iii) effective organisation;
- (iv) sound leadership;
- (v) strategic management;
- (vi) performance or results focus, and
- (vii) skills building

Harvey (2001) supports this view by stating that a particular culture must exist for an organisation to be successful in meeting its objectives. A positive organisational culture supports service delivery in that it can drive the implementation of change towards improved service delivery (Harvey, 2001: 433).

The need for sound leadership is supported by Minervini (2003) who argues that leadership plays a critical role in ensuring that a common vision exists in organisations. The vision is then used by leaders to develop a common sense of purpose and sound teamwork (Minervini, 2003:48).

Lastly, the view that skills building is a common characteristic of organisations that continually strive to achieve SDI is supported by Senge (1992) who submits that such organisations enhance the culture of constant learning, including skills building and the transfer of knowledge among employees (Senge, 1992: 31)

## **2.6 EXPERIENCES FROM OTHER DEVELOPING COUNTRIES**

The United Nations (UN) advocates for human development and political institutional reform as means to achieve good governance in countries facing governance challenges. According to the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (2010), good governance has eight defining characteristics which include being:

- (i) consensus oriented;
- (ii) participatory;
- (iii) effective and efficient;
- (iv) transparent;
- (v) responsive,
- (vi) equitable and inclusive;
- (vii) accountable and
- (viii) following the rule of law

From the above eight characteristics, skills development is required for achieving effectiveness, efficiency, responsiveness and accountability (Pillay, Juan and Twalo, 2012:19).

According to Dass and Abbot (2008), governments of developing countries are commonly faced with a challenge of having high demands for services with limited resources to meet these demands. The public sectors in these countries are often blamed for being ineffective. This has prompted several of these countries, including China, Chile and the Philippines, to embark on public sector reform in an attempt to improve service delivery. These countries have achieved only some degree of success (Dass and Abbot, 2008).

Brazil and Malaysia are examples of developing countries known to have successfully achieved public sector reform using, among others, skills development (Pillay, Juan and Twalo, 2012:25). In Malaysia, after many years of attempting administrative reform, the government contracted consultants to advise it on the best way to reform the public sector. The consultants proposed three main interventions, including:

- (i) the creation of a Development Administrative Unit in the Prime Minister's department,
- (ii) the improvement of the government's education and skills development programme and
- (iii) strengthening the professional competence of the civil service.

As a result, the country embarked on an extensive skills development process which included the development of a graduate study programme in Development Administration at the University of Malaysia, massive in-service training, setting up a Skills Development and Career Development division in the Public Service Department as well as the expansions and improvement of the National Institute of Public Administration (Dass and Abbot, 2008).

Brazil had a challenge in the Health sector where the country had two separate health systems- one for the poor and one for the rich (Pillay, Juan and Twalo, 2012:28). The reform was aimed at unifying these two systems into one effective and efficient health system for the country. In 1988, a School of Health Governance was set up to commence with the implementation of sustained skills development aimed at expanding the capability and quality of health governance. The school has achieved significant success, resulting in the ability to provide quality health care to citizens who previously had no access to such services (Pillay, Juan and Twalo, 2012:28).

These two countries have demonstrated that public sector reform to improve the quality of service delivery can be achieved through well-planned and well-executed skills development initiatives.

## **2.7 THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN: VISION 2030**

Similar to other developing countries, South Africa is experiencing challenges in meeting its service delivery obligations. Lack of capacity has been cited as one of the main reasons for this. The lack of service delivery has resulted in the public sector generally being seen as inefficient. To remedy the situation, South Africa has followed the route of other developing states and is constantly adapting its structure to enhance the state's ability to provide services in more efficient ways.

One of the institutions established as part of the reform process is the National Planning Commission (NPC) in the Presidency. The main mandate of the NPC is to develop a vision and plan to assist the country to build a capable developmental state. To achieve this, The NPC has developed the National Development Plan: Vision for 2030.

The National Development Plan acknowledges that, while public institutions have been transformed in the past to achieve more effective and efficient service delivery, there are still concerns about weaknesses and inefficiencies that limit the ability of the state to meet its developmental objectives. The need to build a capable state with skilled and professional public servants is presented as the only way the state will be able to deliver on its mandate to improve the quality of life for the majority of the citizens. The current attempts to do so are criticized as “jumping from one quick fix or policy fad to the next rather than pursuing a sustained focus on tackling the major obstacles to improving the performance of the public service” (NPC, 2012: 408)

The National Development Plan, hereafter referred to as “the plan” is thus presented as an efficient and sustained approach to ensuring that the skill required for the public institutions to function well is developed and maintained at an optimal level. The vision for 2030 is presented in the plan as that of public sector institutions with skilled and committed public servants capable of providing services of high quality to all South Africans and to play a developmental and transformative role. (NPC, 2012: 409).

Presented as being central to the attainment of Vision 2030, is the implementation of relevant, effective and sustained skills development initiatives throughout the public service. Training is identified as a critical part of this approach. However, for the full benefits of training to be realised, the plan acknowledges that Human Resource (HR) practitioners need to be skilled enough to determine the amount and nature of training required, based on requisites skills, as well as to ensure that the desired impact of training are realised. This will allow the state to be able to develop the required professional and technical skill internally (NPC, 2012:410).

