

## **Factors Affecting Labour Union Training in the New Normal**

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### **Abstract**

Labour unions have longed recognized proper help in education and training for officials, activists and its members in general helps to make the union to be a more effective provider of services to its members, organization, government, and society at large. One of the functions of labour union to its members and officials especially in order to bring about development is training. Bearing in mind that every union member is also a worker/employee in an organization and it is the job of labour union to protect the interest of its members and also be deliberate about their development, and contributions to the union as well as the organization they work for. Change is a constant phenomenon in life, which has made the most significant health crisis the world has faced in past 100 years called COVID-19 resulted into what is called a “new normal”. The COVID-19 has disrupted our way of living with unprecedented consequences for our daily lives which includes how we work and learn. As long as the world has not found a proper cure or if we still have to depend on vaccine for COVID-19, we may have to adjust to a “new normal”, which means a new way of living, going about our lives, work, interactions with other people, changes in technology which will require new skills, resulting to new methods of training in organizations and the world at large. One notable example is the Industrial Revolution, which reshaped societies and economies in lasting ways and drastically changed the way people work, and live. The coronavirus disease pandemic similarly produced fundamental changes in work, work practices, the relationship of workers to co-workers, companies, and localities. The labour force has had its own fair share of how the pandemic has caused a drastic change, which has affected labour union training. This paper discussed the different methods and techniques of training considering the new normal adopted by labour union in training their members.

**Key Words:** Labour union, Training, New-Normal

## **Introduction**

As part of the efforts to reduce the transmission of coronavirus disease and help protect the health and safety of employees, public parastatals have generally adopted remote work arrangements, social distancing measures, staggered working hours, and other methods to reduce the presence of employees within work environments while also sustaining organizational activities (International Labour Organization, 2020; World Health Organization, 2020). While such practices are now widespread, they have not been uniform, varying between countries not only in terms of the intensity of their adoption and practice, but also in terms of their application across labor markets. For example, white-collar office workers, or those engaged in activities associated with mental work, have enjoyed the health protections of remote work options, while those engaged in physical work activities (consumer and business services, manufacturing, assembly, transportation, and related activities) have had to maintain their physical presence at work, often exposing them to greater health risks (ILO, 2020c).

## **Literature Review**

The labour force has had its own fair share of how the pandemic has caused a drastic change, which has affected labour union training. According to estimates from International Labour Organization (ILO) 14 percent of working hours were lost globally in the second quarter of 2020 when compared to the last quarter of 2019 (ILO, 2019). This loss is equivalent to 480 million full-time jobs as an indication of massive disruption to labour markets around the world. Furthermore, there was an important change in work modality as roughly one third of the world's workers live in countries where workplace were required to close (with the exception of those for essential workers) and another 42 percent of workers were in countries with partial workplace closures (ILO, 2020). In other to keep the business running large number of workers were required, where possible to radically adapt their everyday approach to work. Teleworking (when the nature of the job allowed) became one of the most widespread adaptations. The adoption of digital technologies in the workplace, the economy and social spheres took center space following the outbreak of COVID-19 and the associated changes in the world of work characterized by teleworking, social distancing, and COVID-19 health protocols. New ways of doing business were necessary to control the spread and impact of COVID-19. This situation was also particularly applicable to workers and their organizations: the internet and systems that were accessible online became pivotal to the daily functions of trade unions.

## **Labour Union**

Labour unions can also be called trade union and they are independent membership-based organizations of workers that represent and negotiate on behalf of working people. They give advice when their members have problems at work, represent members in discussions with employers, and help to improve wages and working conditions by negotiating with employers. Unions also make sure legal rights are enforced, provided and broker education and learning opportunities for members, promote equal opportunity at work, fight against indiscriminate and help to ensure a healthy and safe working environment. Examples of labour unions are: Academic staff unions of university (ASUU), Academic staff union of polytechnics (ASUP), Association of Resident doctors (ARD), Nigerian medical association (NMA), Petroleum and natural gas senior staff association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN), Nigerian union of petroleum and natural gas workers (NUPENG) etc. Labour unions provide services for their members, such as welfare benefits, personal legal help and financial services. Labour union is a formal association of workers that promotes the interest of its members through collective action. Employees join unions with main objective of improving their work conditions, for this reason unions have been formed from organizational level to national level up to international level. Mathis & Jackson (2008) observe that the percentage of union membership varies significantly from country to country. According to historical data, a survey of 30 countries found that since 1970, union membership percentages have increased in only 4 countries (Belgium, Denmark, Finland and Sweden). (Trade union and Labour Relations Consolidation) Act 1992 define a trade union as any “organization of workers” whose principal purpose includes the regulation of relations between workers “of one or more description” and employers or employers association.

