

DEVELOPING PROFESSIONAL CAPABILITY FOR THE NATIONAL STATISTICS OFFICE (NSO): The Philippine Experience¹

BACKGROUND

The thrust of the NSO with regards to capability building and staff development programs is explicitly indicated in the agency core values for human resources. It recognizes the value of its human resource and continues to promote their general welfare and well-being. The agency is committed to seeking and providing opportunities for the professional and personal growth of its staff, as well as providing avenues for enhancement and sustainability of their careers.

The NSO continually seeks out higher productivity through a workforce that possesses the knowledge and skills required for effective performance of designated tasks and office activities.

The NSO has existing human resource policy with regards to the recruitment of potential technical and administrative staff following the guidelines on Merit Selection Plan (MSP), pursuant to the provisions of the Philippine Civil Service Commission (CSC) on recruitment and hiring of personnel in the government service. It has established personnel development programs on trainings and scholarships linked to the agency's five year development plan. The agency has also strengthened its organizational capacity with the institution of various in-house and other statistical development programs on census and survey management, census data analysis, management of civil registration and production of vital statistics. Moreover, the NSO has established partnerships and linkages with all agencies in the country's statistical system at the national and sub-national levels. It has also conducted and hosted several training courses for statisticians and other technical staff of National Statistical Offices of some neighboring countries in Asia and the Pacific as well as those from the African region.

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The NSO trusts that an effective, proficient and satisfied human resource shall provide the necessary support to carry out the agency's mission of producing and providing quality statistical and civil registration products and services.

RECRUITMENT

It is the policy of the NSO to adhere strictly to the principles of merit, fitness and equality. The selection of employees shall be based on their relative qualifications and competence to perform the duties and responsibilities of the position.

Merit Promotion Plan (MSP)

In compliance with the provisions of the CSC on the recruitment and promotion of potential civil service personnel to available positions in the agency, as covered in its plantilla, the NSO established its MSP as well as its accompanying Performance Evaluation System (PES). The CSC approved the MSP and the PES in September 2002 and since then, accredited the NSO for the execution of the MSP. This action has provided the NSO the authority to grant and approve appointments.

The MSP mandates that selection of employees for appointment at the NSO shall be open to all qualified individuals according to the principle of merit and fitness, and provided that they all meet the minimum requirements of the position to be filled up. It covers all positions in the first level pertaining to clerical positions, second level or administrative and supervisory and third level for managerial positions both at the Central Office and Field Offices of the NSO.

The following are the features of the MSP and the processes involved:

1. It covers all positions in the plantilla of the NSO and includes original appointments and related personnel actions.
2. It is open to all qualified individuals and does not discriminate on account of gender, civil status, disability, religion, ethnicity or political affiliation.

3. Vacant positions in the NSO are published in accordance with existing civil service laws, in particular, RA 7041 (Publication of Vacant Positions), and as such are posted in the CSC Bulletin of Vacant Positions, published in a newspaper of general circulation, posted in the NSO offices, both in the Central Office and Field Offices and in the NSO website.
4. The MSP established the Personnel Selection Board (PSB) in the Central Office and the Regional Selection Board (RSB) in the Field Offices that will assess the qualifications and competence of the applicants.
5. The appointing authority in all positions in the first two levels for the agency is the Administrator. For the third level positions, the Administrator recommends the qualified candidates to the President of the Philippines for appointment. The Administrator assesses the merits of the recommendation of the PSB for appointment and/or promotion from among the qualified applicants.

The competence and qualification of potential candidates for appointment shall be determined on the basis of the following criteria:

1. Very satisfactory performance of the last two rating periods for personnel applying for promotion.
2. Appropriate relevant education and training, in accordance with the requirements specified in the index of the civil service Qualification Standards (QS). For statistical positions, preference is given to applicants who graduated from college with a degree in Statistics, Mathematics, Engineering or Economics. For managerial positions, relevant master degree is an essential educational requirement. Relevant trainings required for statistical positions include statistical management development trainings conducted by NSO, Philippine Statistical Association (PSA), Statistical Research and Training Center (SRTC), statistical academic institutions, among others.