Lastly, the plan acknowledges that building a capable state will require recruiting and retaining talent. To do so, the notion of turning the public service into an employer of choice is presented which, as stated in the plan, requires a strong HR function with career plans and other incentives (NPC, 2012:410).

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 APPROACH**

A qualitative approach was adopted because it was necessary to explore in sufficient detail whether there is a perceived relationship between the level of staff development and the quality of service delivery. This approach allowed respondents to express their views, attitudes and feelings regarding the Turnaround Project in a manner that would not have been possible through a quantitative approach. The respondents were able to express their views regarding the efficacy of skills development systems and procedures put in place to ensure that the improved level of service delivery is sustainable.

### **3.2 STUDY DESIGN**

In-depth interviews were conducted using semi-structured questionnaires (see appendix A). The questionnaire was used to guide face-to-face interviews. The face-to-face approach was preferred to increase the rate of response as well as to allow for probing, if necessary, in order to collect information that would be detailed enough to allow for the drawing of logical and reasonable conclusions.

### **3.3 STUDY POPULATION**

The interest in this subject arises from concerns over the inability of government to provide an acceptable level of services to the public. This has, from time to time, been attributed to lack of capacity. The population for this study is the Department of Home Affairs. This is one of the most critical department. Its

ability to render an acceptable level of service determines whether government will succeed in meeting the needs of those requiring essential government services or not.

The department has changed over time from being one of the worst (PSC, 2012: 11) to being one that receives positive and constructive feedback from the users of its services. This is after they had implemented a turnaround project that involved intensive skills development initiatives. The department is thus able to provide useful insight into the role the implementation of staff development policies plays in enhancing service delivery.

### **3.4 STUDY SAMPLE**

To allow for the collection of detailed and accurate information, it was critical that respondents be people who have sufficient knowledge and/or are involved in the implementation of skills development initiatives in the department. Respondents must ideally also have been present before and during the implementation of the turnaround strategy and thus be able to provide the necessary information to answer the research questions.

For the above reason, the non-probability approach was used to generate a purposive sample. This approach to sampling allowed for the selection of information-rich respondents. The following key informants were interviewed:

- Acting Chief Director: DHA Learning Academy
- Chief Director: People Management and Development
- Director: People Development
- Chief Director: Human Resource Strategy and Planning
- Director: Human Resource Planning

- Assistant Director: Skills Development Facilitator

### **3.5 DATA COLLECTION**

Entry into the department was requested through a letter sent to the Director-General (DG) as the head of the institution. Some challenges and delays were experienced in this regard. The department had recently been classified as one of the security departments with strict protocols relating to the sharing of information. The DG of the DPSA agreed to intervene to facilitate the process. After prolonged negotiations between the DG of the DPSA and the DG of the DHA which included explaining the purpose of the study, written permission was granted and appointments were subsequently scheduled with the identified individuals. An interview schedule was compiled using all the appointments confirmed with the respondents.

Data was collected through face-to-face interviews using a semi-structured questionnaire (Appendix A). The responses were captured through taking brief notes (broad themes only) and voice recording of the interaction. The face-to-face interviews allowed the researcher to obtain in-depth information through probing as necessary. The voice recorded data was transcribed.

### **3.6 DATA ANALYSIS**

The transcribed data was coded using common themes that emerged during the interviews. The broad themes of the tool used for the interview were also used for coding. Following the coding of the data, an analytic comparison was performed to determine the points of agreement as well as the points of differences. The themes that emerged from the responses provided points of

agreements and the points of difference which were then used to arrange the data in a coherent and logical manner.

### **3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

All ethical principles were upheld at all times during the study. **Informed consent** was obtained from subjects prior to data collection. A consent form which outlines relevant information regarding the nature, significance and implications of the study was attached to all the research tools (Appendix A). Participation was entirely voluntary and respondents were informed that they were allowed to skip questions they did not feel comfortable with, should they express a desire to do so.

The **confidentiality** of participating individual respondents will be protected through the safe keeping of all information collected. No unauthorized access to the information will be permitted.

The report was compiled and will be handled in a manner that will not result in any **prejudice** to the subjects. Given the low number of respondents, no respondent codes or labels were used as this would have allowed for the statements to be attributable to specific respondents.

### **3.8 LIMITATIONS**

While all possible measures were implemented to ensure that subjects responded as honestly as possible, a possible limitation is that the study primarily relied on self-reporting by individuals responsible for implementing skills development initiatives in the department. This presented an opportunity for both under and/or over reporting on some items.

The respondents were required to report on an intervention that started in 2008. For this, they relied on their memory of events at the time, which presented a risk of **recollection bias** (Newman, 2011: 432).

Given that respondents are responsible for the implementation of skills development initiative in the department, they were reporting on their own performance. The likelihood of the **halo effect** having influenced their responses exists (Newman, 2011: 6).

