

# Training in Psychology, Mindset Change and African Development

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## Abstract

The present work focuses on psychological training, mindset change and development in Africa. The objective is to show that the development of Africa requires a change in the mentalities of the African populations through training in psychology. Indeed, Africa suffers from many ills that hamper its growth. And these ills are the work of man in general. He lives in a plural society but behaves as if he were the centre of gravity of the earth. Society should function as he thinks, as he wants it to, hence a characteristic individualism that generates many interpersonal, intergroup, intragroup conflicts, etc. Psychology, as a science of behaviour and mental processes, aims at bringing people to understand themselves, each other, integrate and live together. This is why training in psychology would lead people to change their mentalities, to see things as they are and thus tend towards the expected development.

**Key words:** training, psychology, change, development, mentalities

## Introduction

Psychology is a science that has existed for many years. At the beginning it was in the footsteps of philosophy (with notably the reflections of Plato, Descartes or Aristotle on the relationship between body and mind). From a scientific point of view, the history of psychology began in the middle of the 19th century after the other natural sciences, as a branch of physiology. Very quickly, numerous currents developed, each with their own particularities and methods for achieving psychological well-being.

History shows that the word 'psychology', first mentioned by Goclenius in the title of one of his works in 1590, does not exist in any Bantu or African language. It was introduced into sub-Saharan Africa by the former European colonial powers. In Zambia, for example, professional psychology was born in 1937 during colonisation, particularly in the context of British anthropological research to serve British colonial interests (Peltzer and Bless, 1989). The first experimental psychology laboratory in sub-Saharan Africa was established in Zambia in 1965 (Heron, 1967). The first psychology course was taught in English-speaking Africa in 1949. It is a fact that the entry of psychology into sub-Saharan Africa as a science and/or profession in the 1960s is recent. In any human activity, beginnings are difficult and long. The results are often uncertain. Moreover, at that time, Africa had two universities for Francophone Africa and four for Anglophone Africa. Today, more than ever, there are many universities in Africa. But unfortunately the problem of training in psychology is still very acute. This problem is at least at two levels. Firstly, the number of psychology teachers to supervise or train students is very low. Secondly, the number of candidates who knock on the door of psychology each year is also relatively low. This shows how little interest Africans have in the discipline of psychology in a continent beset by many political, economic and social problems.

Nsamenang (1995) in his work notes that African societies undergoing socio-economic changes are probably a vast laboratory for the psychologist and social scientists. They offer the possibility of looking for different patterns or changes in patterns of psychological functioning through social or religious variables often absent in mainstream psychology.

According to Beauvois and Monteil (1998). psychology in general, and social psychology in particular, is a

body of scientific knowledge designed to be universal while proclaiming its particularities and cultural specificities. For Kodjo-Grandvaux, (2013) the production of social psychology in sub-Saharan Africa is useful and necessary, because Africa is not only the cradle of humanity, but also the future of the world-economy in which we are all engaged. The psychological knowledge of sub-Saharan societies and cultures remains almost untouched by interpretation (a terra incognita), although psychology is a living and relevant reality in Africa noted Jahoda (1983), Akin-Ogundeji (1991), Tobie (2009). In this regard, Africa is a developing continent. In order to develop, it needs to find a certain number of pillars on which to base its actions in order to hope to achieve this goal one day. To achieve this, would it not be necessary to change the mentalities of the populations through training in psychology? To this end, the main objective of this chapter is to show that if Africa is to develop today, it would benefit from a change in the mentality of its populations through training in psychology.

Thus, this chapter is structured around five main points. The first is the notional and definitional framework, the second is the conceptual and theoretical framework, the third is the importance of training in psychology, the fourth is training in psychology and African development and the fifth is suggestions.

## Conceptual and Definitional Framework

### Training

The term formation comes from the Latin *formati, -onis*, which is the action of forming, the way something is formed. It is a process leading to the appearance of something that did not exist before. In general speaking, training can be defined as the action of a trainer practicing on one or more people in order to adapt them technically, physically and psychologically to their future functions.

Training is a global phenomenon that invades all spheres of society, all fields and all ages. We speak of initial training, adult training, continuing education, vocational training or self-training etc. (Fabre, 1992).

Belanger et al (1983) define training as a set of planned learning activities aimed at the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes that facilitate the adaptation of individuals and groups to their socio-professional environment and, at the same time, the achievement of the organisation's efficiency objectives.

