



A TECHNICAL PAPER

On

TRAINING - A BRIDGE BETWEEN TODAY AND TOMORROW

PRESENTED AT THE

PAQS 2019 CONGRESS

By

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ABSTRACT

Purpose

This paper is written to spur lecturers, employers, and experienced professionals to the responsibilities of training young professionals. It addresses the practical benefits of **real time** training and the dangers of lack of or ineffective training of young professionals in the industry. It exhorts young Quantity Surveying professionals to make learning a priority by making themselves available for training.

Design/methodology/Approach

The paper examines published articles and experience of the researcher and those of other experienced professionals in reaching conclusions.

Findings/Results

Trainings can be done at formal institutions of learning or informally through apprenticeship programmes and on-the-job.

A research work shows that in Hong Kong for instance, fresh graduates who studied Building and Real Estate (BRE) lack basic knowledge and skills that make them employable. The researcher argued that if institutions of learning interact with professional institutions to keep abreast with latest advancements in professional practice, then in time will ensure that the students will graduate to have high employability values.

If the Quantity Surveying Profession would remain relevant in the future, young Quantity Surveyors of today must be trained effectively with efficiency in mind.

Lack of effective training will ultimately result in loss of interest in the profession by these young professionals.

Research shows that what students are taught in schools constitute only about 40% of the knowledge and skills needed to work after graduation. In Africa, it could be as low as 25 -30% or even less in very bad instances.

Implications/Originality/Value

Lack of effective training opportunities for Quantity Surveyors will ultimately result in loss of interest in the profession by young ones.

Knowledge acquired in higher institutions could account for up to 40% of what is required in real life (according to some practitioners). In Africa, using the giant of Africa, Nigeria, as a case study, it could be as low as 25 -30% or even less.

Keywords: Employability, Profession, Quantity Surveying, Training, Young.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

I once watched a video of a polar bear and her baby climbing an ice hill. As the mother bear climbed in front, the baby bear followed after her. But after a short while, the baby bear would fall off the hill and the mother goes back to help the baby get back up and follow her steps. Sometimes the mother bear would leave the cub behind and climb a long distance, and when she looks back and sees the cub struggling to follow, she will go back to her cub. Each time she went back to her cub, the cub is encouraged to keep up with following its mother. This process continued until the cub was also able to get to the top of the ice hill.

While I watched that video something struck my mind – this must be a training process!

Training has been part of the human way of life. As a matter of fact, it is part of our make-up to either train or be trained. When a woman is pregnant for instance, studies have shown that she can start training the unborn from the womb. That is why the mother can sometimes tap the foetus when it's making some moves that give her discomfort. This training process continues after child birth until the child becomes an adult, able to take care of himself. In Africa, parents sometimes overlook that one is an adult, they try to continue the training as though you are still that baby of yesterday.

The facts above highlight the immeasurable importance of training. Today, a lot of young professionals have only little or no tangible practical experiences and skills needed to thrive in the typical work environment after school. How can these be helped through training? Who will train them? Where will they be trained?

This paper is written to spur lecturers, employers, senior and experienced professionals to the responsibility of training every young professional around us. It addresses the practical benefits of real time training and the dangers of lack of or ineffective training of young Quantity Surveyors in the construction industry. It exhorts young Quantity Surveyors to make learning a priority by making themselves available for training.

2.0 TRAINING

A dictionary defines training as “The activity of imparting and acquiring skills”. According to a source, training is teaching, or developing in oneself or others, any skills and knowledge that relate to specific useful competencies. Training is a process of building knowledge, skills and competence in individuals, a group or team.

From the foregoing, we can extract that training is a way of teaching, building or developing in someone, new skills, knowledge and competence with the specific goals of improving one's capability, capacity, productivity and performance. It forms the core of apprenticeships and provides the backbone of professional services.

For professionals like us, training is irreplaceable if we must maintain, upgrade and update skills throughout a working life. In many professions and occupations like ours, such training may be referred to as professional development.

3.0 THE CHALLENGES OF TRAINING

I have been involved in interview panels lately, not just for Quantity Surveying openings but for other professions. I have also been involved in training undergraduates and graduates for over 4 years now

and there is a trend that I have observed. Most young professionals do not possess what is needed to meet the challenges or requirements of the real work environment.