## **CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

The transformation of the DHA was about improving service delivery to achieve the effective and efficient delivery of high quality services on a sustainable basis. From the literature reviewed in Chapter 3, the role of skills development in improving service delivery has been confirmed. Some authors in the reviewed literature have gone to an extent of describing how skills development must be approached and implemented to achieve improved performance in organisation and thus improve service delivery.

From the literature we see the importance of a broad approach to skills development, by also focusing on attitudes, organisational culture and that leadership be provided from top management. The NPC has taken this discussion further by suggesting that professional and skilled HR practitioners are required if public institutions are to benefit from the implementation of skills development intervention, stating that it is HR practitioners who identify capacity and skills requirements for department and that they must thus be skilled enough to do so.

Transformation is about changing for the better. In some cases, such as the DHA, the change is extensive. Change needs to be managed such that the majority of staff perceives that the change is implemented in a supportive manner and that there is top management commitment to the change process. If this is not done, the risk of the change process failing is always there (Kotter, 2007). For change to succeed, there is a need to identify change agents which, ideally, should include top management agents (Kotter, 2007:12).

Cases of failed or ineffective transformation processes abound in the literature. The DHA had itself attempted transformation around 2004 with no noticeable impact on service delivery (DHA 2010). According to Beer and Nohria, (2003), 70% of change programmes fail because these are attempted without the necessary vision, strategy, communication, trust, resources, leadership, management commitment and change management skills (Beer and Nohria, 2003: 131-141).

With the understanding that the DHA Turnaround Strategy involved a significant amount of skills development, together with evidence in Chapter 3 suggesting that skills development efforts don't always yield the envisaged benefits, the success achieved by the DHA is of interest. A semi-structured questionnaire was used to determine the perceptions of some key informants in the department regarding the role skills development played towards the success achieved in turning the department around. The responses and valuable insight provided by the respondents are presented below.

## **4.2 THE RESPONDENTS**

A total of six key informants participated in the study. From these, five are senior managers and one is a junior manager in the department. All the respondents are responsible for the implementation of skills development policies in the department. While this had a potential of respondents over-stating the successes and impact of skills development, it was necessary to involve participants with in-depth knowledge. Furthermore, the fact that the successes of the department are acknowledged outside the department, including by citizens, may counteract concerns about potential halo effect.

From the six respondents, three joined the DHA before the Turnaround Project, one joined during the process and two joined after the consultants that managed

the project had left the department. The latter two respondents (R5 and R6) referred to themselves as “*products of the turnaround project*”. All respondents spoke passionately about the intervention and were willing to share their perceptions and experiences.

## **4.3 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS**

### **4.3.1 Unpacking the DHA Turnaround Project**

Respondents were requested to share their views regarding the role skills development played in improving service delivery during the DHA Turnaround Project. They were further requested to provide information regarding the sustainability of the improved systems and processes initiated during the Turnaround Project. When requested to share their views regarding what the project meant to them as individuals, there was a consensus amongst the respondents that the Turnaround Project was indeed a means towards improving the quality of services delivered by the department on a continuous basis. Respondents described it as a multifaceted intervention focusing on the core business, support services, systems and processes of the department. They stated that the Turnaround Project reviewed how business was conducted and how this needed to be improved.

Respondents explained that several different aspects of the department were improved. Amongst others, signage was improved in all service delivery offices and the lay-out of offices was structured in such a way that operation management was enhanced. The Organisational Structure was revised to streamline the core business units (Appendix B). Technology such as the mobile phone Short Message Service (SMS) notification was introduced and embraced in enhancing efficiency in the way the department renders services.

The respondents stated that an in-depth analysis conducted placed training as a strategic catalyst for the introduction of innovation, new technologies, the business process re-engineering, and all the other interventions that made up the 52 components of the Turnaround Project. Poor customer care, corruption and other challenges that existed provided a business case for the strategic focus on the implementation of skills development programmes. According to the respondents, the in-depth analysis recommended that training be formalized, centralized and accredited, resulting in the establishment of a Learning Academy in 2010. Skills development programmes on, amongst others, Customer Care, Change Management, Operational Management and or how to curb corruption were provided for the frontline staff.

Transformation programmes tend to introduce some instability as people wonder what to expect and whether their jobs will be safe or not. During transformation, people affected respond by either making the change happen; helping it happen; letting the change happen or resist it happening (Switzer, 2008: 14). The extent of the transformation in the DHA, which led to an almost total overhaul of systems, structures and procedures that existed before, could have led to significant challenges that could have rendered the intervention a complete failure if not managed well. The respondents cited the professional manner in which the transformation was handled in the DHA as having enhanced the overall success achieved significantly.

Change agents called “The Top 200” were identified from senior and middle managers. The main responsibility of the Top 200 was to communicate the need for the change, provide feedback on the progress of the entire project to all staff members and to ensure that everybody was on board. The constant feedback and consultation by the Top 200 made communication effective. This resulted in most staff members having a positive attitude towards the transformation and is reported to have yielded positive results. This finding supports the argument advanced by Kotter (2007) that failure to communicate is one of the most

common reasons why transformation projects fail (Kotter, 2007:6). This view is further advanced by Fourie (2007) who states that sharing information and discussing the vision and goals through workshops, meetings and seminars are key components of successful change projects (Fourie, 2007:353).

