

MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT:
PACKAGED TRAINING OR CAPACITY BUILDING?*

by

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SUMMARY

Development project management training has two objectives: a direct objective to improve organizational performance and an indirect objective to enhance an organization's ability to effectively function within a changing environment. Traditional training approaches that emphasize knowledge transfer fail to meet these objectives because they are place-oriented and thus emphasize giving standardized training to groups of unrelated trainees at a particular facility; they emphasize teaching the skills trainers know rather than determining management needs or building upon knowledge trainees already possess; learning is expected to occur by inference from artificial examples rather than by attacking real problems; trainees are generally drawn from only one management level at a time; actual performance and organizational incentives or disincentives to use new skills are not examined; and training is treated as a discrete event rather than as just one ripple in a constant stream of management development activity.

To overcome these six weaknesses, an alternative approach is advocated. That approach has two major characteristics: it is action oriented and has an organizational capacity development bias rather than a transfer of knowledge to individuals bias. The action orientation and enhancement orientation are described in detail, the approach is illustrated by a Jamaican example, and implications of adopting an action-based approach are specified. The authors contend this alternative approach is practical, necessary, and rewarding to those who engage in it.

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INTRODUCTION

By their very nature development projects place added and often conflicting demands on organizational roles and relationships; planning; management and administrative systems; and individual skill requirements. The strains of these demands are particularly evident in projects planned and managed at sub-national levels that have an area development focus.

Conventional strategies for increasing institutional capability to plan and manage such projects view demands on individuals, organizations, and systems as separable. Since these strategies most frequently focus on training programs to transfer generic management skills such as scheduling, monitoring, and control to individuals it is not too surprising that the results have frequently not produced improved project performance. Obscured in the conventional view is the fact that the skills and knowledge provided have no relation to organizational job requirements or that the organizations are not prepared to effectively utilize those skills. This is because conventional training programs are designed on the basis of what "experts" consider to

be the knowledge and skills that "effective" managers require rather than what the organizations are actually prepared to do to improve performance.¹

This general failing of conventional training programs is the result of particular weaknesses in the approach. These weaknesses are identified in the next section. The third section presents an alternative approach that has worked under field conditions.

In brief, the alternative, or capacity-building, approach views training as having a two-fold purpose. First, it aims to improve an organization or project's performance in achieving objectives. Second, training aims to enhance an organization's capacity to cope creatively with a changing and uncertain environment. Consequently, the long-term objective is developmental change while the short-term objective is more efficient and effective organizational action.

Since field staff may be unaware of the implications of organizational change, they may suspect the intentions of outsiders who diagnose a need for change. However, since "training" is recognized as a legitimate dimension of project implementation, it offers an entry point for the start of consulting relationships and capacity-building measures. Thus training can become the catalyst for creating an environment conducive to organizational change and development.

WEAKNESSES IN TRADITIONAL TRAINING PRACTICES

Experience with training institutes and training activities in Africa, Asia, and Latin American suggests six common weaknesses in the way conventional training is provided. These weaknesses are identified in what follows.

Weakness I: Place-Orientation

The existence of a training facility creates pressure to use it in order to justify the high capital and operating costs. As a result, there is a place-oriented bias in management training which measures success in participant-days rather than improved project performance.

Moreover, trainee selection is likely to be based on "who is available" and "what organizations will pay" rather than on whose involvement is needed to produce and implement improved project performance. Training is often viewed as a bonus, a trip away from the project site rather than as a process leading to improved performance. Those sharing the training experience may not share any working relationship. Their return to work is often accompanied by frustration since colleagues are apt to be disinterested in or skeptical about the need for change. The use of new methods too often ends up as only vague recollections of "how we did it at the institute".

This is a common weakness. Bringing together unrelated trainees from different levels and organizations and processing them through a standard skill package in a neutral location has not been a demonstrably successful way of improving project performance.

Weakness II: Dictation-Orientation

Much management training assumes a one-way transfer of skills--from trainers to trainees. Instead of emphasizing the exciting possibilities of a mutual learning experience, a more common emphasis is on dictation and absorption.

There are four important problems with this approach. First, it assumes that a relatively limited set of management and organization skills exist in the local environment. However, experience suggests that both technical² and managerial³ skills often do exist within the local environment, which indicates that this assumption is often false.

Second, a dictation orientation assumes that a reasonably well-defined body of project management skills exists. If those skills are transferred to individuals--so the logic goes--the result will be organizational change. This connection is not supported by our experience. (Hannah, 1981; Hannah, Owens, and Mickelwait, 1981; Honadle et. al., 1980b; Walker, 1981).