3. Appropriate experience in terms of the number of years in related tasks, as indicated in the QS.
4. Outstanding accomplishments in the performance of related tasks, occupational history, and other achievements worthy of commendation.
5. Psycho-social attributes and personality traits of the potential applicants which include the way the applicant perceives things, ideas and how the applicant acts and relates to others in social situations.
6. Potential of the applicant as to the capacity and ability to assume duties of the position to be filled up. It is also measured in a given trade test related to the position being applied for.
7. Appropriate civil service eligibilities. The eligibility is an indispensable requirement for entrants to the civil service. A sub-professional eligibility is required for first level positions while a professional civil service eligibility is a requirement for second level positions. Managerial or executive positions pertaining to third level positions require a Career Service Executive (CES) eligibility and subsequent conferment of a Career Service Executive Officer (CESO) rank by the President of the Philippines.

A mechanism for grievance has been integrated also in the MSP with the establishment of the NSO Grievance Committee. Grievance is an option for a qualified next-in-rank employee who applied and who is not selected for promotion to file a complaint. Other applicants who were not selected may also file a complaint and present their grievances with the committee under the following primary conditions: that there is no compliance of the selection process or there exists discrimination on the account of gender, civil status, disability, religion, ethnicity or political affiliation.

DEVELOPMENT

Along with MSP and PES, the NSO also established the Personnel Development Committee (PDC) which primarily serves to assess and screen the qualifications of

nominees for trainings and scholarships offered by NSO, PSA, SRTC and other national agencies, as well as those offered by various institutions abroad.

As part of the agency's development plan, the NSO encourages the participation of its staff in training and scholarship programs geared towards promoting excellence in the agency products and services. Accordingly, it encourages employees to pursue higher studies in Statistics and other fields of study relevant to NSO.

Guidelines for Application for Training and Scholarship

1. Any permanent NSO employee who has rendered at least 2 years of service as a permanent employee with no pending administrative or criminal charges may apply.
2. For foreign scholarships, the age limit is generally specified by the sponsoring institution; for other foreign/local scholarships, the age limit is not more than 55 years old.
3. The training or scholarship program must be relevant to the applicant's work.
4. Employees who are favorably endorsed by their respective department directors may be considered for recommendation to the Administrator who is the approving authority.
5. Once approved, the applicant shall execute the contract and service obligation.

The PDC addresses issues on personnel development of NSO officials and staff and provides recommendations to the Administrator on training and scholarship grants and policies. It evaluates applicants to trainings and scholarships on the qualifications set out in the training and scholarship policies of the NSO.

Responsibilities of NSO

1. Financial Assistance
 - a. For local scholarships with NSO as the sponsoring agency or if the applicant is not on a fellowship grant, tuition fees of the

- b. Salaries and other benefits of the applicant shall be provided by NSO for the whole duration of the training or study grant.
- c. For foreign scholarships, NSO also provides pre-departure allowance, clothing and medical allowance.

Responsibilities of the Grantee

1. The grantee executes a service contract and obligation, stipulating the conditions of the training or scholarship grant; the obligation to return to the country for foreign grants and serve the office immediately upon completion of the training or scholarship.
2. The contract requires guarantors who will assume full responsibility should grantee fail to comply with the conditions of the contract.
3. Upon completion of the course, the grantee shall fulfill the service obligation which varies from 6 months to 2 years or depending on the duration of the training or scholarship program being availed of. To some extent, service obligation extends to 2 years for every year of the availed program.
4. The grantee is also enjoined to re-echo his/her training either by presenting a paper in a symposium or giving a lecture in a training course conducted by NSO.

As a matter of policy, NSO allocates at least 1% of its total agency budget as support to all types of training and scholarship programs that are designed to develop the technical capabilities of the staff.

In-house Statistical Development Programs

A training needs assessment (TNA) was conducted by NSO to its employees in 2002, the results of which served as the basis for the development of the agency's training development plan. This resulted to the following training agenda commensurate to the level of positions occupied by a particular NSO staff:

First Level Positions

Training courses for first level positions were focused on practical learning such as English Fundamentals, Basic Technical Writing, Records and File Management and Basic Customer Service Skills.

Second Level Positions

For second level positions, technical training courses on statistics and information technology necessary for the management of census and surveys have been introduced. For potential and new statisticians, the Group-A Training has been designed to equip the participants on the required skills and capabilities in performing their duties and responsibilities. The training also prepares the potential participant for advancement in their careers in the agency.