Research findings reveal that in Hong Kong for instance, fresh graduates who studied Building and Real Estate (BRE) lack basic knowledge and skills that make them employable. My personal experience proves this researcher right. In my penultimate year in the university, I joined a firm for Industrial training as a requirement for graduation. At the point of joining, I didn't have much knowledge to qualify me for any serious assignment of work. However, 6 months after, at the end of my training, the firm offered me a job as I had acquired as much knowledge that gave me much confidence to take up any assignment. The training I received became the knowledge bridge that helped me become employable.

During a Talloires Network Leaders Conference held in South Africa from 2-4 December, 2014, this topic was in focus. Reeta Roy, CEO of MasterCard Foundation, one of the funders of the Youth Economic Participation Initiative (YEPI) programme said and I quote "It was very obvious after meeting with people in the world of education that formal education seldom speaks to the world of employment,". He continued "Economies are trying to grow and employers are out there looking [to recruit], but there is a plethora of young people who just don't fit with what the growth sectors need." True to his words, even sought-after graduates, such as engineers, need additional skills to satisfy employers.

The trend is that university education graduates could master their technical skills but their employers yet feel dissatisfied with employees when it comes to having skills that make them employable because they lack skills such as motivational skills, communication skills, interpersonal skills, critical thinking, problem solving and entrepreneurial skills (Ramlee, 2002). In the opinion of Syed Hussain *et al.* (2012), graduates do not fulfil the basic needs and requirements of employers because the university education curriculum is designed only to prepare graduates with basic knowledge but this knowledge is not necessarily relevant in the industry. According to Shere and Eadie (Kathleen, 2005) these generic skills are not job specific, but are skills which cut across all industries and jobs from entry level to top management level.

Basic Requirements of Employers from Employees and Young Graduates according to Harvey *et al.* (1997), employers are looking for people who not only fit within their organisation but also those who are intelligent and well rounded, who have a depth of understanding, can apply themselves (to work), take responsibility and develop their role in the organisation. Some of the critical skills mostly sought after by employers of labour anywhere in the world include:

1. Communication Skills: this is the skill that shows the employee's ability to listen, write, speak and convey information effectively. To be effective and proactive in the workplace, the individual needs to be able to communicate effectively. Each person needs to be an exceptional listener and communicator who effectively conveys information verbally and in writing.
2. Analytical/Research Skills: This is the type of skill that deals with the graduates' ability to assess situations, seek multiple perspectives, gather more information if necessary and identify key issues that need to be addressed. The graduate is expected to possess highly analytical thinking with demonstrated talent for identifying, scrutinizing, improving and streamlining complex work processes.
3. Computer/Technical Literacy: almost all jobs nowadays require a basic understanding of computer hardware especially word processing, spreadsheets, and email. The young graduate is expected to be computer literate with extensive software proficiency covering a wide range of applications

4. Interpersonal Abilities: This refers to the ability of the employee to relate with co-workers, inspire others to participate and mitigate conflict with co-workers. This is essential because workers spend a lot of time at work each day. The graduate should be a proven relationship builder with unsurpassed interpersonal skills.

5. Problem-Solving/Reasoning/Creativity: This refers to the ability to find solutions to problems using the employee's creativity, reasoning and past experiences along with the available information and resources. The young professional is expected to be an innovative problem solver who can generate workable solutions and resolve complaints.

6. Flexibility/Adaptability/Managing multiple priorities: This skill deals with the employees ability to manage multiple assignments and tasks, set priorities and adapt to changing conditions and work assignments. The young professional should be a flexible team player who thrives in environments requiring ability to effectively prioritize and juggle multiple concurrent projects.

While most countries have seen an unprecedented expansion of university education over the past decades, there is a persistent gap between knowledge and skills requirements of the productive sector and universities. Currently, African universities appear to be under-providing scientific and research products and innovations to the productive sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, mining, construction, trade services among others. These situations are attributable to lack of effective linkages between university research and productive sector as well as inadequate capacity, knowledge, and skills required to achieve transformative changes. Also becoming a worrisome trend is the lack of innovation outputs and creative skills from universities given that the productive sector is becoming an increasingly dynamic place requiring highly skilled and creative workforce. Such poor showing is gradually putting the competitiveness of many universities across Africa at risk, with several quarters calling into question the quality and adequacy of current academic system and curriculum to meet the capacity and skills requirement of the productive sector.