Another intervention reported to have determined the success of the Turnaround Strategy was the strategic decision to start with a process of providing leadership skills for all managers in the department. Respondents described how this resulted in a fundamental mind-shift at the top. Minister-Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, who is now the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, is reported to have provided the necessary vision, clarity and commitment. The support and involvement of both the Director General and the Minister is also said to have had a positive impact on the change process. One participant (R5) stated that *"We are still reaping the effect of that intervention"*. Another one (R2) referred to the intervention as *"A business case that turned into a huge success"*.

It was reported that a system of identifying and acknowledging best-performing offices was introduced. This is reported to be providing continual motivation for the front line officers to provide high quality services at all times. The Minister and the Director-General are also reported to be continuing with unannounced walk-about to the different offices for on-going observation and to keep employees from dropping the standards of performance achieved during the Turnaround period.

Receiving feedback from clients regarding the quality of services delivered was also seen as important. The Minister established Stakeholder Forums. These are community-based structures through which the department interacts with citizens. The respondents stated that the purpose of these structures is for citizens to have a constant watch over service delivery and to inform the Minister if services are not delivered in an acceptable manner.

While the respondents spoke eagerly about the successes achieved to date, they all stated that the turnaround process is continuing despite the departure of the service providers that had developed and introduced it to the department. This they attribute to the fact that the transfer of skills to staff was considered a critical deliverable for the service providers contracted for the project. Respondents stated that they were made aware that sustaining the high quality of services achieved requires each member of the team to always strive to perform better than he/she performed the day before. Lastly, there was an acknowledgement that the issues of organisational culture and the attempt to fully skill everybody remains work in progress.

#### **4.3.2 Current Implementation of Skills Development Policies in the DHA**

One respondent's view was that skills development policies are currently not being implemented in the best possible manner, citing succession planning and experiential learning as examples of strategies that are not being implemented in the department. All the other respondents felt that, while the DHA was not implementing skills development policies in any meaningful manner before the Turnaround Project, this had changed. They stated that the department reports consistently to the PSETA and goes beyond what is stipulated in the skills development policies.

Respondents reported that a DHA-specific accredited qualification, The National Certificate on Home Affairs Civic Services at NQF Level 5, was developed and is reported to be registered with the PSETA. The respondents reported that this qualification is currently being used as part of the broader skills development strategy of the department. It was also reported that a Learning Academy was established over and above the required skills development structures. The Learning Academy is reported to be headed by an executive manager at the Deputy Director General-level .

According to the respondents, each employee in the department is required to develop a Personal Development Plan (PDP) which outlines their skills development needs. It was reported that the People Development Unit (known as HRD Units in other departments) is expected to use the individual PDPs to develop the Workplace Skills Plan (WSP) which is submitted to PSETA and to the department's Learning Academy. The Learning Academy is then expected to use the WSP to develop and implement skills development programmes that respond directly to the work demands or needs of staff.

As reported by the respondents, this approach ensures that the skills development initiatives of the department are aligned to its actual skills requirements. The clear role clarification is reported to have been designed so as to prevent role confusion between the Learning Academy and the People Development Unit as outlined in the department's organogram (Appendix C). The department's bursary scheme is also reported to be using the WSP and the skills development programme to award bursaries in line with the skills required for the department to function optimally. Lastly, the respondents reported that a skills audit was conducted to place people where they are most suitable in terms of their qualifications and experience.

In agreement with the Turnaround Project Report (DHA, 2010), respondents stated that before the Turnaround Project, training was ad hoc, for personal preferences and not necessarily linked to the work demands or requirements of the department. They stated further that permanent staff used to be trained on the core business of the department by the then Learning Centre for two to three week periods each year. Training was reported to have been regarded as just another function within HR, led by a junior official. One respondent stated that when the department was repositioned as part of the Security Cluster in 2009, training was elevated to a strategic level, which led to the establishment of the Learning Academy with a Deputy Director General in charge of it. In summarising

the challenges experienced by the department before the Turnaround Project, one respondent (R3) stated that:

*“Before, it was difficult as training was not at a strategic level. There was no talk of skills development proper but, just mediocre training. It was actually that training that I can say contributed to poor service as it was not tailored to enhance work performance. Trainers themselves were poorly trained .It was ad-hoc and very bad. Turnaround changed all those but the department also went to bench-mark with other countries...”*

#### **4.3.3 Perceived Link BetweenThe Level Of Implementation Of Skill Development Initiatives AndThe Quality Of Services Rendered By Institutions : *The DHA Experience***

The respondents stated that they are of the opinion that the implementation of skills development initiatives improve the quality of service rendered by institutions. To illustrate this view, the respondents referred to how the structured implementation of the department’s skill development programmes have improved the quality of services rendered by the department. The tailor-made skills development programmes have resulted in the employees being able to discharge their duties at high quality levels. The DHA-specific qualification ensures that skills development programmes respond directly to the workplace demands. One of the respondents ( R1) responded as follows:

*“In our department, this had an impact on service delivery. Lots of people were trained. Newly employed were inducted and access to home affairs offices was also improved. Mentoring and coaching were also key in improving performance. Coaching clinics were introduced to hand-hold in*

*order to groom internal staff. Right attributes and values were instilled on the frontline staff members. The training intervention, amongst others, has yielded fruits”.*

The on-the-job training programmes like the Customer Care and Change Management training provided were cited as having contributed towards employees understanding their jobs better and thus being able to serve clients with a more positive attitude. The Performance Management and Development System is reported to be helping the department to identify the skills gaps through the skills audit and the PDPs.