Labour unions play many roles in promoting the welfare of its members. For instance, labour unions play the role of bargaining power, minimize discrimination of any kind, sense of participation of the members, platform of self-expression, betterment of employee relations (employee and employee relationship, employee-management, management and trade unions and trade union and other stakeholders of the organization) and sense of job security of its members. A union’s purpose is to represent workers interest, hence union involvement consist of a collective bargaining process in order for awards and agreement to provide protection around the application performance appraisal of and performance related pay (WCOTP, 1989; BTU, 2009 and Swarnalatha and Sureshkrishna. 2011). The union also is involved through consultation in the development, implementation, the review and the modification in anything

that concerns its members. Protecting employees from unfair labour practices, encourage training of employees, offer incentives to members for example, medical insurance, legal advice and reduction in working hours. However, the functions of the labour union includes but is not limited to assisting its members in collective bargaining efforts, but also includes contract administration and arbitration, strikes, political action, legislative activity, union administration, research activities, organization of unorganized education and community activity.

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) objectives include; regulation of relations between academic staff and employers; encouragement of participation of its members in the affairs of the university system and of the nation, establishment and maintenance of a high standard of academic performance and professional practice, establishment and maintenance of just and proper conditions of service for its members (Pemedede, 2007). TETFund as an initiative of the federal government has helped ASUU as a union and has been making visible impact in supporting tertiary education in terms of sponsoring academic staff in Nigerian universities for higher degrees and sponsoring conferences, workshops, and valuable research endeavors (ASUU, 2013). The federal government in considering the call by the academic staff union of universities (ASUU) in the FGN/ASUU agreement of 2009 to revitalize the public universities to meet national and international standards, set up a committee on needs assessment of Nigerian public universities (CNANU) in 2012 (implementation monitoring committee IMC, (2014). The impact of the needs assessment intervention fund for Nigerian public universities was being felt in various ways including providing learning facilities and comfortable learning environment for students as well as staff training and development.

### **Labour Union Training**

Training is one of the major functions of trade unions all over the world. Training of their members and officials is essential to strengthen the organization and improve its various functions. Particularly in view of the involvement of trade unions in an increasing number of social and economic issues in the recent years, it has become even more vital for the unions to continue and expand their training activities for both their leaders and members. The Workers Education Programs of the Bureau for Workers Activities (ACTRAV) of the ILO is aimed at assisting trade unions in promoting their training programs to expand their activities and membership and to improve their capacity to represent and defend the interest of their members. According to the president of BTU, the union plays an important role by encouraging

the employer to discharge this responsibility. Union defense of high salaries and job security has a part to play in this process because it provides an incentive to the employer to invest in skills to maximize workers productivity, (BTU, 2009).

Training is considered one of the good techniques for improving personnel skills and retaining competent human capital that will improve organizations efficiency and effectiveness. The efficient and effective service delivery of organizations is greatly determined by the quality and quantity of competent personnel it attracts maintained and retained overtime. Training can be defined as planned predesigned learning that effect change in an individual's behaviors, skills, knowledge to improve employees performance and organization productivity (Devi & Shaik, 2012). Training is a technique which helps workers gain competencies to undertake more challenging tasks in their current or future job through development of proper attitudes that will improve their efficiency and organizations effectiveness that will earn the employee's promotion, recognition and increase in pay (Falola, 2014; Hartani,2015). Training is an effective process of improving employee's job satisfaction when the workers perceived that their higher input is appreciated by the supervisors and management. Labour unions organize training for its members to help them get better in different aspects of their work life. These training programs organized by labour union helps the employees to understand their rights, benefits, how they should be treated on the job, promotion exercise, how to improve on their knowledge, skills and attitude.

Labour union function fall under two categories which is union administration and protection of member interest. Thereforelabour unions provides the following types of training to their members: apprenticeship training to prepare skilled workers for the workplace, labour education and labour studies to enable union officers and members to perform their institutional and professional function, vocational education to help workers develop new skills or upgrade existing ones and self-improvement education to enhance members abilities in such areas as citizenship, basic skills or cultural awareness. In the case of senior staff association of Nigerian universities (SSANU), they organize conferences, seminars, workshops and symposium from time to time so as to add to the knowledge, improve the attitude and enhance the skills of their members.

According to the ILO's recent report World Employment and Social Outlook 2021 (ILO 2021) there has been a five-fold increase in the last ten years of digital labour platforms transforming the world of work (the report defines digital platforms as online entities providing digital

services and products). According to the report, digital labour platforms are providing new work opportunities, including for women, persons with disabilities, young people and those marginalized in traditional labour markets. This growth has underlined the need for international policy dialogue and regulatory cooperation to provide decent work opportunities and foster the growth of sustainable businesses more consistently.

