

Reflections of a Trainer

Information literacy training at the Parliament of Zimbabwe

Ronald Munatsi, 2010

A basic principle of effective training is that the facilitator has a good understanding of the subject material and resources at hand. However, knowing the background and needs of the audience can be equally important. Knowledge of your audience is one of the key aspects of the train-the-trainer workshops, providing future facilitators with the subject knowledge and materials to adapt to their respective audiences. This case study looks at the adaptation and application of information literacy training methodologies to participants from the Parliament of Zimbabwe.

Last year, the Parliament of Zimbabwe was the beneficiary of an Information literacy (InfoLit) training workshop. This workshop was a cascaded event, following-on from an initial train-the-trainer workshop on 'Advanced Internet Research and Information Literacy Training' in Nairobi, Kenya, at the beginning of 2010. The cascading methodology involves training an initial group in the skills necessary to train others. Whether done locally, regionally or internationally, the idea is that each participant will go on to train more people in their institution, country or region. The Parliament of Zimbabwe sent two participants to the Nairobi workshop – Ronald Munatsi and Siluzile Mhlanga, from the Library and ICT departments respectively. Other participants included those from the Parliaments of Malawi and Zambia.

A follow-on workshop in Harare, Zimbabwe, saw the same participants return to build on the training in Nairobi. The principal aim was to raise awareness and equip participants with hands-on skills in Web 2.0 and other online tools. This would aid in improving access to, and effective utilisation of, scientific information resources thereby facilitating evidence-based policy making in parliaments.

Following these two workshops, the Parliament of Zimbabwe implemented two information training workshops and a total of 80 members of staff received training. The following are reflections from the trainer perspective by the lead facilitator of these workshops.

Adoption of Training Skills (Train-the-Trainer)

The initial workshops (in Nairobi and Harare), set a solid foundation for the follow-on workshops. They also presented excellent networking opportunities, as the participants formed strong bonds and have continued to tap information from each other. As trainers we really benefited from this. What I also appreciated was that the follow-on workshop in Harare was not the organiser's plan initially, but was suggested by the participants after having identified gaps in their skills. It was suggested that bridging these gaps would allow them to run future training workshops more effectively within their own parliaments.

"I can now not only search effectively but [also] evaluate the usefulness and authenticity of the information."

Workshop Participant

After the Nairobi workshop, it was clear that each participant was strongly identifying with the programme and applying the new skills to their own situation. It was not a workshop where participants simply attended only to forget everything the moment they leave. A strong and enthusiastic group of participants can have a large impact on a training workshop, however, excellent facilitation is key – and the facilitators in this case were excellent. They were a well-organised and well-rounded team that were able to effectively represent the key dimensions necessary for InfoLit training. To support evidence-based policy in parliaments, there are a wide range of people involved – from academics and researchers to experts in library and information science (such as science communication).

In train-the-trainer workshops, the facilitators must create a lasting impression on their participants, inculcating them with the values and necessary skill-sets to implement future training programmes. A motivated and competent trainer can mean the difference between success and failure in future programmes.

Cascading the training within the Parliament of Zimbabwe

After the follow-on workshop in Harare, we started working on implementing a local training workshop. Although I wouldn't describe this as a 'stroll in the park', we successfully implemented two workshops for the Parliament of Zimbabwe staff.

Once we had decided on the workshops we wanted to run, we applied for funding through INASP's Evidence-Informed Policy Making programme area. Thankfully, we didn't have many problems applying for the grant since we had a very strong programme outline with clear objectives. Fine tuning the proposal did take some time,

with several drafts between the Parliament and INASP, but we did not lose heart and it was eventually approved. The first InfoLit training workshop targeted staff members from the Library, ICT and Research departments, as well as relevant committees.

The second workshop involved a number of other departments including Public Relations, External Relations and Hansard. To take part in the workshops, participants had to be computer literate and have a working knowledge of the internet. The department Heads were asked to nominate appropriate participants. Our workshops were modelled around the Nairobi and Harare workshops with the exception of those modules focusing on training trainers. The content and the varied participant groups meant that ours were longer than the initial train-the-trainer workshops and stretched over 5 days.

Because of the length, we felt the two of us who had attended the initial workshops would not suffice, so we sought additional facilitators. We roped in a tutor in InfoLit from the University of Zimbabwe (UoZ), invited both the Zimbabwe PERii Country Coordinator, Agnes Chikonzo (UoZ's University librarian) and the Director of Library and Information Services at the American Embassy Public Affairs Section, S. Mushonga. The added expertise from these institutions worked very well for us and provided valuable information for both organisers and participants alike. Our Director of Library Services at the Parliament doubled as the administrator and facilitator making our lives much easier.

Although we primarily utilised the INASP training material, we also developed additional presentations that we felt were relevant to our audience. The initial resources are an excellent template, created with the intention of making them easily adaptable to more specific audiences and information needs – be it language, skill level or examples specific to a country or institution. A key addition we made concerned 'new media' – social media tools and applications that foster quicker, more interactive access to resources and also the bookmarking and sharing of content. The collaborative content generation and management typifying Web 2.0 services has immense advantages including: collaborative peer-generated research content; collaborative cataloguing and metadata management; and user-driven research information services. We also included extended features of different search engines.

Outcome

The outcome of our workshops surpassed all our expectations and has greatly contributed to our organisation. This has been demonstrated both by the feedback from the evaluation forms and

“The workshop has been useful, enlightening and illuminating, particularly in so far as it exposed the enormous gaps I had (and still have!). Whereas before I thought of myself as being comparatively ‘street wise’ and ‘savvy’... as far as ICTs are concerned, my shallowness and naiveté in this medium have been exposed.”

Workshop Participant

the feedback that we continue to receive. The training also opened up a great deal of enthusiasm among the participants as they continually discover the new tools, media and applications the internet offers. As a librarian I am inundated with calls and emails from staff members asking about what they may have forgotten while others even advise me of new and additional features they have discovered.

Fellow facilitators from the other institutions, especially the US Embassy Public Affairs Section, have also reported similar developments with participants frequently visiting for research assistance and information. It is our hope that we will be able to extend similar training to Members of Parliament including identifying skill requirements for specialised groups to build their capacity in supporting evidence-based policy-making.

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Participants from the workshops for parliamentary staff, 2010