### Psychology

The word psychology comes from the Greek *Psukhe* meaning soul and *Lagos* meaning science, reasoned study. Initially, psychology was defined as the study of mental activity (until the end of the 19th century). With the advent of behaviourism in the early 20th century, psychology began to focus on objectively observable behavioural phenomena, which gave rise to its definition as the science or study of behaviour.

According to Watson (1913), psychology must take into consideration as its object of study what men do from birth to death. With the emergence of cognitive psychology and phenomenology, the most commonly used definitions refer to mental and behavioural processes.

Thus, according to Mayer (1981), psychology is the scientific analysis of human mental processes and memory structures in order to understand human behaviour.

### Change

For the Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française (1932-1935), the word Change means the action of changing or the result of this action. The dictionary review is more extensive when it comes to defining the verb.

According to Cote et al (1994), change is the passage from a current state to a desired state, from an original current situation, judged inadequate, to another considered to be the most suitable, which better meets the requirements of the environment or the new aspirations of the people concerned. This transition, they continue, implies, as a starting point, a break with an existing equilibrium that is contested, because it contains a set of characteristics that create a more or less uncomfortable situation.

## **Development**

Etymologically, development is derived from develop with the suffix -ment. Indeed, the concept of development is polysemous, evoking several dimensions, both theoretical and even ideological. For Rist, (1996), some, the concept of development is a matter of belief. While for Latouche (1991) it is a matter of ideology or economic theory.

According to the UN (2022), development is a multidimensional endeavour that aims to improve the quality of life of all people. Thus, Economic development, social development and environmental protection are interdependent, sustainable and mutually reinforcing components.

In defining development, reference is often made to the now classic definition proposed by the French economist Perroux in 1981. For him, development is the combination of mental and social changes in a population that enable it to cumulatively and sustainably increase its real and aggregate output.

## **Mentality**

Mentality is a set of intellectual habits, beliefs and psychic dispositions, characteristic of a group. It is a permanent state of mind inherent in an individual, a moral behaviour.

## **Conceptual and Theoretical Framework**

For Sonntag (1994), in its most common meaning, training refers to time freed up, specifically devoted to the acquisition of skills. It is often emblemized by training courses. Training perceived in this way obscures the learning generated by work situations that are not simply repetitive.

In the field of psychological training, several authors insist on the psychological training of individuals. In fact, this allows the individual not only to know himself, but also to manage himself, know the other, integrate him and manage him. For these authors, psychological training is necessary in order to deal with situations that are destabilising situations in the profession (Calin, 2011; Latry, 2004; Lamarre, 2004; Develay, 1996; Nimier, 1996; Baillauquès, 1990). It is not simply a question of managing a group of individuals, but of first learning to manage oneself before the group, this is what psychological training offers.

Indeed, training is itself a source of anxiety (Saint-Luc, 2009), as the change it produces can be destabilizing, revealing the birth of a professional or even personal identity crisis.

Just as the satisfaction of physical needs is essential to survival, the satisfaction of psychological needs is essential to the development of optimal psychological functioning (Deci and Ryan, 2000). Through the latter, the individual is able to achieve full self-realization and experiences psychological well-being (Sauvé, 2012). There is a link between psychological training and psychological well-being (PBO). Indeed, experiences that involve and satisfy psychological needs generate positive emotions and psychological well-being (Ryan and Deci, 2001).

Training is one of the many elements of human resource management. This strategy is inspired by the theory of human capital developed by Becker (1962). Human capital is defined as the set of productive capacities that an individual acquires through the accumulation of general, specific knowledge or know-how, etc.

The concept of development refers to the set of technical, social, territorial, demographic and cultural transformations accompanying the growth of production. It reflects the structural and qualitative aspect of growth and can be associated with the idea of economic and social progress (GDP).

According to Yacine-Toure (1983), the results of the economic and social development programs undertaken in Africa since independence are, as we have seen, far from reflecting the hopes raised. Economic activity, dominated by the agricultural and mining sectors, remains extraverted and oriented more towards the interests of the international market than towards the needs of local populations. The capital, technology and equipment of the new states are entirely of foreign origin.

According to Rist (1996), development is equated with the process that induces change in natural evolution. From natural evolution to social change, the transposition seems quite straightforward.

Lewin (1975) in his work proposes a model of change that focuses on attitudinal change and suggests that the evolutionary process of change follows a path characterised by three phases of varying length, difficulty and intensity depending on the individual or group concerned. These are: decrystallization, transition and recrystallization

### **Decrystallisation**

Decrystallisation corresponds to the period when a system, whether it is an individual, a group or a community, begins to question its perspectives, habits or behaviours, voluntarily or not.