### **Labour Union Training in the New Normal**

The COVID-19 pandemic has turned working life upside down for millions of workers and with it, the work of trade unions. When large parts of the economy were shut down, when going to work became a matter of life and death, and when work for millions of people, including most union staff, moved into their homes, how did unions continue to function effectively? The pandemic demanded and necessitated the need for improvements in how the workforce is protected and trained. One of the long standing and urgent need was equipping workers with skills that will be demanded in the labour market in coming years (post COVID). The pandemic accelerated trends towards automation, putting some skills in high demand, and others in low demand, making recovery in the labour market more difficult. Those changes necessitated training for workers so they can cope with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and adapt to the new normal. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, automation and artificial intelligence technologies were transforming the workplace, increasing interaction between workers and machines, and requiring new skills for workers (McKinsey, 2018). Author and Reynolds (2020) speculate that the post-COVID labour market will markedly differ from its pre-pandemic environment in four key ways: Tele-presence which is defined by the oxford dictionary as “the use of virtual reality technology, especially for remote control machinery or for apparent participation in distant events”, Urban de-densification, employment concentration in large firms and general automation forcing. Other studies have had similar predictions of how work will change in the wake of the COVID crisis. The crisis required significant steps forward in training workers/employees for the post covid-19 economy.

The world has changed drastically and this has demanded a new working arrangement with greater workplace automation because we are in the era of “new normal”, from telemedicine and streaming fitness classes to social distancing and “elbow bumps” and from online learning from ivy leagues universities to remote workplace training and engagement. The covid-19 emergency measures has defined the new organizations’ life which includes increase in remote and flexible work arrangement which will require the employee to be well trained in order to

meet up with the knowledge, skills and attitude required in the “new normal”. The different aspects and mode of training labour unions ensure their members engage in the new normal are specific to the types of service they render and the changes the new normal has affected. Given the adoption of more digital technology, automation, and artificial intelligence (AI), as well as the “new normal” work practice in the post-pandemic labor force, certain types of occupations could be adversely affected. The least educated, unskilled, and low-skilled workers may be replaced by automation (Lund, 2021).

Vulnerable workers will likely be the hardest-hit group; some of them might have to work multiple jobs (probably freelance jobs) to sustain a living. It is likely further to exacerbate existing inequalities in the world of work, and therefore reskilling and up-skilling will become more necessary than ever before. Similarly, jobs such as personal care, on-site customer service, and leisure and travel have been severely disturbed by the pandemic. Businesses and policymakers can help workers in workforce transitions by additional training and education programs. For example, businesses might analyze which tasks can be done remotely instead of looking at an entire occupation and possibly eliminating it. Policymakers might facilitate businesses in terms of digital infrastructure enhancement (Lund, 2021). Work-related policy changes that will protect and support businesses and workers, including enhancing employees in the post-pandemic, are also essential. The future trend of the labor market will be a challenging time for everyone, and the labor policies will need to be improved and strengthened to thrive in the post-coronavirus disease world.

The workplace relations and labour law analysis suggest that, even though the mode of work has changed tremendously across enterprises, this change has not had notable effects on workplace relations as enterprises have devised ways of communicating and maintaining dialogue in the workplace. The COVID-19 pandemic has also impacted employers’ perceptions and the importance they attached to several critical aspects of their operations such as the role of labour unions, the role of employers and business membership, workplace dialogue, workforce flexibility, digital technology, and business continuity planning. The existing labour laws and regulatory framework are viewed as inadequate to cope with the changing realities created by COVID-19 and therefore should be reviewed.

### **Factors Affecting Labour Union Training in the New-Normal**

Regarding skills development, knowledge sharing and productivity, it is found that the biggest challenge posed by COVID-19 pandemic in terms of skills development, knowledge sharing,

and productivity is the need for regular provision of training and development, as well as skills acquisition programs for employees, with creative funding approaches. It is further noted that Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) skills are now more important for business success notwithstanding, other forms of skills such as core technical, creative, innovative and communication skills are also vital for business success.

To meet the required skills needs, enterprises plan to use their own funds while also relying on public and donor funding support. It also discovered that enterprises have changed the way they measure and monitor performance and productivity of employees. In terms of human resource management, only a few enterprises have changed the criteria for hiring new workers, while for most others the criteria remain largely unchanged. Among vital tools being used by enterprises to provide for mental and emotional wellbeing of employees, including those working remotely and in-person, are communication, organising of social gatherings either digitally or socially distant– for employees as a way of relieving them of stress, and the design of a clearly defined policy on flexible work. As a way forward, the most important lessons learned from the Covid-19 pandemic are the need for flexibility, the importance of preparedness for unplanned shocks, and the need for forward thinking business plans; that is, business planning should be long-term in nature and be able to accommodate unexpected changes and occurrences that may alter such plans.