We are seeing a paradigm shift from a 'knowledge pipeline' approach to 'innovation web' model of knowledge generation, transmission and utilization. The new paradigm promotes innovation by improving the flow of technology and knowledge and removing barriers between actors in the value chains. Many countries are experimenting with variants of the innovations model in order to improve the relevance of university research and innovations to the productive sector.

Some researchers say that what students are taught in the university constitute only about 40% of the knowledge and skills needed to work after graduation. In Africa, it could be as low as 25 - 30% or even less in very bad instances (my opinion). This then presupposes that employers and very senior and experienced professionals have a part to play in equipping these tender professionals with the right knowledge and skills to meet up with what is required of them in the real life field.

4.0 THE NEED FOR TRAINING

A dangling question has become, what can be done? According to a researcher, this vacuum of knowledge and skill required by the real business world can be filled if institutions of learning interact with professional institutions to keep abreast with latest advancements in professional practice. If Universities and other tertiary institutions teach their students in line with latest best practices, the students will graduate to have high employment opportunities.

The latest Mitchell Institute report, 'Connecting the worlds of learning and work', says that collaborating with industry and the community is vital to better prepare children and young people for future work and life.

Exposure to the world of work provides opportunities for students to build connections with professionals outside their usual family networks, and to learn by "doing" in real world contexts. This offers some valuable benefits – enriching school learning, building students to be employable, and helping them develop the capabilities (such as problem solving, collaboration, and resilience) that we know are valued in work and life.

There is indeed a need for the incorporation of skills needed for employment in the university education curriculum because these skills can accelerate employment. Without these skills, young professionals can be considered to be handicap in competing for jobs (Audu et al, 2013) .Young undergraduates in the tertiary institutions should acquire skills that make them employable while in school. These skills can be learned through classroom instruction, in the field or outside the classroom. These skills are abstract in nature and require a measure of time to train these young undergraduates to be employable.

Judging from the arguments above and the realities facing us, it is an obvious fact that there is a need to invest hugely in various forms of training.

5.0 TYPES OF TRAINING

There are various forms of training and they depend on the propose of the training.

Technical Training:

Technical training is a type of training meant to teach the new professionals the technical aspects of the job. In the Quantity Surveying Profession, technical training could include teaching young professionals how to handle issues of claims during a contract, how to carry out valuation of on- going projects for the purpose of payment of a contractor, Preparation of bills of quantities, preparation of preliminary cost estimates, preparing material and Labour schedules etc. It can also include trainings in such areas as Alternative Dispute Resolution processes, expert witnessing, taxation, heavy engineering, finance and investment.

Technical knowledge is what qualifies one to be called a professional ab – initio. That is why before one is called a Quantity Surveyor, he has to undergo professional competence tests to confirm that he is abreast with the key methods and skills needed to practice. Such tests cover core technical and ethical subjects.

Technical training is often performed in formal schools, at seminars and workshops but it can also be on – the – job.

Quality Training:

In a service oriented profession like ours, quality training is extremely important to ensure quality services and deliverables. Quality training refers to familiarizing professionals with the means of preventing, detecting, and eliminating non - quality items in our products. In a world where quality can set you apart from competitors, this type of training provides young and advanced Quantity Surveyors with the knowledge to recognize products that are not up to quality standards in line with best practices internationally and teaches them what to do in scenarios when they encounter issues that present challenge to keeping the standard of quality.

In many countries, the institute of Quantity Surveyors and the registration council have provided laws, codes and bylaws that help measure quality based on a number of metrics. This type of training is key because lack of quality consciousness can ruin a person's career. Imagine being known as always giving out documents tainted with errors or as one who is prone to giving defective professional advice, obviously no one will be willing to patronize your brand. I have met Architects and clients who said they do not have confidence in cost documents produced by Quantity Surveyors. In one instance an Architect told me that his project had once ran into trouble because of under measurement and poor pricing of a contract bills of quantities. When quality is not our watch word, we will be delivering poor professional services and deliverables.

Quality training can happen in schools but most effectively when done on – the – job.