Third, this approach assumes that trainers' skills are the best ones for the trainees to learn. In a sense this is professional ethnocentrism. It says, "My experience is the solution to

your problem." Thus the emphasis is on the supply of techniques rather than the need for decisions and actions. This discourages the development of new solutions and may compound the difficulties (Moris, 1981).

Finally, in a era when a North-South dialogue and interdependent view of human relationships is espoused, there is doubt about this approach as a style of interaction. But it is not a good example of the way the development process could be structured.

This weakness is most pronounced in activities where standardized, predetermined training programs are used. It suggests a ritualized rather than developmental approach to training and is often based on a belief that methods developed and applied within infrastructure projects can be readily transferred across cultures, projects, sectors, and organizational settings.

Weakness III: Inference-Orientation

The place-orientation and dictation-orientation of many training programs leads to another problem. Since the trainees come from a variety of organizational settings, they often do not share a common experience base from which examples can be drawn and to which techniques can be applied. Instead the instructor builds a hypothetical case and the trainees are expected to bridge the gap between the fiction and reality.

This is learning by inference rather than learning by demonstration. A wide range of experience suggests that behavior

is more likely to be influenced by demonstration than by inference (Honadle, 1981). The artificial nature of much training actually obstructs the transfer of skills into an action setting.

Weakness IV: Single-Level Focus

How many workshops are titled for "supervisors", "middle managers", "senior management", or "executives"? Such a stratified approach implies either that each level requires a different set of skills or that those higher up the ladder are reluctant to mingle with those on lower rungs. The first implication is suspicious since there is often little substantive difference among the various courses in prepackaged programs. The second implication may actually reinforce the problem.

Organizational problems are not all horizontal; coordination among equal units is not the only implementation difficulty. Many issues relate to interactions among levels and thus a multilevel involvement is necessary to resolve many crucial operational questions.

Furthermore, improved organizational performance requires dealing with the organization as a unit rather than just as a collection of individuals. This means that effective training will go beyond a single-level focus to an emphasis on both vertical and horizontal linkages which affect performance. Trainee groups should include representatives of multiple levels.

This logic also extends to actors outside the project organization. To resolve problems and gain commitments by the

critical actors it may be necessary to involve either villagers or capital city-based bureaucrats, or both in project-level workshops.

Weakness V: Over Emphasis on Organizational Stock

A common assumption in project management training is that improved knowledge is a sufficient condition to improve behavior. However, this is seldom true.

An illustration of the weakness of this assumption is drawn from an Asian experience. In one project responsibility for each project vehicle is assigned to one individual. That person receives a standard monthly cash allotment to cover fuel and routine maintenance costs. Though the practice does minimize false expense claims, it provides a strong incentive not to make frequent trips to isolated rural areas because this increases both fuel costs and the likelihood of minor repairs. Since any unspent funds can be kept by the individual but any costs exceeding the allotment must come from the individual's own pocket, the procedure is an effective deterrent to delivering services to rural areas, monitoring fieldwork, or working collaboratively with villagers (Honadle, 1979).

Thus raising the stock of organizational resources by providing vehicles (material resources) or training (human resources) is not alone likely to influence performance. Until the incentive system is examined it is impossible to determine the probability that managerial training will have any meaningful

impact upon management behavior. Unfortunately, most training programs ignore this fact and proceed as if individual skill improvement were a necessary and sufficient condition for improving organizational performance.⁴

Weakness VI: Training as Discrete Activity

The combination of the weaknesses already noted produces a situation where each course or workshop gains an independent identity and becomes a discrete, time-bound occurrence rather than just one ripple in a constant stream of management development activity. This situation is unsatisfactory. When training is isolated as a separate event it becomes an end rather than a means.⁵

The line of causality, then, is circular: discrete treatment of training leads to an emphasis on inference, organizational stock, single-level treatment, dictation, and site boundedness. In turn, these emphases reinforce discrete training at the expense of continuous management development. The result is less effective training and less believable trainers.

Neither of these results is desirable. Moreover, both can be avoided to a large degree. Strategies for overcoming these weaknesses comprise the next section of this paper.

AN ALTERNATIVE TO TRADITIONAL PRACTICES

The strategy described here is based on numerous efforts to improve the management of rural development. Beginning with empirical research on factors contributing to project success (Morss, et. al., 1976), an experience base has accumulated with project designs, long-term technical assistance for implementation, and short-term activities emphasizing management development.