### **Transition**

This consists of learning about the new way of working and experimenting with the new ways of doing things.

### **Recrystallisation**

The new ways of doing things, the new practices are harmonised with other dimensions of daily life and become part of the habits.

Thus, with training in psychology, African populations will start to question their behaviour. Then they will use the psychological knowledge to learn the new way of functioning and experiment with the new 'ways of doing' things. As habit is second nature, because once it becomes established it becomes an autonomous and unconscious source of control over behaviour, things will not be easy at all. Nevertheless, the new practices will harmonise with other dimensions of daily life and will become part of the new habits.

## **Importance of psychological training**

According to Legendre (2005b), the concept of training is defined as the totality of theoretical and practical knowledge that has been acquired in a given field, whereas psychology is the attitude of a person who shows finesse in understanding oneself and others.

Psychology touches all aspects and problems of our lives. It aims to solve the problems that the individual

faces in society. These problems are both general and particular. General: when Psychology aims at the development of healthy and balanced societies Particular: when it is concerned only with the well-being of the individual as a person in isolation.

Training in psychology is of paramount importance in the life of an individual. Indeed, it can be applied to almost every aspect of life, whether one is a student, an office worker or a manager. Our relationships with others and our reactions to events are sometimes tinged with negative or positive emotions and controversies, yet psychology is there to help us understand and overcome these. It is also important for measuring performance, assessing our strengths and weaknesses and considering career options.

The importance of training in psychology is clear when we realise that through psychology we realise that our success depends largely on our ability to understand the minds of others, our ability to read signals, recognise emotions, predict behaviour, etc. So, by being able to read people, we can understand what motivates them or what they are thinking about at any given moment. And this would help us in our interaction with them. Furthermore, psychology can help us, among other things, to understand or define our problems, identify the best ways to deal with these problems, implement new strategies to manage these problems and prevent the repetition of the same patterns in the future.

According to Michael Frese, a professor at the National University of Singapore Business School and Leuphana University, “Psychology-based training aims to develop proactive behaviours in entrepreneurs, such as initiative, innovation, identification and exploitation of new opportunities, goal setting, planning and feedback mechanisms, and overcoming obstacles.

## **Training in Psychology and African Development**

According to the relationship between training and organisational development, the literature is extensive. Thus, many reference studies in the world are unanimous in recognising the role of training in the development and retention of skills in any organisation. The internal and external environment of the company generally bends under the weight of the changes that take place in its environment. As a result, since competence is a “rare and perishable commodity”, people are called upon to adjust their skills constantly, otherwise they cannot keep up with the pace of work requirements. Training has always had a prominent place since the first theories of organisations appeared. This is why every company in its organisation gives an important place to training by setting up a department or a directorate depending on the size of the company.

The African populations are bending under the weight of growing poverty due to the underdevelopment of Africa. Many evils plague this continent: epidemics, wars, inter-community conflicts, etc. All this is the work of Man himself, author of his own destruction. Yet, with all the wealth that African countries abound in, one would have expected a developed continent and not a developing continent with even poor, highly indebted countries in its midst.

Indeed, in Africa, people live each for themselves and not each for others or each with others. The personal ego is put first. No one thinks about the other. Yet we are stronger when we work for ourselves and for others, when we integrate the other into our existence, into our life. The African forgets one thing: it is impossible for a human being to live in autarky, isolated, apart from others. You always need others to lead your life. Moreover, the theory of foetalization tells us more about the fact that we are beings essentially predisposed to live in groups.

In fact, it says, the human being is an extra uterine foetus at birth. In other words, man is born prematurely and his first existence is that of an extra-uterine foetus which must complete the maturation process begun in intra-uterine life. This long and slow maturation explains the length of childhood and consequently the need



for the little man to be surrounded by the care of his parents, given that he is in a situation of total dependence and powerlessness.

Moreover, theories close to Marxism also inform us that it is essentially the multiple needs that man must satisfy, in particular: clothing, food, drink, shelter, etc., that are at the origin of the constitution of human groups. A group cannot develop unless there is love, peace and harmony between its members. Cohesion is a determining and essential factor in the development of a group. But there can be no cohesion as long as the members of the group do not abandon selfish, if not egocentric, behaviour, as long as they do not think of others as well, as long as they do not work and exist not for themselves but with and for others.