Skills Training:

Another type of training is the skills training. It is a type of technical training. However, skills training, includes proficiencies needed to actually perform technical parts of our jobs. For example, to carry out a valuation of an on – going project, one needs to know how to measure executed works with the contract bills of quantities, address issues of variation, additional works and fluctuations. For one to give an advice on financing and investment, he has to possess the knowledge of the financial system of the country he is working in and the financial market internationally. He also needs some experience and knowledge in investment options in the real estate market. That is to say that with skills training, one becomes acquainted with the step by step, first principles method of carrying out various technical functions of a Quantity Surveyor. The skills we possess are like the 'blocks and mortar ' of the technical 'blockwork' of our professional life. Skills form the building blocks for our professional tower (level of competence). The more blocks we lay on it, the higher the wall of blockwork goes, that in effect means that our level of competence keeps growing.

Without being skilful in any area of our practice, one cannot say he/she is technically competent in that area.

Soft Skills Training:

I have included this type of training called soft skills training because it is most of the times neglected. Soft skills refer to personality traits, social graces, communication, and personal habits that are used to characterize relationships with other people. Soft skills might include how to answer the phone or how to be friendly and welcoming to clients, how we relate with team members, our hygiene, writing skills, speaking and negotiation skills.

According to a *Computerworld* magazine's most recent hiring and skills survey, "Survey respondents said writing and public speaking (soft skills) are two of the most important soft skills they look for when hiring new employees". Many problems in organizations are due to a lack of soft skills, or interpersonal skills, not by problems with the business itself. As a result, HR and managers should work together to strengthen these employee skills. This is true even in Quantity Surveying firms or departments of any organization.

Recently I was involved in interviewing some Quantity Surveyors for a position. In attendance for the interview amongst others were a first class graduate from a reputable university and a third class graduate. At the end of the interview session, the panel decided to recommend the 3rd class graduate for employment. While reading the report of the interview the CEO found it difficult to believe that the third class graduate did better than the first class graduate. So another interview session was organised with the CEO present this time. At the end of the day, he reaffirmed the initial report as being correct. One may ask, what was the problem? Lack of good communication skills! The young man with first class could not express what he can do coherently enough to convince the panel of his competence while the

third class man did a good job on that. No matter how good we are technically, if we cannot market ourselves to others then it is to no avail that we possess such hard-skills and competence.

From the report of computerworld above and my experience just narrated, it is inarguably true that just possessing technical skills and knowledge does not sell one but a person's ability to communicate either in writing or verbally. As Quantity Surveyors, our communication skills should be top notch because almost all aspects of our job require writing or speaking.

Other soft skills that we need to pay attention to are dressing, hygiene and ability to listen.

Soft skills training can be administered either on – the - job or in schools. Also mentorship programmes or relationships can achieve this.

Professional Ethical Training:

This is the type of professional training that focusses more on the ethical aspects of the profession. It is said that if you train a man in the head and not in the mind, you have created a destructive weapon. This implies that when a person is technically trained but not ethically trained, he can turn back to use his training to harm the society and even bring disrepute to the profession. There are codes of conduct guiding Quantity Surveying practice in every country, but it is not enough to just follow them, these codes are supposed to be internalized by all Quantity Surveyors. That is the essence of ethical training.

Ethical training can be very beneficial. I will buttress this with my experience. I was employed into a Quantity Surveyor consulting firm, the first orientation I got was on ethics. The firm had an image of being honest in its activities and the principal partner lived out these ethical values in his professional life, he was exemplary. A time of test came for me. I was appointed the Project Quantity Surveyor for a government project. We prepared the bills and the client invited for tenders. When the tendering process came to an end, I was approached by a client representative to ask for the tender figures for the 5 lots of the project in exchange for \$2,800 for each lot. At that point in my life, I was in need of a personal car, so an offer of \$14,000 just for the bid figures was indeed a real temptation. I could buy a good car with \$8,400 and I could have some \$5,600 left in my pocket. In order not to sound rude to the client representative, I told him to give me some time to think about it. But I did not risk thinking about it, I could begin to consider the "nice" offer, so I immediately gave a call to my boss, who they didn't want to know about their offer, and I narrated the entire event to him and asked him to give the man a call and tell him that I am not interested in his offer. Well, when we submitted the tender evaluation report to the client, they manipulated it to achieve their end. However, until today on that project, I walk with my head very high and have gained much respect from both the client and contractors.

