

# A study of The Competencies and Skills Required by District Directors of The Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA)

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SRIPATUM REVIEW

## Abstract

This research examines a study undertaken in Bangkok Metropolitan Administration. The aim of the paper was to study the skills and competencies required by the District Directors in order to produce an operational strategy for workplace learning and improvement of work quality. The participants of the study consisted of the three Executives and all fifty District Directors of the BMA.

The challenge to face the BMA was to use a mixed methods approach, using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The principal study was undertaken by the application of a Delphi survey technique, followed by a series of semi-structured interviews. The results of Delphi survey identified that the seven elements needed to improve their skills and competencies were (1) leading an organisation (2) administering responsibilities rapidly and transparently in order to provide effective service (3) being mature (4) establishing good human relationships (5) collaborating effectively with people and their organisations (6) providing moral leadership concerned with equity and equality (7) understanding people in order to satisfy their needs.

The five professional development strategies to promote these needs were (1) improving skills and competencies (2) successful training (3) sharing ideas and opinions with their peers in training classes (4) two months duration of training programmes (5) the training at the Nongjok Training Institute.

This study leads to a recommendation that the BMA makes a firm commitment to implement this new policy and to adopt training strategies in order to bring about an increase in the skills and competencies of all of the District Directors, thus improving their on-job performance and encouraging them to be life-long learners.

**KEYWORDS:** Professional development, Proactive evaluation, Learning organisation, Delphi survey, Bangkok Metropolitan Administration

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) is organised in accordance with the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration Act 1985, to be responsible for the management of the city of Bangkok. It is the sole organisation at local authority level responsible for the well-being of Bangkok residents. The BMA receives some financial support from the central government. The BMA is comprised of two main bodies: the Governor, and the Bangkok Metropolitan Council.

This study focuses on the skills and competencies required by District Directors to make them more effective in their role. District Directors have been authorised to perform the following tasks: local governing, community development, occupational training and promotion, registration, police works, public cleansing, city planning, health care, revenue collection and education. These duties are divided and assigned to ten sections: Administration Section; Registration Section; Public Works Section; Environment and Sanitation Section; Revenue Section; Public Cleansing and Public Park Section; Education Section; Finance Section; City Law Enforcement Section (City Police); Community Development and Social Welfare Section.

This study establishes the skills and competencies required by District Directors of the BMA, and gives an indication of appropriate professional development strategies that might be used to achieve these skills and competencies.

This in turn assists in formulating a job description for their role. At the same time, it supports the value of using Proactive Evaluation as a process for describing current best practice and for developing a strategy for action amongst very senior administrators engaged in local government - an area that is often inaccessible. It also provides a link between human resource development and professional development that will be of interest to scholars in the field.

This study proved to be significant in that it led to the following outcomes: the production of an operational strategy for the ongoing workplace and lifelong learning as part of The Ninth National Economic and Social Development Plan (2002-2006); providing District Directors with an understanding of how to meet their needs and to advance or protect their job interests; the provision of workplace learning opportunities that will enable District Directors to develop their own learning organisations; to make learning an integral part of the workplace. The findings of this study will help the administration of the BMA better understand the interests and needs of District Directors in order to improve their job performance. It will help develop the relationships between Executives and Subordinates to learn and understand each other and assist the BMA in becoming a learning organisation.

### 1.1 Objective

The primary objective of this study (Koetsuk, 2006) was to undertake a Proactive

Evaluation that: 1) establishes the skills and competencies required by District Directors in the city of Bangkok; and 2) outlines professional development strategies required to promote these skills and competencies.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

In this study, a needs assessment was employed that involved both qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative methods used to collect data by means of semi-structured interviews of three senior executives of the BMA who control all Districts in Bangkok; the outcomes of these interviews were used to establish a starting point in describing what they believe the District Directors - their subordinates in the BMA - require to improve their skills. The principles of a collaborative intent interview, in which the researcher aimed to persuade the interviewees to become collaborators, were applied to this discussion (Jean & Jean, 1996). This process led to the formulation of 13 key issues.

A Delphi survey is used to obtain individual opinions from a group of experts and systematically to obtain consensus (Lanford, 1969; Isaac & Michael, 1981; Ziglio, 1996). the researcher selected the Delphi survey as the research method for this study because such a survey is often used to obtain an informed or refined consensus from a group of participants. It is a methodology in which respondents work independently to pool their ideas

about a relevant idea - in this case, the skills and competencies thought necessary for the role of District Directors. In a quantitative phase, three rounds of a Delphi survey of fifty District Directors were undertaken with the intent of achieving a consensus on which of the 13 key issues, together with a further three issues identified by the District Directors as part of the survey, were considered to be the most important. The outcome of this was the identification of seven specific skills and competencies, and five professional development strategies that should be included in any training programme designed for District Directors.