The functional training provided through the Learning Academy is reported to be preparing staff for the work they are employed for and is supportive of work performance. Individual performance is now reported to be linked to departmental performance and employees are reported to no longer receive performance bonuses if the department is perceived to be performing badly. In the words of one respondent (R3):

*“Work performance has improved. The image of the department has also improved. Employees are now well-informed and approach their work differently. Skills development has empowered staff to perform better. Every Skills Development programme that we introduced is geared at enhancing work performance. It’s functional training, on the job-training. It’s meaningful and relevant to enhance performance. It’s not for fun”.*

The respondents perceive the quality of services delivered by the department to have improved significantly and they attribute this mainly to the structured and sustained implementation of skills development initiatives. The claims by the respondents that the quality of service delivery has improved is undisputable. The department seems to have turned itself around successfully through its

Turnaround Strategy. It has transformed itself successfully from being perceived as one of the worst government departments to currently receiving recognition as one of the most effective and efficient government department.

The department's recognition for the improved quality of service comes in the form of awards, public opinion, clean financial audit reports and most of all, a team that is proud to belong to the department. The special recognition as a best practice model in the National Development Plan is by far, probably the most significant form of recognition the department has received. The department is presented as embodying what Vision 2030 envisages for public sector by 2030. This recognition implies that the DHA is already where the government would like the department to be by 2030 (National Planning Commission, 2012).

Exit interviews conducted by the City Press Newspaper (22<sup>nd</sup> July, 2012: 5) with clients at the DHA offices in the different provinces yielded positive sentiments. Clients leaving the offices after receiving services were requested to comment on the quality of service they had received during that visit to the DHA. These clients gave positive feedback, stating, among others, that the waiting time was significantly less than they had anticipated; the toilets were clean, the officials were pleasant and articulate and that the service they received had generally exceeded their expectations.

The department has come a long way from being declared “dysfunctional” in 2005 (OPSC, 208b:12) and receiving a rating of “F” or “dismal” performance in 2006 (Mail and Guardian 2007, 21 December: 14-21), to becoming a model of good practice in under ten years.

#### **4.3.4 The Link Between the Skills Development Initiatives Implemented, Broader Institution Building and HRD Strategy**

The respondents stated that, apart from ensuring that the department renders high quality services at all times, the skills development interventions were aimed at developing the DHA into an employer of choice for both current and prospective employees. The strategic focus on skills development, identifying and rewarding outstanding performance and creating a positive attitude among staff is aimed at ensuring that people do not resign after the department's resources have been used to render them competent and committed.

According to respondents, coaching and mentoring were introduced for both senior and middle managers. Respondents reported that a Leadership Forum was introduced to focus on leadership development which enables senior and middle managers to network, talk to each other and peer review each other. It was also reported that an Executive Management Programme was developed and is being provided by the Learning Academy in conjunction with the Wits Business School. The focus on managers is reported to have been aimed at ensuring that they are able to manage staff so as to get the best out of them, while at the same time ensuring that the organisation has the necessary leadership to grow adequately so as to meet the changing and increasing demand for its services.

It was reported that the inclusion of middle managers in the management development programmes and the Leadership Forum is intended to serve as part of succession planning aimed at ensuring that the department is able to grow its own future leaders who will be skilled, qualified and possess adequate hands-on experience required to sustain the successes of the Turnaround Strategy. One respondent (R4) summed it up by stating that: “ *...We grow our skill in-house.... Our HR Plan talks about talent management, attracting and retaining scarce skills*”.

The department's HRD strategy was described by respondents as being two-pronged. First, there is a focus on "cadre development", a programme through which internal people are developed and outsiders recruited and trained as determined through the department's skills development programme. There is also a "Cadet Programme", through which external people are put on a programme and trained without necessarily employing them. This programme works in a way that is similar to Learnerships. The best amongst the participating cadets are then considered for permanent employment if they are "organizationally fit". The cadets are mainly unemployed-graduate youths. The cadet programme teaches them the DHA culture.

Respondents stated that, through a close business partnership developed between the HRD Unit and the Learning Academy, skills development is now managed in a coordinated manner, based on skills required to sustain and build the department further. They reported that, before the Turnaround Strategy was implemented, this used to be done in silos, with each unit planning its own skills development, most often with no regard for the broader organisational skills requirements. The different branches in the department are now reported to be performing regular skills audits to feed into the overall departmental skills development programme.

It was reported that Minister Dlamini –Zuma and the DG introduced proper performance management systems to ensure that those who receive incentives or rewards, are those who really deserve them. It was further reported that no employees receive performance bonuses unless the whole department is deemed to have achieved its performance targets. The aim is for all employees to understand that the overall success of the department depends on each one of them.