Yes, it is worthwhile to invest in this type of training as it helps to protect our professional image.

Team Training:

This form of training is usually for new professionals. Do you know the exercise in which a person is asked to close his or her eyes and fall back, and then supposedly the team members will catch that person? As a team-building exercise (and a scary one at that), this is an example of team training. The goal of team training is to develop cohesiveness among team members, allowing them to get to know each other and facilitate relationship building. We can define team training as a process that empowers teams to improve decision making, problem solving, and team-development skills to achieve business results. Often this type of training is for young and new professionals and for existing ones at the mid-level positions.

6.0 BENEFITS OF TRAINING

Training has got many benefits, they include:

Improved service performance – when young professionals receive the necessary training, they are more able to perform in their jobs. The training will give them a greater understanding of their responsibilities within their role, and in turn build their confidence. This confidence will enhance their overall performance and this can only benefit the profession. Quantity Surveyors who are competent and on top of changing industry standards make themselves invaluable and top choice professionals and also help their organizations hold a position as a leader and strong competitor within the industry.

Improved professional satisfaction and morale – the investment in training that we make today shows those we train that they are valued. That on its own is a moving force towards better performance at work.

Increased productivity and adherence to quality standards – Productivity usually increases when professionals implement what they have learnt over time. Increased efficiency in processes will ensure project success which in turn will improve the employment potentials of our graduates and give them better opportunities of being hired. Also, when these young professionals are trained, they will be more disposed to render quality services to clients.

Encourages young professionals to also train those behind them – When one benefits from a training arrangement, he would be moved to train others. A case in point is my humble self. I am a full blown case of a training programme and that is why I stand here today preaching the gospel of training.

Encourages more young persons to study Quantity Surveying – Lack of effective training, especially of young Quantity Surveyors will ultimately result in loss of interest in the profession by these young professionals. When young Quantity Surveying graduates are not employable due to lack of knowledge and skills needed in the real business world, employers would decline from employing them and would prefer the older, experienced ones. As this becomes a trend, it will become a discouraging factor to young persons seeking a career in Quantity Surveying. They will conclude that the profession is for the old people and does not have future for the young generations.

But when they get trained and they become skilled, they get employed then other young persons would want to study Quantity Surveying. I have three under graduates of Quantity Surveying who chose the course because of me. I have a graduate of Quantity Surveying who felt that the profession was for old people and decided to go back to school to study law, but after spending 6 months in our office under my coach, he is presently practising Quantity Surveying.

Promotes the image of Quantity Surveying globally – When we train the young ones, they become worthy ambassadors of our profession in every nook and cranny of the world. Clients would become more confident in our services and employers would be quick to hire young graduates on projects of all sorts.

7.0 THE INDUSTRIAL TRAINING APPROACH

The Industrial Training programme (or sandwich) is a training initiative meant to bridge the the gap between theories and practice. It was established to expose the students to actual working environment and enhance their knowledge and skill from what they have learned in the college.

I will like to use the UK and Nigerian experiences to show my point on this issue.

In United Kingdom (UK), the sandwich programme was widely accepted as a way to make students employable through practical training on - the - job. A report in 1997 endorsed the value of this employer based student training by recommending that the Government, with immediate effect, work with the representative of employer and professional organizations to encourage employers to offer more work experience opportunities for students (Huntington, 1999).

The University of Ulster for instance, has produced a policy document that defines the main objectives of industrial training being to:

- Enhance students' familiarity with the world of work and enable them to reflect constructively on issues related to work
- Assist students to evaluate and understand how work experience relates to their personal career objectives and future professional development
- Develop employable skills - like technical skills, soft skills and knowledge of how organizations function.
- Consolidate, complement and extend the academic programme and enable the essential integration of professional practice and academics.
- Maintain and develop links between schools, organizations and the community and to provide grounds practice the theories learnt in schools.

As is the case in the UK with the sandwich programme, the Nigerian government in 1971 established the Industrial Training Fund (ITF) to promote, accelerate and encourage the acquisition of indigenous skills required in industry and commerce to meet the developmental needs of Nigeria.

