

THE QUEST FOR SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN THE ACHIEVEMENT OF MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS: A PHILOSOPHICAL EXAMINATION

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ABSTRACT

Philosophy of skills Development focuses on the understanding of man who is the embodiment of intellect (which is capable of abstraction, judgment and reasoning) and body (which is for motor sensory action, capable of manipulations). It looked at skills development which presupposes the understanding of man who is the embodiment of Skill Development. The paper realized that efficient Skill Development must imply appropriate development of the components of man.

INTRODUCTION

Man's state of helplessness in the state of nature led him to trying to understand himself. At the Stone Age, nature was too imposing on the primitive man. In his efforts to provide himself with the basic necessities of life, he fabricated crude implements out of the stones and sticks within his reach to solve his problems.

With the coming of the steel revolution in the first millennium before Christ, man improved on the implements and spent lesser hours at works as tools became lighter and more durable (Okafor and Igwe, 2008:1). This shows that man is not an aggregate of material components, but a bundle of possibilities. This nature of man should be developed appropriately for efficient performance.

WHAT IS MAN?

Man has been conceived in various ways with diverse understanding. Earnst Heinrich Haeckel, a materialist in Mascia (1964:445), sees reality as matter animated by energy. All phenomena are only different products of the same primitive matter. Man is a compound of matter and energy. According to the Materialists, man is composed of

nothing more than material components. His Intellectual, emotional and spiritual aspects are nothing but products of his material nature acting according to the rules of physics and biology. This is the basis for the technology-man, where man is seen as the object that is there to produce and has no feelings. He is the industrialized man who is a machine that contained at the dictates of the manager. His behaviour is determined by heredity and temperature, environment and training. Thus, he deserves no praise for good acts or blame for bad, every act is beyond his control and he always seeks to please himself (Baender, n.d). The implication of this materialist approach is that man is not responsible for his behaviour. The environment is to blame for unacceptable behaviour. Man is not distinguishable from the other materials of creation and therefore, has no dignity or inherent worth. (What is Man, n.d.).

The Christian context presents man in the context of the creator/creature relationship. Man is created and sustained by God (Gen. 1:27). Man is a person and is therefore, capable of making moral choices. He is body and soul made in the image of God. He is bestowed with the 'will' which makes him to choose to do good or bad and therefore, has responsibility for his actions. Man can therefore, be termed to be basically good or basically evil based on his decisions and will. This pushes man into the realm of ethics.

Idealism which is a theory, that the essential nature of reality lies in consciousness or reason sees man as essentially spirit, intellect, and his physical body is foreign to his essence. The body is nothing but a shell for the intellect, ideas or the spirit. This means that the body is a mere matter that houses the intellect. For Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), the intellect has 3 operations - **Abstraction, Judgment and Reasoning**. This means that the object of the sensitive knowledge is the particular things while the intellect is the intelligible arrived at by abstractions from the particular (Mascia, 1964:235).

Aristotle on the other hand stated that, ideas/ concepts (abstractions) are representative of a reality which exists outside the mind but not outside individuals. They exist in the individuals as essences, immanent forms or principles of activity. (Okafor, 2006: 14)

From the above therefore, man is a being made up of body and soul/mind/intellect and by implications must abstract, judge, reason and with the ability to perceive, understand and manipulate (motor sensory).Also, Aristotle in his theory of **hylomorphism**, in Mascia, (1964:75), stated that individuals are not produced by some ideas or model, but

are produced by other individuals of the same species. By virtue of the act of generation, the germ or seed receives the power of reproducing another individual specifically the same as the generator. The power of reproducing a new individual is the very form of the seed. For him, every form is a force or potency for developing what is virtually contained within the subject, so the form of a seed is potency for developing a perfect being (Okafor, 2006: 15). Man has intellect and reasoning, and is capable of development.

The fact that the primitive man fabricated crude implements to solve his problems showed that man, because he has intellect, has the ability- to apply knowledge and competence in performing a mental or physical task. That is, he has skills and can develop same for solutions to his problems.

SKILL

Skill is the capacity to .do something well; technique, ability. Skills are usually acquired or learned, as opposed to abilities which are often thought of as innate. It is a learned capacity to carry out pre-determined, results often with the minimum outlay of time, energy, or both (Definition of skills, n.d (a)).' It is great ability or proficiency; expertness that comes from training, practice, etc (Definition of skills, n.d (b).). It is a demonstrated personal attributes and demonstrated 'ability to apply knowledge and competence (Definition of skills, n.d (c).

Skills can often be divided into domain-general and domain-specific skills. For example, in the domain of work, some general skills would include time management, team work and leadership, self motivation and others, whereas domain-specific skills would be useful only for a certain job. Skill usually requires a certain environment stimuli and situation to assess the level of skill being shown and used. (Skill, n.d.).

General skills include the following:

- Learning- to -learn, where you have foundation skills.
- Basic skills competence, where you have-reading, writing and computation skills.
- Communication skills, which has-problem solving and creative thinking skills.

- Personnel management, where you have self-esteem, motivation/goal setting and employability/career development skills.
- Group effectiveness, under which you have interpersonal, negotiation and teamwork skills.
- Skill of influence; which has organizational and leadership skills. (General Skills, n.d).