The job descriptions of employees in the various units within the branches are reported to be tailored in such a way that they enhance overall departmental performance. Individual performance is also said to be structured such that it contributes towards the total performance of the department. This is reported to have resulted in the formation of high performing teams and has contributed towards sustaining the delivery of high quality services.

#### **4.3.5 The Sustainability Of Skills Development Initiative Implemented During the Turnaround Project**

The responses to questions in this section seem to suggest that the DAH has a sustainability plan in place for the initiatives put in place during the Turnaround Project and that the plan is currently being implemented. It was reported that the Change Management processes, Project Management skills, accountability and the culture of reporting still exists. The M&E mechanisms are reported to still be in place. One respondent (R6) stated that:

*“Performance management and operations management is now a way of life in the department and also at the coalface of service delivery sites. The use of feedback mechanisms and clients satisfaction surveys is also a way of life in our department”.*

The following were listed as some of the initiatives sustained from the time of the Turnaround Project:

- The department has a signed Workplace Skills Plan for the 2012/2013 financial year,
- There is a signed Human Resource Development Plan for 2012/13,
- The department has a signed Human Resource Plan for the 2012/13

- The department has a Skills Development Team which is now called the People Development Team,
- All employees have their Personal Development Plans for the Financial Year 2012/13 as part of the Performance Agreement in line with the Performance Management Development System ( PMDS),
- The National Certificate on Home Affairs Civic Services is still in use
- Training of front line office staff continues and
- The Learning Academy established is responsible for ensuring that the department's capacity needs are met through continued provision of targeted skills development programmes.

One of the respondents ( R1) described the turnaround as a “...revolution, not an event”. The interventions introduced are reported to have been sustained because there is adequate understanding among staff that the successes achieved will not be sustained for long if skills development and the other initiatives are abandoned. According to one of the respondents (R3), the interventions were so institutionalised that

*“Ministers can come and go but, the DHA will continue to flourish. We want this department to be an employer of choice... Staff turnover is very low and everybody wants to work here. Through the Learning Academy, the intention is to turn this department into a learning organization. If the current executive leadership can be left untouched, we can change this department and take it to even higher levels of productivity...”*

#### **4.3.6 Enhancing The Implementation Of Skills Development Policies In the Public Service**

The respondents are of the view that the adequate implementation of skills development policies in the public service can only be realised if there are proper

monitoring and evaluation (M&E) mechanisms in place. According to the respondents, proper M&E could enhance the ability to regularly gauge the impact of implementing these policies on service delivery and on whether the policies support the immediate and career growth of staff. A suggestion was made that the public service has to benchmark itself against the private sector and keep on learning from available best practices. It was proposed that the term “skills development” not only be restricted to the conventional classroom approach but that it be understood as inclusive of all forms of learning, such as mentoring and coaching.

According to the respondents, enhancing the implementation of skills development policies in the public service also demands that learning networks be encouraged and established. This will instil the culture of learning best practices from each other and thereby avoid departments from “reinventing the wheel”. Adequate communication and understanding of policies are also reported to be required so that everyone is aware of them. It was further proposed that Public Service employees be sensitised on the importance of the PDPs they are required to develop annually as part of the performance management process.

#### **4.3.7 What Can Other Departments Learn From The DHA Experience?**

When asked the above question, all the respondents stated the DHA Turnaround Project provides empirical evidence that skills development can lead to service delivery improvement if there is a concerted focus and commitment to skills development initiatives. They stated that it is mainly due to lack of proper skills that there is poor service delivery in the Public Service. Conducting constant impact assessment of training was cited as being critical to determine whether skills programmes are effective or not. It was proposed that departments look beyond the classroom approach and move away from the traditional way of

training by also embracing coaching and mentoring approaches as well as leadership development programmes.

Respondents further proposed that departments be encouraged to follow the correct procedures in properly analysing their skills needs by ensuring that their Work Place Skills Plans evolve from individual PDPs. Respondents felt that this was necessary so that the skills development interventions can cater for their work requirements. Aligning the departmental HRD strategy to the departmental vision was also recommended by respondents, stating that this could lead to interventions that enhance and build the departmental capacity to perform as required.

The respondents propose that departments must take a conscious decision to train everybody, starting from the top and cascading downward throughout the department. Leadership skills for senior managers are perceived as critical in ensuring that departments have managers who are capable of giving strategic direction. One respondent stated that it is important that departments be seen to be utilising at least the 1% skills levy for the development of the staff at all times.

It is the view of the respondents that no major transformation or turnaround project can succeed without the active support of the top executive ( DG) and political leadership from the Minister in providing strategy, vision and the necessary resources. Without leadership, respondents believe there would not have been any change. This view supports the argument advanced by Switzer (2008) who states that, for transformation to be successful, it is important for staff to know that the changes are supported at the top of the organisation (Switzer, 2008: 13). According to the respondents, sponsorship of change by administrative and political heads was a major contributor to the success of the transformation. The heads are reported to have given real and visible leadership support to the change efforts, selling the vision and helping the staff to see how the envisaged changes would benefit them.