Nine of the fifty District Directors were invited to participate in a subsequent qualitative phase in which, by means of individual semi-structured interviews, each discussed the seven skills and competencies and the five professional development strategies. The outcomes of each interview were summarised and formulated as a set of case studies. 'A good case study brings a phenomenon to life for readers and helps them understand its meaning' (Gall, 1996, p. 543). The findings from the outcomes of the narrative analysis of the semi structured interviews provided a comprehensive profile of the skills and competency needs, as well as appropriate professional development strategies, which led to the formulation of a professional development training policy for District Directors of the BMA.

### 3. PARTICIPANT REVIEW AND REPORTING

As in all applied study, particular attention must be paid to the detailed planning and in turn the effective execution of the study. This process focused on four key planning and execution activities.

#### Phase 1: Interview of the Permanent Secretary and two Deputy Permanent Secretaries of the BMA

This phase, which took place over two months, was conducted via face-to-face interviews using a standard semi-structured interview protocol with the Permanent Secretary and two Deputy Permanent Secretaries of BMA in order to establish what they believe to be the skills and competency needs of District Directors in the changing environment of their workplace. The contribution of each person interviewed provided valuable information that was used to design the questionnaire for the Delphi survey in round one of Phase 2 of the study.

#### Phase 2: Delphi Survey

The Delphi survey procedure used in this study consisted of three rounds, and the timescale to accomplish this phase was from 10 September to 26 November 2004. In this phase, a total of three rounds of assessment as recommended by Pfeffer (1968) were undertaken with a view to obtaining a consensus view of the importance of these ideas. The outcome was a rank-ordered listing of seven skills and competency needs that represents a consensus view of the District

Directors of the BMA

#### Phase 3: Semi-structured Interviews

In phase 3, the researcher carried out a set of individual semi-structured interviews of nine District Directors between 27 December 2004 and 10 January 2005. Three District Directors were invited from each size range. They were asked to discuss the seven skills and competency needs as identified by the Delphi survey, together with a discussion of professional development strategies that were to promote these needs

#### Phase 4: Policy Formulation

As a result of the findings of the Delphi survey and the narrative analysis of the semi structured interviews in Phase 3, the skills and competency needs and professional development strategies were used as the basis for formulating a professional development policy for District Directors of the BMA.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISSCUSION

The responses to the final round of a Delphi survey enabled the researcher to achieve a consensus of all fifty District Directors needs most in order to improve their on job performance and their ability to adapt to change in the organisation. These seven elements were:

1. They were lacking in leadership skills.
2. They need to learn how to provide an increased quality of public service.
3. They need to improve their emotional intelligence quotient
4. They need to improve the quality of



their interpersonal contacts with colleagues.

5. They need to collaborate effectively with people and their districts.

6. They need to improve moral leadership that encourages equity and equality for all of their staff so that they can work more effectively with them.

7. They have indicated interest in being proactive regarding the problems of the people so that they can help to provide better services.

The key ideas which corresponded to the five professional development strategies to promote the seven skills and competencies were:

1. They wanted to Improving their skills and competencies.

2. They wanted to learn from Expert trainers having both academic and practical experience.

3. They wanted to share ideas towards solving problems during classes so that they can use this knowledge to solve the very real problems that they face within their individual districts.

4. They wanted to have training programmes that take place for up to two months.

5. They wanted to attend training programmes at the Nongjok Training Institute.

## 5. TRAINING POLICY FOR THE BMA

According to Hunt (2000), policy is 'a consistent set of principles, directed to the achievement of designed outcomes'. The outcomes of this study were a declaration in the

form of a policy that represents the personal beliefs, values and needs required to improve the skills and competencies required by District Directors. This particular policymaking regarding the learning needs of District Directors comprises 6 of the 18 phases developed by Dror (1973, 1987).

Real improvement will take place when the scheme is having a very real affect in raising their aspirations and achievements. The training programme will offer a wide range of themes reflecting services that are vital to the peoples' quality of life.

District Directors will gain essential advantages from this training policy that will bring beneficial effects to their job, as follows:

1. They will become a new-generation style of leader in their district by implementing their leadership skills so as to adapt to the changing environment.