Since 1978 Development Alternatives, Inc. (DAI) has been providing short-term management development assistance to 23 integrated rural development programs in 18 countries in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin America. Along with that assistance, DAI staff have engaged in action research to improve the practice of rural development management.⁶ Based on this experience and research, an alternative to traditional practices has evolved and been applied both within projects where DAI is the prime contractor and programs where DAI provides only short-term assistance. This alternative approach is predicated on two important characteristics which attempt to confront and rid training activities of the six weaknesses of conventional management training.

Action Orientation

Instead of a place orientation, an action orientation is used. This includes the following characteristics:

- Work groups rather than individuals collected from numerous unrelated settings provide the basic units of training;
- Real problems provide the subject matter for workshops;
- Workshops demonstrate the application of methods to actual problem situations;
- Multiple organizational levels are involved because many problems cannot be resolved without the participation of critical decision makers;
- Activities are usually conducted at or near the project site to lower costs, examine local performance constraints, allow participants to return to their homes at night, and introduce action-oriented training as an integral part of project management;
- Workshops are treated as activities which blend into planning, counseling, coordination, and evaluation functions and are seen as concentrations of normal processes;
- Decisions, commitments, and actions are expected to be emphasized; and
- An examination of incentives or disincentives for targeted behavioral changes is incorporated into group discussions, exercises, and decisions.

These eight attributes of an action orientation deal directly or indirectly with most of the weaknesses of traditional training: the place bias is minimized, multiple organizational levels are involved, use of real problems involves demonstration rather than reliance on inference, the discreteness of training is de-emphasized, and the focus goes beyond organizational stock to incentives and performance. The one weakness not touched by the action orientation is the reliance on dictation as the style of interaction. This is dealt with by an emphasis on enhancement.

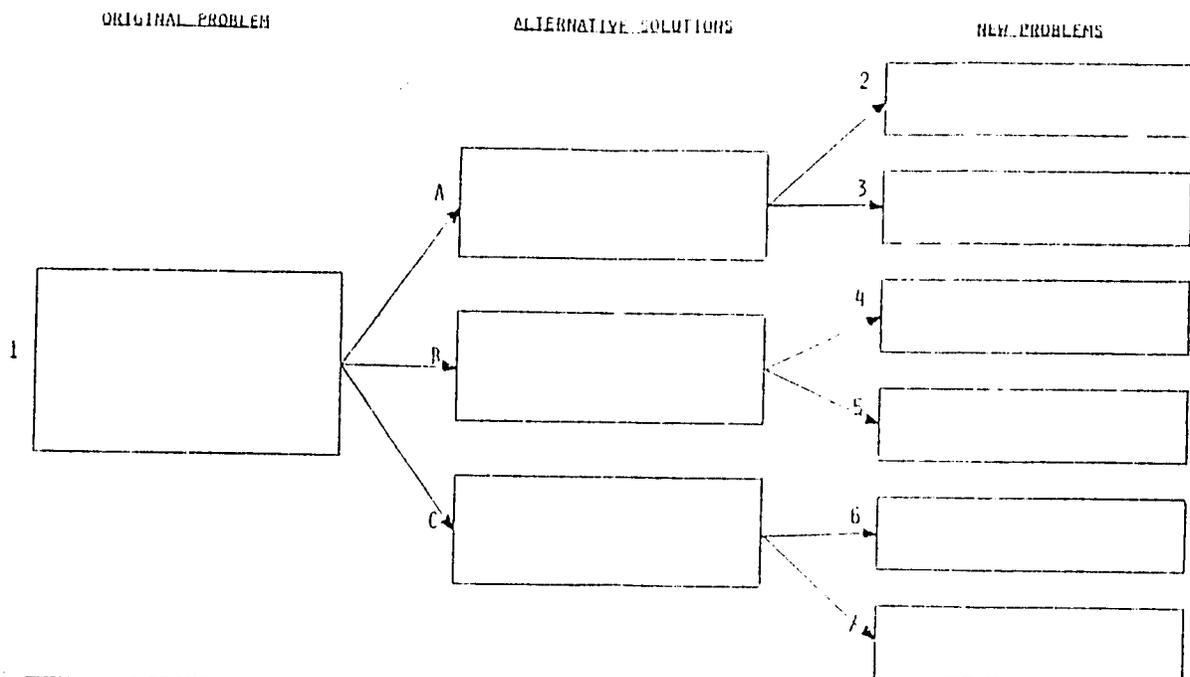
Enhancement Approach

An enhancement approach to management development emphasizes the organization and attempts to focus participant knowledge and skills on pertinent issues rather than transferring trainer knowledge and skills to trainees. To do this, it is necessary for the consultant to discover critical issues and priorities. Interviews and observations before the workshop may be used to gather this data. Exercises during the workshop may also prove useful.