Under this scheme, a student is to go on a job placement with a firm in his third year of study, usually in his field of study, for 3 – 6 months. During this period the student is exposed to real time projects where he gets to experience firsthand the practicality of the theories studied in the colleges or universities. Such exposure helps to give the student an opportunity to interact with real clients, work with a team, explore all avenues of practicality with regards to his/her course of study. At the end of this training period, the student is not expected to return back to school with a mind focused on some ambiguous theories but on the reality of his/her course of study.

The industrial training scheme or the sandwich programme produced very employable graduates who didn't have any difficulties fitting into their work environments after graduation. Adopting and/or improving on such a scheme will greatly proffer a solution to the growing gap of graduates lacking the skills needed for actual employment.

On the other hand, even though not under the industrial training scheme or sandwich programme, lawyers and Medical doctors go for one year industrial attachments where they practice in real time what they have learnt in theory. Within this one year, the lawyer or doctor familiarizes with the realities of the profession and job. It is only thereafter that they are conferred practice licenses. Though this programme has been abused in recent times, it has gone a long way in producing seasoned lawyers and medical doctors. Quantity Surveyors can adopt this!

8.0 THE WAY FORWARD

There is a future before us, a future that we must embrace, a future that we can look up to, a future that will reinforce our existence as a professional body. That future is the young and inexperienced Quantity

Surveyors of today. We can make that future very bright but we can also choose to mar it with mediocrity and unprofessionalism.

Our only option of making that future bright is to take up the challenge to train the young and inexperienced ones among us now. When each of us here today embrace training and mentorship as the way to equip the young and upcoming professionals among us, we will have a generation that will be able to preserve the legacies we create today. When we train them we are sure that this noble course of Quantity Surveying will extend into an unreachable future.

However, when we fail to accept this challenge, then we can afford to think like the epicureans of the first century who say " let us eat and drink for tomorrow we shall die". Yes, we will be practising Quantity Surveying for today without a hope of succession and continuity.

If the Quantity Surveying Profession would remain relevant in the future, young Quantity Surveyors of today must be trained effectively with efficiency in mind.

Lack of effective training, especially of young Quantity Surveyors will ultimately result in loss of interest in the profession by these young ones. When these young ones lose interest in the profession, preaching Quantity Surveying in the future would be like hosting a party and playing disco in an era of hip hop, for sure you will agree with me that only the elderly will be seen there.

The Quantity Surveying Institutes in every country and academics amongst us can push for industry based training schemes to be adopted or improved on (if in existence) by their countries. Quantity Surveying firms must take advantage of such a programme to train young Quantity Surveyors and get them ready for practice when they are out of school. Apart from helping to curb unemployment, it will to a large extent curb the menace of mediocrity and inexperience in the industry. During such trainings, trainees should be made to read wide on professional and industry based materials. They should be fully involved and integrated into the jobs. It is only in such a way that we can oppose inexperience. For the trainees, this is a time to learn and so this opportunity should be taken seriously as such an opportunity will prepare you for work in the future.

I invite us all here today to make a declaration in this 23rd PAQS conference, that as we return to our various countries, we will become priests in the training temple.

9.0 CONCLUSION

Higher institutions all over the world offering Quantity Surveying are indeed doing great job in training future Quantity Surveyors, but there is a need to compliment what they are doing with our own efforts on - the - job or via mentorship programmes. We all have a responsibility of making the future Quantity Surveyors proficient today. No matter how inconveniencing it might be for us, the path of training remains our best choice.

Again, adopting the approach already in operation in the medical, legal and pharmaceutical professions will pay us. After graduation they go for one-year real time professional trainings that gives them time to develop confidence in the skills they possess by exposing them to real life opportunities to put into practice what they have learnt in school. Also adopting the industrial training formula will help largely (if monitored) in making the young professionals employable.

On the other hand, Young Quantity Surveyors also have a part to play. I have seen a lot of Young Surveyors with little or no requisite knowledge requesting to be paid so high remunerations as employees, whereas in my opinion, what they are actually doing is asking an employer to pay them so

high for taking them in for training. Young Surveyors need to realise that employers only pay for value which an employee can add to the organisation. So they need to learn first before seeking financial benefits.

It is my plea to us all gathered for this August assembly to make it our goals to train at least one young Quantity Surveyor today.

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