2. They will be able to participate in and be responsible for public management as well as to promote rapid and transparent improvements in the quality of public services.

3. They will be able to establish a better way of working that leads to satisfactory results and to make them more effective by improving their emotional intelligence.

4. They will be able to solve increasing problems and complex social issues by developing their personal skills, which in turn will benefit the BMA.

5. They will be able to encourage better performance as well as to improve effective collaboration by gaining new knowledge that will have a beneficial effect on their job responsibilities.

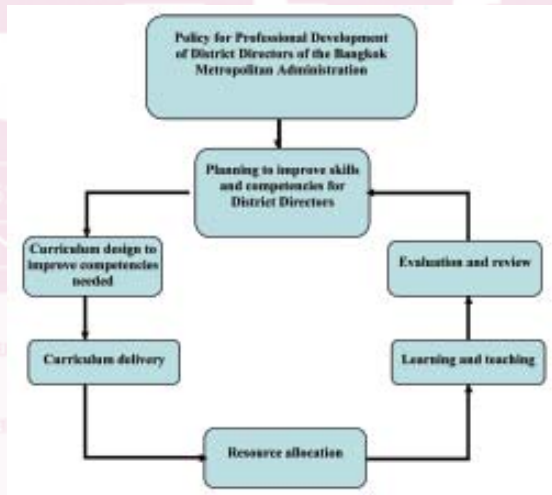
6. They will be able to work more efficiently and effectively in terms of provision of quality by improving moral leadership with equity and equality.

7. They will gain new knowledge by improving strategies to better understand the local people to increase public satisfaction.

8. They will be able to improve the quality of work and productivity in the long term.

9. They will be able to lead a learning organisation that supports continuous learning, organisational improvement and development.

Effective civil servant development and training would appear to be viewed with increasing importance in the present climate. Dyckman (1992, p. 88) sees 'systematic training and professional development of all staff' as a necessity for the District Directors profession. It can be said that to meet the challenges of the future, a much larger investment is required on the part of the BMA to help District Directors improve their professionalism so that they can better understand the range of their responsibilities - thereby enabling them to work more effectively. The elements of this professional development policy are shown in Figure 1,



**Figure 1:** Policy sequence for professional development of BMA District Directors

An improved approach towards District Director development needs to emphasise the learning organisation; it needs to be integrated with both operational and strategic planning and decision making. What must be considered is a Proactive Form of Evaluation to obtain data (Owen & Rogers, 1999); a qualitative approach to public policy making (Dror 1973, 1987); a systematic approach to organisational development (Senge 1990); and a learning competency being a characteristic that distinguishes a superior from a fully-successful learner (Rothwell, 2004).

## 6. SUGGESTIONS FOR THE BMA AND LEARNING DEVELOPMENT

The outcome of this study has been an operational strategy, in the form of a training policy, for workplace learning and improvement of work quality. However, these results could be

used for establishing the training needs of District Directors in order to improve their job performance in the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration.

Suggestions for development are as follows:

1. The Executives of BMA should focus on relationship development of District Director teams. Real change for the BMA is a long-term process that involves both the Executive and the District Directors. The District Directors need the support of their Executives to keep the momentum of change going.

2. The Executives of BMA should be encouraged to undertake a formative and a summative evaluation of the training programmes that result from the training policy. Such evaluations would be expected to improve such programmes.

3. The Executives of BMA should dictate the extent to which the District Directors take responsibility in their own professional development and monitoring of change processes should be explored.

4. BMA should become a learning organisation involving both District Directors and the Executives of the BMA. It should focus on providing time for quality professional development.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

This study gives sufficient background detail to provide training opportunities that will improve the on-job performance of District Directors within the BMA, rendering them more efficient, effective and able to offer more reliable services to the people in their constituencies.

The findings of this study were intended to encourage the Executives of the BMA to look at what was important for their District Directors in order to improve their job performance. The training policy as part of The Sixth BMA Development Plan (2002-2006) has identified a set of skills and competencies needed by District Directors so as to improve their on-job performance and their ability to adapt to change in the organisation. Thus, the BMA must begin to evaluate their current training and development capabilities. The BMA must provide instructional materials that will enhance the performance and confidence of the group of District Directors. A training programme that clearly addresses the needs of District Directors and the programme focused on developing new skills and competencies needed by all fifty District Directors.

Training programmes will prepare them for the rapidly changing and increasingly demanding work environment in which they find themselves. Ideally, this will help to stimulate enjoyment, active participation and motivation for them all.

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