Participation in the Group-A Training requires the applicant to meet the basic educational requirement, that of being a graduate of Statistics, Mathematics, Engineering or Economics or other related degrees and having passed the screening examination. The duration of the training extends up to a period of four to six months and it covers modules on theoretical and practical statistics, design of surveys, survey and field operations, data processing, civil registration and vital statistics, technical writing and actual on-the-job training in all departments of the agency.

The Group-A Training is a short title to what is referred to as the Statistics with Information Technology Applications and Survey Operations Course. The training has been institutionalized in the NSO as it started in 1969 and has produced prominent statisticians both serving the government and private

sectors. The training has just recently culminated its 22nd batch. Table 1 outlines the statistical training programs for the Group-A.

Table 1. Statistical Training Programs for the Group-A by Batch.

* Batch	Title of Training	Sponsoring Agencies	Year Conducted	Number of Participants	Number of Participants who are still with NSO
B C 1	Statistician Training Course	BCS* -CSC	1969	15	-
S 2			1971	23	1**
— 3	Statistical Manpower Training Program	NCSO* - UP* -NMYC*	1974	30	3
B 4			1975 (1 st Sem)	29	4
u 5			1975 (2 nd Sem)	26	3
e 6			1976	20	5
a 7			1977	27	6
o 8	Statistical and Electronic Data Processing (EDP) Training Program	NCSO-PSA	1978	24	5
f 9			1979	25	2
C 10			1980	30	5
e 11			1981	16	3
n 12			1982	20	6
u 13			1983	26	6
s 14			1984	24	5
a 15			1985	24	6
n 16			1986	21	1
S 17	1987	25	3		
t a t i 18	Statistics and EDP Training Program	NSO-SRTC-PSA	1988	23	5
s 19	Statistics and Computer Training Program	NSO-PSA	1991	32	23
t 20			1993	28	23
c 21	Statistics, Information Technology Applications and Survey Operations Course	NSO	2003	30	19
* 22			2009	28	28
* N	Total			546	162

* BCS - Bureau of the Census and Statistics
 NCSO -National Census and Statistics Office
 UP -University of the Philippines
 NMYC - National Manpower and Youth Council
 ** Current Administrator of the NSO

Third Level Positions

To sustain managerial capabilities of NSO officials, several management trainings are conducted as part of the training development agenda. The Field Officials In Service Training (FOIST), for example is designed to enhance the statistical management skills of incumbent field officers and prepare them for bigger responsibilities

For the most part, however, the NSO avails itself of management seminars and workshops offered by the Career Executive Service Board (CESB), CSC, private training institutions and universities.

NSO and Polytechnic University of the Philippines (PUP): Master in Applied Statistics

NSO tied up with the Polytechnic University of the Philippines (PUP) for the offering of its graduate program, Master in Applied Statistics (MAS). The program is being administered by NSO and the degree is conferred by PUP. It was initially offered as a continuing graduate program for Group-A graduates to provide them strong foundation in statistical methods, demographic techniques and competence in data management using statistical packages.

Classes for the MAS program are held at the NSO Central Office and its administrative requirements are facilitated at the Graduate School of the PUP which is located near the NSO Central Office.

The partnership with PUP now runs for almost two decades and has successfully produced graduates from the NSO, other government agencies as well as other scholars from neighboring countries, such as Cambodia and Myanmar. Table 2 shows the distribution of MAS graduates since 1982 (next page).

Table 2. Number of MAS Graduates.

Academic Year	Number of MAS Graduates	NSO		Non-NSO	
		Central Office	Field Office	Other Agencies	Foreign Institutions
1982	1			1	
1983	1	1			
1984	1	1			
1986	2	1		1	
1987	1	1			
1988	1	1			
1990	1	1			
1993	1	1			
1995	1			1	
1999	10	4	1	2	3 (Cambodia)
2000	7			2	5 (Myanmar)
2002	1	1			
2003	4			1	3 (Cambodia)
2004	4	1		3	
N 2005	2	1	1		
a 2007	1			1	
t 2009	4		1	3	
i Total	43	14	3	15	11

National Scholarship for Development (NSFD) and Local Scholarship Program (LSP)

The MAS program was initially made possible with the introduction of the NSFD which encouraged NSO staff to pursue higher academic programs, particularly in Statistics.