A further recommendation from the respondents was that it is also crucial that there be change agents with the necessary skills and knowledge to manage change and to get the employees' commitment to the change process. Involving all staff in the change process is also key as people are more likely to be supportive and less resistant "*...if they see their fingerprints on something that they helped to create*", as put by one of the respondents (R5). Switzer (2008) advances a similar argument, stating that people are more supportive and less resistant if they are involved in creating the organisation's vision (Switzer, 2008: 14).

Another factor mentioned as a critical success factor for transformation aimed at improving service delivery, is effective communication to ensure that everyone fully understands the benefits of the new changes, as well as to win their commitment to the process. Internal newsletters to give updates and to get feedback from the staff on the change process underway, were given as an example of ensuring adequate communication.

Lastly, the respondents recommended that, when using external consultants, it is critical that skills transfer be effected through the proper management of consultants and through binding consultants to this in the Service Level Agreements.

#### **4.3.8 Managing Staff Attitude During The Turnaround Period**

Respondents were requested to share their personal experiences of the Turnaround Project. Those that were already working at the DHA at the time stated that at the beginning, they were anxious, not knowing what to expect and whether their jobs would be safe or not. They stated that they were not sure whether the project was not just about re-deploying staff and replacing them with others as is commonly the case during such interventions. However, they all

stated that the introduction of the Top 200 change agents, with the resultant clear and constant communication about the intervention, soon put them at ease and helped them see the need for the change envisaged.

The leadership development initiative was seen as having empowered managers to develop a common vision as well as clear goals and objectives, which in turn ensured that there was never any uncertainty about the next steps as well as what to expect at which stage in the process. The commitment and dedication from the Minister and Director General was also cited as having made the experience positive for most of the staff.

The focus on skills development was reported to have made staff confident that the turnaround process would work. The respondents stated that staff knew from the beginning that they would be able to operate and use the new technologies that were introduced at the time. Respondents stated further that they knew before the end of the project that the turnaround would lead to improved service delivery because they each understood their jobs and how each job contributes to overall organisational performance. According to the respondents that were present at the time of the intervention, the highlight was seeing the positive effects of the turnaround as it unfolded, realising that their individual contributions were making a visible difference in the quality of services provided by the department.

One of the respondents stated that a down moment was when there was constant change in programme managers as new managers were recruited and some old ones re-deployed to units they were deemed more suitable for. This, according to the respondent, was too much to handle in the midst of a big transformation process because staff had to get to know their managers as well as the new systems of work at the same time. However, the positive attitude among their colleagues, the work of the change agents and the other positive factors mitigated the impact of having new managers at that time

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

The ANC government won the first democratic election in 1994 on a promise to provide a better life for all the citizens. This is a promise the ANC has made in all subsequent elections. To achieve this ideal, the ANC-led democratic government adopted a pro-poor approach as demonstrated through the various strategies and policies adopted soon after the 1994 elections, including the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), Affirmative Action and Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) to name a few (Mc Lennan, 2007: 12).

Under the leadership of former President Thabo Mbeki, the government elected in 1997 promised to enhance the realisation of a better life for all by putting in place systems and processes necessary to improve the delivery of basic services to the citizens. Amongst others, the focus of government at the time was on fast-tracking the implementation of the RDP (ANC, 1994 : 4-7), professionalising the Public Service (Mc Lennan, 2007: 14) as well as on growing the economy and redistribution of available resources (Kotze and Taylor, 2010: 201).

The need to develop the capacity of the state to deliver quality public services has been acknowledged by the government since the dawn of democracy. This led to the development of an elaborate legal and policy framework for this, such as the White Paper on Public Service Training and Education of 1997 and the Skills Development Act of 1998, amongst others. Despite the existence of the skills development framework and the government's good intentions, concerns regarding poor delivery of public service remain to date.

The failure to provide adequate standards of public services has been attributed to various reasons, including the lack of implementation of staff development policies (PSC, 2010), the decentralization of human resource and financial management to managers without the necessary skills and resources after 1994 (Levin, 2004: 13), as well as on the implementation of Affirmative Action and Employment Equity legislation which is believed to have compromised the ability to recruit based on merit (Cameron, 2009:7). While the debate on the reasons for poor service delivery continued in academic circles, the citizens became more frustrated and adopted various ways to demonstrate their dissatisfaction, including through several service delivery protest actions estimated by Kotze and Taylor to have reached an average of 15 per day across the country by the end of 2005 (Kotze and Taylor, 2010:202).

The importance of staff development in improving service delivery has been acknowledged significantly (Owen, 1991; Minervini, 2003; Hannagan, 2004; Levin, 2004; PSC, 2008a; Zula and Chermack, 2007; Pillay, Juan and Twalo, 2012). Various approaches to ensuring effective and efficient staff development are advanced in available literature. These include using the strategic objectives of the organisation to determine the nature and extent of skills development (Zula and Chermack, 2007:25); acknowledging prior experiences of staff and providing structured opportunities for them to put their newly acquired knowledge into practice, also referred to as Action Learning (Kraak, 2010; Marquardt, 1999; Winterton et al, 2006:13) and creating the correct attitude in staff and the correct organisational culture to enable employees to use the new knowledge and skills (Badat, 2008: 6; Woodall, 2000:23; Smith, 2001:12).