Once critical issues have been identified, various organizing mechanisms can be used as the basis for large and small group exercises in applying the mechanisms. In such a situation, the trainee provides the knowledge while the trainer/consultant introduces the organizing framework.

An example of such a framework is presented in Figure 1. This decision tree forces participants to consider problems caused

Figure 1: Decision Tree



SOLUTIONS CREATE PROBLEMS AND, UNLESS THIS IS CONSIDERED, WE CAN MAKE SITUATIONS WORSE BY CREATING DIFFICULTIES WHICH ARE GREATER THAN THE ORIGINAL PROBLEM. TO USE THIS DECISION TREE: ENTER A PROBLEM IN BOX 1; IDENTIFY THREE ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS AND ENTER THEM IN BOXES A, B & C; IDENTIFY TWO PROBLEMS CREATED BY EACH SOLUTION AND WRITE THEM IN BOXES 2 - 7; AFTER CONSIDERING THE NEW PROBLEMS, CHOOSE A SOLUTION.

by different solutions to an initial problem. It serves to sharpen and concentrate knowledge they already possess onto a specific issue.

When such a framework is used in a session where senior managers, supervisors, field technicians, and farmers are represented, it can mix knowledge in new ways as the different actors learn about the others' uncertainties and difficulties. Moreover, it can be used as the basis for group problem solving and follow-up action.

An enhancement approach, then, has the following characteristics:

- Respect for participant knowledge;
- Use of frameworks to focus trainee knowledge;
- Constant trainer flexibility to readjust schedules and exercises in light of new data presented by participants;
- Interactive approaches involving participants in redesigning workshops to meet performance needs; and
- An engagement by trainers with the substance of the development process and the establishment of a partnership among "outsiders" and "insiders" involved in efforts to improve village conditions and promote self-sustaining development.

Before concluding this paper, the following section provide illustration of this alternative approach as it was used in an actual field situation which will help to make this approach more concrete.

FIELD EXPERIENCE

One example of an action-oriented enhancement approach occurred with the second Integrated Rural Development Project (IRDP) in Jamaica. In this case, exercises were based on actual situations occurring during IRDP implementation, involved project staff in generating plans for their own action, and focused on raising the ability of project personnel to deal with new situations as they arose. Furthermore, although the visiting consultants provided both a framework for confronting problems and a process for generating group initiatives, the workshops were--in a very real sense--self-designed by the participants.⁷

One of the objectives consistently articulated by project staff was the self-reliance of village organizations called Development Committees. However, these committees commonly lacked self-reliance and depended too much on the IRDP for guidance and resources.

To address this issue, IRDP staff conducted an analysis of the forces encouraging self-reliance and those inhibiting it. "This force field analysis" was the first step towards a strategy for strengthening local Development Committees.

The next step in the strategy development process, was to identify the present condition of the Development Committees, articulate what they should be like at the end of the project, and suggest some ways to reach an intermediate point. This exercise focused on four dimensions: membership, resource base, functions, and skills.

Small groups were used to develop attributes of the committees' present and future conditions. A plenary session was then convened to synthesize the views. The present attitude of most Development Committee leaders was depicted as "dependency on IRDP." More specifically, the present status of the Development Committees was described as follows:

- Membership: Older, male, wealthy landowners, agricultural society members; varies from place to place; not representative of their community.
- Resource base: Dependent upon IRDP funds and skills, reluctant to use their own individual resources, lack of collective resources.
- Functions: Grousing (complaining) forum; public relations assistance to project; identifying community needs, two-way communication; providing advice on IRDP-fund use; helping farmers to organize themselves.
- Skills: Some craft skills, traditional farming skills, limited management and organizational skills, highly skilled at begging, low membership skills, little ability to identify and act on their own needs (varies), some communication skills.

By the end of the project, however, the goal was for the Development Committees to look very different from their existing configuration. The ideal was to have them achieve a heightened sense of community awareness and responsibility. More specifically, the objectives for each dimension were described as follows:

- Membership: Broad-based, revolving.
- Resource base: Drawn from other organizations, community contributions, financed from operations, organized with Treasury Committee.
- Functions: Seek solutions to community problems, become independent of government/foreign donor funds, provide information to the community, identify their own purposes and develop programs to achieve them.
- Skills: Organization and management, leadership, financial management, technical (agricultural), education/communication; creativity and ability to respond to new ideas; ability to accurately identify community needs.