Human behaviour is such that, as we said above, conflicts, epidemics and wars have occurred very quickly because of every man for himself mentality. In fact, the anarchic construction observed here and there in Africa means that each person protects himself and puts the other in difficulty. For example, waste water is directed to the neighbour's house, who is unhappy and blocks it in one place, thus creating a real breeding ground for mosquitoes and other microbes. As a result, diseases (epidemics), interpersonal and even inter-community conflicts, wars, etc. are created. The money that should have been used to build schools, hospitals, roads, in short infrastructures that would have improved the well-being of the populations is diluted in the purchase of arms, medicines, courts, etc.

The training of people in psychology is of paramount importance for the development of Africa. Indeed, once people are trained in psychology, it will bring about a change of paradigm and therefore of mentalities among them and they will see things differently than before. Everyone will no longer exist for themselves but with and for others. This would limit the evils that lead our continent to drift and therefore to the underdevelopment that was once confined for ages.

Thus, with training in psychology, people will understand that society is but a conglomeration of individuals who interact and share the same space. And, for the space to be viable and alive, they should adopt behaviours that would lead to harmony, to cohesion. If it is true that psychology is the study of behaviour and mental processes, then training in this field would lead to a modification of the mental file; to a relatively sustainable modification of the attitudes of African populations on the cognitive, affective and conative levels. Since psychology is concerned with understanding the individual or Man in his behavior and in his relationships with others, training in this field would lead people to understand what they are, what they represent in society, not only to know themselves but also and above all to know the other person in front of them, how to deal with the other, how to integrate them and how to live with them.

## Conclusion

The theory of human capital distinguishes two possible forms of training: training allowing the acquisition of general knowledge (school, classic training structures) and training offering specific knowledge which generally takes place within a company. Given the obsolescence of initial training acquired at school, linked both to technological progress and to changes in the production systems of companies, continuing training, which offers both general and specific knowledge to workers, has emerged as a method of capacity building. However, investment in continuing education is not without cost to companies. Gosselin (2006) lists, among other things, costs relating to the location of the training, trainers' fees, salaries of individuals undergoing training, contributions to training organizations, loss of productivity of staff undergoing training, etc.

From the above, we suggest that African countries place particular emphasis on the orders of training (general and continuing). Thus, we propose that psychology teaching modules be introduced into the curriculum of public and private secondary schools and colleges of general and technical education.

To this end, we could start teaching psychology from the second grade for example. This will allow students

who arrive at university to be able to orient themselves freely with ease and knowledge in psychology.

Therefore, we suggest that once the teaching units of psychology are introduced in the secondary school curricula, that in the first year of university the teaching units of specialization are introduced directly. In this way, the student who arrives in the first year of psychology starts to learn directly in a specific field and later on we could have accomplished psychologists.

We also suggest that in Africa, training in psychology should be generalized in all training structures (institutes and schools of health, social work, education, agriculture, mining, livestock, water and forestry, public works, law enforcement and security, etc.). In fact, it is clear that apart from teacher training schools (ENS, ENIEG, ENIET) and a few rare schools, psychology is not taught in other schools, however great they may be, and they train the country's senior executives.

We also suggest that African countries provide universities, and in particular psychology departments, with all kinds of resources to encourage them to set up associations and psychology clubs responsible for scientific activities in psychology; to increase the number of seminars, colloquia, congresses and open days with a view to publicizing and exchanging psychological knowledge with experts and/or the public. We would also ask them not to keep the results of research on psychological knowledge in drawers but to put them into practice in order to make this knowledge more widely available to the public. This could lead to a real awareness of the daily realities of life, of the social phenomena that revolve around them and, in turn, to a change in mentality that would lead to the development of Africa.

Given the difficulty that African researchers have in publishing their work in the major Western scientific journals, for reasons that are still unknown, we suggest that African countries set up research centres worthy of the name in psychology that would be responsible not only for publishing the work of researchers, but also for popularising the results of this work.

It is certainly true that continuous training requires a cost, but it is also true that what one would earn after training an individual will be largely above the costs generated by this training. Isn't it often said that "a child you train is an adult you earn"? For this reason, we propose that African countries introduce a system of continuous training in all organisations, whether they are small, medium or large companies or civil society organisations.

It was a question here of showing that the development so much sought after by African countries goes through the change of mentalities of African populations through training in psychology. Given that psychology touches all aspects and problems of our lives, that it aims at solving the problems faced by the individual in society, we believe and are convinced that the more people are trained in psychology, the more there will be a relatively lasting change in behaviour, attitudes and mentalities, the better people will understand each other and the more we will tend towards the development so long sought after.

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