The DHA Turnaround Project has demonstrated that it is possible to implement the system of Public Service Training and Education as envisaged in the White Paper on Public Service Training and Education as well as in the Public Service Regulation, 1999, as amended. The department managed to organise its

implementation approach of skilling its workforce in a manner that enabled it to improve its performance and productivity levels.

The skills development initiatives implemented were in line with the legislative framework which states that skills development must be (i) demand driven, needs based and competency based; (ii) supportive of work performance and career development; (iii) strategically linked to a broader process of transformation, institution building and HRD and (iv) strategically linked to the National Qualification (NQF), the SAQA framework and the National Skills Development Strategy. As assessment of the DHA strategy demonstrates that all these four criteria were met as follows:

**(i) Demand-driven, needs-based and competency-based**

The respondents mentioned that an in-depth analysis was conducted to assess the skills of employees against the skills required to perform their jobs. The development of PDPs by each employee also satisfy this criterion. The Customer Care and other training provided to frontline staff throughout the department provides further evidence that the skills development was in line with this criterion.

**(ii) Supportive of work performance and career development;**

It was reported that each person developed a PDP which was fed into the WSP used to develop the department's skills development programme. Through the PDPs' individual employees are reported to have identified the skill development they require to function optimally. Those performing at optimal levels were identified and acknowledged. Lastly, the middle managers were included in the

leadership development interventions to prepare them for their future roles as senior managers in the department.

**(iii) Strategically linked to a broader process of transformation, institution building and HRD**

The DHA Turnaround Project provides a model of success in meeting this criterion. It was a transformation process aimed at improving service delivery and used HRD strategies to achieve this transformation. It led to institution building, transforming the department into an employer of choice for current and prospective employees. All respondents mentioned how proud they are to be working for a department known for delivering high quality services to citizens.

**(iv) Strategically linked to the National Qualification (NQF), the SAQA framework and the National Skills Development Strategy**

One of the strategically significant outcomes of the department's Turnaround Project is the DHA-specific Qualification which was developed. The qualification is at NQF level 5 and is accredited by the PSETA in line with the SAQA Framework..

## **5.2 CONCLUSIONS**

The DHA Turnaround Project achieved some successes and skills development contributed greatly to the success of the strategy. The way the project was conceived, implemented and sustained is in line with a wealth of evidence in available literature.

The success achieved by the DHA in implementing existing staff development policies in the public service can be seen to demonstrate that the policies that exist are generally good policies that can significantly improve service delivery in the public service if implemented well.

The way the Turnaround project was packaged created an environment conducive for the implementation of staff development policies. The project included leadership and management development, change management, operations management, project management, finance management, political and top executive commitment, skills transfer and the development of a common vision accompanied by effective communication.

It can therefore be concluded that whilst there is ample evidence that the implementation of staff development policies contribute towards enhancing the performance of organisations, it is critical that the organisational environment be made conducive for implementation of these policies, as demonstrated through the DHA's experience. The DHA implemented comprehensive staff development interventions beyond the common focus on training only. Mentorship, coaching, on-the-job training and performance management are some of these interventions.

The training was based on organisational needs determined in a systematic manner, with a clear focus on achieving pre-determined levels of performance. The process of identifying existing capacity of staff to determine areas of further development was managed well through the PDPs, resulting in the skills development proposed being viewed as necessary and relevant by staff.

Lastly, the responses provided seem to suggest that the participants believe that the implementation of staff development interventions as part of the DHA Turnaround Project played a critical role in improving the quality of services delivered by the department. From the responses provided, it can also be

concluded that the implementation of systems and procedures put in place during the Turnaround Project has been sustained beyond the project period and continue to be utilised in the DHA.

### **5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS**

The interest in the DHA's Turnaround Strategy was generated by the success achieved through this intervention. Government departments are constantly criticised for being unable to deliver services as required to improve the lives of poor people. If other departments could emulate the DHA's approach, this could contribute towards the realisation of the establishment of a developmental state, capable of enabling government to address the triple challenges of poverty, inequality and unemployment. This will in turn improve the socio-economic conditions of the majority of the citizens, thereby contributing to the ideal of creating a better life for all citizens. Given the successes of the DHA Turnaround Project, it is recommended that:

- The Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) works with the DHA in coordinating a Learning Network consisting of all departments, to share lessons learnt and best practices on how to implement the staff development policies for improved service delivery as well as how to sustain successes achieved.
- The DPSA uses the DHA case study to amend the current staff development policies to explicitly highlight the ways to create organisational environments conducive to the implementation of these policies.

- .The DHA's strategy be documented and published as a model of best practice.
- The DHA be supported in its attempt to sustain the high quality levels of service delivery achieved. Given the critical nature of services provided by the DHA, a return to the previous state of affairs is not an option.
- The DPSA to seriously consider the proposals mentioned by respondents on how to improve the implementation of staff development policies throughout the Public Service

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