



LEARNING STUDY

Hajia Nafisah Bridges the Generational Gap

The Federal Transport Agency (FTA), the regulator of air, road, maritime and rail transport had their usual Management Meetings on Thursdays. It was always a very long and intense meeting, and the newly appointed CEO of the Agency was a very thorough and experienced professional who had joined the agency from its early days when it was carved out of the Ministry of Transportation as a pioneer staff.

This week's meeting was no different and each of the Directors gave their weekly reports and received feedback and inputs from their colleagues. Mr Akenzuwa, the ED-Railways cleared his throat in his usual manner before he began to speak - everyone called him the 'English-speaking guy' as he always wore a bow-tie and had this haircut from the 1960s that made him stand out.

'Fellow colleagues, our Department has been struggling with a big issue for many months now and I think with the impending retirement of two our Assistant Directors we are going to be in real trouble'. At that point, Hajia Nafisah, the Acting Director - Human Resources (she was the youngest member of the Management Team and had only worked at FTA for 4 years) leaned forward to pay rapt attention to Akenzuwa whose combination of an American and English accent often got everyone mesmerized and confused.

"During the last round of inspection of the various rail concessionaires we needed to appoint some of our Managers and Deputy Managers as team leaders on the various teams because we already had two Assistant Directors retire from last year. The chaps were just not ready and didn't really do a good job. I had to get very involved in my personal capacity to ensure that the final reports and memo to the Minister and the Federal Executive Council were done properly. "Sir, in the 25 years since I have worked in this Agency, I have never seen a Director get so involved in routine operations - absolutely ludicrous! Perhaps if I ever saw this happen it was in the first year when we started, and we were all still learning the ropes, but come on -



something just *ain't* right. (as he punched his clenched fist into the air a few times).

At that point, the FTA's CEO interjected "Hajia" (as he turned towards Nafisah who was seated a couple of spaces to his left). We have an existential challenge on our hands and I know we have talked about this before - it pre-dates your coming here. You all remember how for many years as we got through the last military regime there was a blanket ban on recruitment, and then even when Baba was in charge there was also a lot of right-sizing and then another period of a hiring embargo.

Yes, we were a bit over-weight in the early days, but then we got so lean that it almost looked like we had kwashiorkor" (Everyone laughed, Mr Ukpe, the CEO was known for his humour, and "keeping it real"). Then, we hired all these young people mostly "green-horns" and a few more experienced hires and since then the wave of private sector participation in the industry has grown so much that we are struggling to play catch up. But our real problem is a generational gap - those who have the DNA of the organization - we the 'old-school" and then the "newbies" or millennials or whatever Hajia Nafisah and Co like to call them. We need to fix this gap, and all this exposure training that we have spent millions on, while quite useful clearly has not solved the problem, and only seems to be getting our millennials more hits on their pictures from their globe-trotting on - "The Gram" (another round of laughter and side-talk ensued at Ukpe's social media savvy).

The discussions continued with speaker after speaker re-echoing Akenzuwa's concerns. Hajia Nafisah's report confirmed the issues - there was a huge generational gap and a number of impending retirements in the next three years that could create a real succession crisis. She needed to get to work fast, and find a solution, and Ukpe made this clear in his summary remarks at the end.

As Nafisah returned to her seat she checked her phone and remembered a WhatsApp Group to which she belonged from a workshop that she attended on Strategic Human Resources. She had never really kept up with the conversations on the group but remembered how the discussions always centered on solving real-life HR problems. She posted a synopsis of her challenge at FTA and got very useful advice from the members. The two that stood out were - 1) Invest in Knowledge Management and 2) Implement a Mentoring Program.



In the weeks that followed, Hajia Nafisah got the approval of the CEO to implement both programs and luckily one of the people on her HR group who had actually mooted the ideas was available to consult for them and drive implementation.

Like with all new initiatives, the Mentoring and Knowledge Management Program had its teething problems, but Rwang (the Lead Consultant) and his team were excellent at managing change and laid out a great plan to carry everyone along. Clear metrics were created to monitor and track the implementation of the mentoring program and its impact. Mentors and mentees were matched, a policy document was approved with guidelines for the program and the mentors received training to be able to carry out their new roles. Rwang also provided Mentoring Toolkits across various subject areas and arranged a briefing with the mentees too before implementation to clear any “gray areas”

Very importantly, the Knowledge Management (KM) project that was running side-by-side also ensured that processes and procedures were better documented and that the history and lessons from transactions of the past were curated and available to all. The KM team captured a lot of the oral history and traditions of the Company in stories that were placed on their portals and did a lot of video interviews of past and current staff that were also available on the Staff Portal and used in the Mentoring conversations.

Within one year, things had started to turn around - the retirements continued though, but the skills gaps reduced, and performance got better. Hajia Nafisah had succeeded in bridging the gap at FTA!

Is your organization dealing with similar generational or capacity gap that traditional “training” has not been able to resolve? Will you like to explore the impact of a Workplace Mentoring and Knowledge Management Program? Then call us at Learning Impact NG on 0818195 6161.