SKILLS AND MAN

It is clear from the above concepts of skill, that skill presupposes man. If there is no man, there is no skill. It presupposes the ability of man to abstract, judge and reason as well as the ability of man to move (motor sensory) i.e. ability to manipulate. When skill is said to be the capacity or ability to do something well, it means the ability of man to do something well. This in the real sense implies the combination of developed concepts (abstraction), ability to distinguish between concepts/ideas (judgement), ability to connect the concepts/ideas (reasoning) and manipulate them towards the good of man and the society.

A factor that needed more elaboration is the issue of "doing something well". It indicates that something could be done well or badly (efficient or inefficient). This brings up a fact of development. For Aristotle, every form is a force or potency for developing what is virtually contained within the subject (Mascia, 1964:75). Man therefore, has the potency for development. If the development is in the right directions, then the man is good. If it is in the negative direction the man is not good or evil.

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

According to Stephen du Toit (n.d), skills development is the training and development that the employer provides to employees in the workplace. This includes on-the-job training provided by the employer. Stephen's definition, though tailored to a workplace, however, implies that skills development is the training and development one gets for better performance. Effective skill development requires learning how to master a process for better performance. To do this, one needs the right mixture of feedback, motivation, practice and theory. In other words, before you practice, you must know and understand intellectually what has to be done. Good theory is relevant, practical,

detailed and convertible into a behaviour (Skill development Phase 1: Find Sound Theory, n.d)

Skills development requires a provider/trainer/skill developer/teacher who has the competence to elicit this expected performance or behaviour from the learner.

PHILOSOPHY OF SKILLS DEVELOPMENT: MAN AND ACHIEVEMENT OF SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Philosophy strives at a universal understanding or reality. It is some form of rational activity, a critical examination of all reality, of all areas of human experience including man himself.

Therefore, for man to be developed there should be an environment conducive for the development. The development must be geared towards improvement of intellect for better understanding and formation of concepts, judgement, and reasoning as well as enhancement of the power of manipulation. The developer must really understand the person being developed, the areas to be developed and how to make the person achieve maximum development.

An effectively developed man can uplift the society for the good of man. An effective skill development brings with it improvement in the life of man, better and civilized society and a fully realized man i.e. a perfect being who has achieved his personality.

SKILL DEVELOPMENT, A FACTOR FOR THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE MDGs

The United Nations at its 55th session held on 5th September, 2000 termed “Millennium Summit”, identified eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which will be achieved by 2015. The eight MDGs were broken down into 18 quantifiable targets which are measured by 48 indicators. The goals are:

Goal 1: Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger - this has 2 targets and 5 indicators

Goal 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education- this goal has a target and 3 indicators

Goal 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women- this has a target and 4 indicators

Goal 4: Reduce Child Mortality- this has a target and 3 indicators

Goal 5: Improve Maternal Health - this has a target and 2 indicators

Goal 6: Combat HIV I AIDS, Malaria and Other Diseases- this has 2 targets and 7 indicators.

Goal 7: Ensure Environmental Sustainability - this has 3 targets and 7 indicators

Goal 8: Develop a Global Partnership for Development- this has 7 targets and 17 indicators

(Okafor, 2007: 107)

The United Nations also set out a road map towards the implementation of the declaration which outlined potential strategies for action designed to meet the goals.

A look at the 8 goals shows that for the achievement of each of the goals, it requires skill development and an effectively developed man. For instance, eradication of poverty and hunger requires full scale industrialization and the development of man in various skills to enhance employment in the industries of skilled personnel for efficient production of goods to fight hunger. In the area of the achievement of Universal Basic Education, it requires a well trained educationist who can bring up adequate policy and implementation pattern for full enrollment of children and achievement of set objectives which will give room for proper gender equality. Also, the achievement of the MDOs requires well trained physicians who will appropriately reduce child mortality, improve maternal healthcare and combat HIV j AIDS, Malaria and other diseases. It will require too, well trained environmental agents to ensure environmental sustainability and development that will be global.

In fact, the MDGs require skilled personnel and managers to fashion out policies that will lead to the achievement of the goals, like universal education, reduction of child and maternal mortality, combating HIV/AIDS, environmental protection and global development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above discussions, it is therefore, recommended as follows:

- ❖ Since skill presupposes man, t-here is the need to understand man and his abilities of abstraction, judgement, reasoning and manipulations. These abilities should be channeled properly for better performance.

- ❖ Skill development requires a skill developer/teacher/trainer who understands the person being developed and who has the competence to elicit the expected performance from the learner (man). There is therefore, the need for the skill developer/teacher who has mastered the processes of skill development for better direction of the learner .
- ❖ Adequate environment conducive for development should be provided which should be geared towards improvement of the intellect for better understanding and formation of concepts, judgement and reasoning as well as the enhancement of the power of manipulation.

If these are provided for, a skilled personnel/manager will be in place who can actually provide better policies towards the achievement of the MOGs within the expected period - 2015.

CONCLUSION

Skill development is the base for the growth of any nation. There is the need for proper understanding of what skill development is and what it requires. This understanding must include the understanding of man on whom the whole thing revolves. Poor understanding of man and inefficient skill development will definitely rock the nation and completely mar the achievement of the MDGs.

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