

ERCOE and organizational capacity building



Dr. Abiel Habtemariam

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Capacity building plays a great role in upgrading and developing the skills required for the provision of better services. The Eritrean Centre for Organizational Excellence (ERCOE) was established in 2006 with the basic objective of assisting the public and private organizations to be the most economic, efficient and effective entities.

The rationale behind the formation of this institution lies in the need to improve institutional capacity and work methods of the public and private sectors. It is a center which plays an important role in the social, economic and institutional transformation by creating excellent organizations in Eritrea. We have conducted a brief interview with Dr. Abiel Habtemariam and this article will extend excerpts of the interview.

According to Dr. Abiel, the Eritrean Centre for Organizational Excellence (ERCOE) has the task to provide training, research and consultancy services to the public and private sector related to management and public administration and inspire the values of excellence on institutions and their staff. ERCOE expects to see creative organizations in the path of excellence. It intends to act as a road map to organizational distinction by inspiring organizations to reach heights of perfection. It provides the

foundation for a never ending cycle of continuous improvement – a process by which people start where they are and work to improve their organization gradually over a period of time.

In relation to the government's policy and development priority, the center is expected to contribute by helping organizations to be more effective and productive. To address challenging tasks ahead, ERCOE tries to respond to the needs and demands of development programs. It perpetually identifies performance and outlook gaps in organizations before launching intervention measures that rightly deal with to the challenges of having effective organizations and managers.

ERCOE is mandated to promote excellence in of organizations and their members. The values that are espoused and practiced by its members are through quality of service and customer focus.

The major interventions ERCOE conducts are in relation to the areas of performance improvement program (PIP), a broad package program in which ERCOE works with the targeted organizations while drafting or revising their strategic plans and working systems. ERCOE works to integrate the interdependence of the various public and private ministries and commissions. It also works to inspire good organizational culture to improve productivity. These are all related to the PIP which takes up two months to accomplish.

The second program of ERCOE is area specific intervention on project management, training of trainers, entrepreneurship and manpower management.

The third task is offering research and consultancy service. According to the criteria of ERCOE, an organization, is said to be on the right path to excellence if it conforms to the seven basic principles of organizational excellence set on the framework of ERCOE. These are in the areas of leadership, strategic working plan, staff expertise, customer focus, process management, and function outcome and knowledge management. The activities of ERCOE mainly revolve around these principles.

ERCOE focuses on organizations and their management teams, their growth into maturity, responsibility and productivity. It can be described as a vehicle of a planned change process with a purpose to make a difference in the organizations' technology and their ways of doing things. The focus areas of ERCOE include performance improvement program (PIP), management of learning and leadership development, organizational development intervention, transferring organizations into "learning organizations", provision of learning resources to organizations and their members and conducting research and consultancy services.

ERCOE carries out performance improvement program (PIP) through vigorous assessment of the target organization's current position and prevalent challenges and opportunities. Furthermore, ERCOE assists organizations in developing strategic plans and in outlining desired goals and objectives with specified timeline. This is done to allow organizations to determine their current "level of excellence" and determine where they need to focus improvement efforts. Finally, it develops techniques of monitoring and evaluation against the envisaged plans. Organizations are said to be effective when they meet their espoused goals.

So far the organization has provided PIP services to 45 institutions with 1620 direct stakeholder participants. This includes ten ministries, all of the six regional administrations, 14 parastatal companies, ten public enterprises within the Ministry of Transportation and Communication, five colleges and two civil service organizations (NUEYS and NUEW). The training offered is supposed to have multiplier effects of spreading the values of organizational excellence.

Management learning and leadership development is done through tailor-made and participatory learning material preparation and delivery, retreats, seminars and workshops.

ERCOE's role regarding organizational development intervention is to facilitate the process of work quality improvement policies and procedures and strategic plans by the organizations.

ERCOE assists organizations to develop learning policies and create learning environments and training organizational development and productivity improvement (TOP) units. Dr. Abiel says ERCOE will greatly contribute to the buildup of in-service units within partner organizations. The "TOP" inservice units are coached and primed to stand up to the task in their respective organizations. With continuous and timely training and development aimed at mastery of "TOP" management, they will be veritable associates actively participating in the development of excellent organizations.

ERCOE also provides learning resources to organizations and their members by publishing management magazines, producing local management films, introducing e-learning and publication.

ERCOE has the responsibility of organizing research and consultancy services that are accomplished with different counter-partners in several areas of possible research topics. This task is carried out through collaborative research with the target organization. A tripartite team is formed to carry out the research which includes members of ERCOE, members of the target organization and graduates from colleges. In the last ten years, it has conducted ten collaborative research projects in cooperation with different partners and impact assessment of its activities.

The intervention impact of ERCOE is evaluated through neutral consultancy body. And it has found that at the individual and organizational level the impact was found to have been good. Some organizations have successfully institutionalized the frameworks and work system models promoted by ERCOE. But at the community level, the center feels that additional effort should be made.

ERCOE offers a variety of workshops to enhance the professional and personal development of its staff. There are four methods employed to achieve this. These are the inhouse training, where the senior staff coach intensively the junior staff; long term training, short term training and study-tour to gain experience of work methods of relative institutions.

In the last 12 years, ERCOE has markedly stepped forward from the initial formative stage to the functioning process of development. It stresses on team work and works closely and has memorandum of understanding with the College of Business and Economics. It is working to improve its own institutional capacity, besides the services it provides to other organizations.

May 2018 01:05

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