Several recommendations for different stakeholders are provided and notable among such measures are complete and or partial economic lockdowns, and restrictions on social gatherings and travel (both within country and cross-border). Particularly in Nigeria, there was total economic lockdown in certain states (Lagos, Ogun and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja), with partial lockdowns in other states for about six (6) months. Apart from the lockdown, the Federal Government also imposed a series of restrictions inter-state and intra-city travel bans, an international travel ban, and restrictions on social gatherings. The various measures brought about disruptions in economic activities. Even though countries have since relaxed these measures, they are still struggling to come out of the effects of the pandemic economically and socially.

In Nigeria, the world of work has been affected tremendously in terms of organization of production, workspace arrangement, labour relations, and modes of work. The pandemic has caused severe disruptions to business operations, brought about changes in the conduct of enterprises in terms of human resource management, workplace structure and arrangements



and modes of work, with many enterprises embracing remote work and becoming more flexible than in the pre-COVID-19 era. These changes have affected both employers and employees in diverse ways. While production, costs of doing business and the income/profit of enterprises have been affected, workers have also suffered disruptions in working hours, wages and salaries, and employment loss in some cases. This report presents a collection of views on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on enterprises and work in Nigeria. It describes the varying ways in which the pandemic has affected work and workplaces, the role of labour laws and the regulatory framework in navigating the pandemic, adaptation of enterprises in terms of skills needs and changing production strategies, as well as human resource management.

Before COVID-19, most trade unions (particularly those from the developing countries) were relaxed in their uptake of digital technologies and platforms to execute their mandate, continuing to rely mostly on physical interactions and high mobility. However, with the outbreak of COVID-19, digitalization has increased significantly in scale, speed and complexity and is fast-changing, putting pressure on trade unions to use digital technologies to shape their way of operating, advance membership servicing and strengthen advocacy and engagement with other national stakeholders. Workers' education and training programmes are key to keeping trade unions connected with their membership and for strengthening the capacities and capabilities of workers to articulate issues that affect them. The outbreak of COVID-19 challenged the traditional forms of trade union education and training programmes, which were predominantly physical. For example, in 2019 ILO/ACTRAV coordinated a course titled "The Evolving World of Work: New Learning Methodologies and Technologies for Enhanced Trade Union Education in Africa".

Not all traditional face-to-face learning courses can easily be used for or are compatible with online learning. Therefore, trade unions and their service organizations (research and education institutes) need to:

- (i) Collaborate, reconstruct, and convert their traditional face-to-face learning courses and modules into online-compatible learning modules, courses and e-materials, and deliver them through webinars.
- (ii) Invest in upgrading office ICTs.
- (iii) Develop internal expertise in online teaching and learning methodologies. These can be in the form of purely online courses or blended courses (a combination of face-to-face and online education).

- (iv) Seek the support of ILO/ACTRAV in developing tailor-made online courses or modules suitable for national and sectorial education and training (such as Learning Modules On Line – LEMON) as coined by the Council of Europe (COE).
- (v) Ensure that such online courses are accredited, licensed and monitored for quality assurance and compliance purposes.
- (vi) Cooperate with labour-friendly experts and/or CSOs and academia so as to build alliances and partnerships critical in a globalized world.
- (vii) Develop specialized ICT courses for trade union members/grassroots, trade union structures and workplace-based committees such as workers committees, on how to interface with online and virtual platforms.

All countries depend on the quality of their infrastructure to improve their productivity, international competitiveness, economic growth, and improvements in living standards of their citizens. Trade unions need to demand that their national governments pay special attention to resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation. In this context, the term “infrastructure” would need to take a broader perspective to incorporate a broad range of factors including physical infrastructure such as roads, bridges, ports and communications infrastructure as well as socio-economic institutions such as the legal system, government regulatory systems and even considerations as intangible as social norms of behaviour. Trade unions must join other partners in advocating for the development of guidelines and best practice in the promotion and development communications industries and improve services for enterprises and citizens.

### **Summary**

Labour unions in Nigeria is saddled with the responsibility of training its members, consistently, and the Covid-19 pandemic brought a shift into the world of work and this affected how labour unions trained their members. Owing to the changes brought about by the pandemic, new constructs and modalities came up especially technologically, the idea of working from home was fostered and so many changes workers needed to adapt to emerge. There so many factors that affected the labour union training in the new normal and one of such challenges was funding. One of the solutions proposed was for labour unions to Seek the support of ILO/ACTRAV in developing tailor-made online courses or modules suitable for

national and sectorial education and training (such as Learning Modules On Line – LEMON) as coined by the Council of Europe (COE).

## Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic brought about a huge shift in the world of work and this affected how labour unions train their members. Means of adapting to the new-normal was procured and adapted by labour unions. Different Technological changes gave rise to news ways of doing things and fostering productivity in the world of work.

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