The NSFD requires government agencies to establish a study-now-pay-later scheme available to its permanent employees who desire to complete professional courses at the college or graduate levels.

The LSP is a competitive scholarship program administered by the CSC and is open to all government employees who wish to pursue a one-year master degree course, or to complete a bachelor's degree course.

In the field offices of the NSO, the NSFD has been extended and some staff have also availed of the Local Scholarship Program (LSP) of the CSC and enrolled in graduate business and public management graduate courses. Enrollment in graduate programs for statistics and related fields in the field offices are limited since there are few available academic institutions that offer specialized programs in statistics.

Outside NSO, the agency has been a recipient of various statistical and management trainings at the international, national and sub-national levels which benefited its staff. Several NSO field officials and staff earned their master degrees in demography, statistics and other related fields in academic institutions in the Philippines and abroad. Some have also acquired extensive trainings locally and abroad. A number of these local trainings are initiated by the PSA.

The PSA is the only professional association in the Philippines committed to the promotion and proper use of statistics and the NSO, being the primary statistical agency of the government has been an active partner of the institution in pursuing its goals. The NSO is a founding institutional member of the PSA and majority of its officials and technical staff both in the Central and Field Offices are individual members of the association. Several NSO officials have served in various capacities as officers of the association.

Partnership with other Agencies for the Professional Development of NSO Staff

In order to provide opportunities for employees' advance growth towards self-realization, the NSO has continued to serve as reliable source of statistical experts for international organizations such as the UNSIAP, Asian Development Bank (ADB), the World Health Organization (WHO) and other similar agencies. Through the decade, more than 50 experts from the NSO were seconded to various organizations.

The NSO has also hosted study and observation tours on statistical operations, statistical data processing, information technology and civil registration and has conducted special trainings as well for delegates of national statistical offices from several neighboring countries such as Bhutan, Micronesia, Nepal, Cambodia, Myanmar, Ethiopia, Sri Lanka, among others.

As local training institution accredited by the CSC, the NSO has also conducted trainings on statistical management, statistical operations, statistical theories and civil registration for various national and local government agencies.

The NSO has also endeavored several research and development initiatives geared towards improvement of field operations activities. It has worked closely with SRTC, PSA, NSCB and other agencies in the country's statistical system and to some extent, academic institutions on enhancing methodologies of censuses and surveys, pretest of field operations, studies on emerging statistical needs, among others.

The NSO has also worked with international organizations in the development of statistical methodologies and development strategies on various aspects of economic statistics, trade statistics, health statistics, survey methodology, etc.

The participation of NSO key officials and subject matter specialists in those activities enhanced their professional and technical capabilities, and at the same time heightened the agency's human resource capacity.

CONCLUSION

In terms of organizational strategies, as enumerated above, the most prominent statistical development program that facilitated human resource stability of the NSO is its institutionalization of the Group-A Training Program.

The program, for decades now has kept the statistical capacity of the organization having enticed graduates of Statistics and related fields to work in a government statistical agency, such as the NSO. It is to be noted that in the Philippines, degree programs in Statistics and other allied courses are limited as there are only a few higher education institutions that offer the program, yet with NSO taking the lead in

the promotion of Statistics with its Group-A Training program, graduates of Statistics can be assured of employment in the government.

The partnership with PUP in the offering of the graduate MAS program supports the policy of the NSO to professionalize its workforce in the field of Statistics relevant to the office. It does not only benefit NSO staff but also extends to other statisticians and practitioners in Statistics as well as other related workers both in the public and private sectors.

In effect, these programs have created a demand for Statistics as a professional career path.

With regards to sustaining statistical management skills of managerial and executive officials of the NSO, professional capabilities that need to be improved shall be more focused on the statistical analysis and data implications of census and survey results; developing capacities on handling official statistics, particularly those that concerns sub-national government statistics.

Presently, the office is developing modules that integrate all these concerns in the FOIST curriculum.

All the challenges in developing capability building programs that will promote the professional capacity of the office and encourage the professional growth of its officials and staff are being addressed by the agency, as part of its ongoing development agenda on human resource.