To help close the gap between the immediate reality and long-term ideal, the project staff generated some indicators for intermediate objectives and actions that could help achieve the intermediate stage. These objectives and actions are displayed in Table 1. This can be seen as a significant step toward creating a strategy for building the capacity for post-project survival within the Development Committees.

This topic's choice was based on intensive preworkshop interviews as well as on data generated during the workshop. A preliminary trip one month before the intervention and a substantive follow-up six months later set the pattern for such exercises as a normal dimension of IRDP implementation.

Similar approaches were used elsewhere. For example, the same methods were used in mixed groups of farmers and civil servants to help build capacity within an irrigation association

Table 1 An Intermediate Point in Development Committee Evolution

Dimension	Characteristics	How to get there
Membership	Increase turnover in membership, meetings consider fewer individual problems and more community ones; balanced membership.	Monitor meetings, integrate local extension staff into formation of committees; develop rules for revolving membership and interest group; geographical area representation; increase numbers; farmers without farm plans.
Resource base	Fund raising activity beginning; begin to systematically identify their own resources; fewer demands on the project; non-project funded activity occurring; 60/40 farmer project participation in resources used.	Train/educate committees; help committees to begin their activities.
Functions	Accomplish community tasks with little help from project; committee passes technical information to farmers not directly contacted by the project.	Training in carrying out the tasks.
Skills	Improve organization and leadership; ability to select new members, takes less time to do things; fund raising.	Give them experience with guidelines; let them develop their own proposals for solving problems and identifying community needs instead of just individual ones; training; demonstrations; field days; fund raising assistance.

in the Philippines; combinations of personal one-on-one consultations and group workshops were used to enhance performance in Liberia; village groups and senior district officials engaged in similar activities in Indonesia; and an intermittent pattern of training and action is seen as essential to the process of administrative decentralization in Egypt. Thus field experience suggests that an action-oriented enhancement approach is practical and can be implemented.³

CONCLUSION: BEYOND PACKAGES AND TOWARD PERFORMANCE

This paper has identified major problems with traditional training approaches and offered an action-based/enhancement strategy as an alternative. That alternative depicts training as an integral part of the ongoing process of organization, management, and system development. Training is also seen as a legitimate entry point for more comprehensive approaches to improving organizational performance.

Adopting such an alternative approach has practical implications involving project management personnel and training staff. Some include:

- Training staff must become involved actors in the implementation process rather than remaining aloof from the issues involved in making programs work.
- Training must focus outward on issues of organization and policy rather than inward on curriculum development and training techniques.

- The training substance should make more use of knowledge and skills already in the environment rather than emphasizing the importation of new skills.
- Training should be recast as management development and pre-training consultation. Follow-on consultation and evaluation should be seen as continual, overlapping parts of the management development and performance process.
- The training target should be organizational rather than just individual. Therefore, on-site, work group-focused, multilevel training should become common.

Such changes would make trainers and implementers partners in a learning and acting process. This is, in fact, the essence of development. It moves beyond packaged training for individuals toward an action-based approach to enhancing organizational performance and capability. Although much remains to be done, some of the most rewarding moments in rural development will be experienced by those who take up the challenge.

NOTES

- 1 On a larger scale this problem permeates the entire development process. See, for example, Heyer et. al. (1981) and Moris (1981).
- 2 For an overview of the importance of "Indigenous Technical Knowledge" (ITK), see Chambers and Moore (1979).
- 3 For a discussion of "folk management" skills held by villagers, see Iversen (1979).
- 4 Not only must management training focus on incentives and behavior in addition to skills, but also different training strategies should be integrated into an overall personnel management system which takes into account non-project objectives and the rapidity of both lateral and vertical personnel movements. See Honadle (1980).
- 5 Failure to consider incentives is a common failing of most development activities, of a training nature or otherwise. An emerging theory of development that directly embraces incentives and other structural elements of development is discussed at length in Honadle (1981). This 'capacity building' approach is the motivating vision behind the alternative training approach described here.
- 6 In addition to Hannah (1981), Hannah, Owens, and Mickelwait (1981), Honadle (1981), Honadle et. al. (1980b), and Walker (1981), project documentation includes: Morss and Gow (1981), Crawford (1981), Soesiladi (1981), Jackson et. al. (1981), and Gow and VanSant (1981).
- 7 For details about the Jamaican project, See Honadle (1981, pp 61-70), Honadle et. al. (1980a), Armor et. al. (1981), and Goldsmith and Blustain (1980).
- 8 This experience follows the strategy posited in Armor et. al. (1979).

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