

PW-ABG-677 # 936-5317

69211

USING A TEAM PLANNING APPROACH
TO STRENGTHEN THE IMPLEMENTATION
AND SUSTAINABILITY
OF DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS

by

Andrea L. Jones
International Development Management Center
Office of International Programs
Colleges of Agriculture and Life Sciences
University of Maryland, College Park
College Park, MD 20742

October 1988
(revised)

Prepared for the Development Program Management Center,
U.S. Department of Agriculture, with the support of the
Performance Management Project of the U.S. Agency for
International Development, Science and Technology Bureau,
Division of Rural and Institutional Development

OVERVIEW

Over the past decade, a powerful and cost-effective approach to facilitate and guide the implementation of development programs and projects has been developed and tested. This approach goes by a variety of names -- including implementation planning workshops, action-training or action-planning programs, and team planning interventions. This approach has been applied to scores of development efforts, including agricultural research and extension projects in the Caribbean, Malawi and Thailand; irrigation projects in India, Egypt and Pakistan; and rural development projects in Tanzania and Lesotho.¹ While these efforts differ in many ways, they all benefited from the use of an implementation-focused team planning approach. Our experience with them demonstrates both the power and the limitations of this still developing approach, and has added to our knowledge of how it can be applied in other settings. This paper draws directly on these experiences and shares some of the key learnings from them.

The paper is geared to managers who face the challenge of carrying out effective and sustainable development, as well as donors, planners and others concerned with development efforts. The remainder of the paper introduces the team planning approach by covering: (1) the major management requirements of development project implementation, (2) the nature of an implementation-focused team planning effort, (3) the general structure of such efforts, and (4) some thoughts on initiating this kind of effort.

MANAGEMENT REQUIREMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION

Recent evaluations of the impact of donor-assisted development projects have examined the factors that contribute to their performance and sustainability. Out of these evaluations and our field experience comes an understanding of the key management requirements for project implementation. These are:

- * getting agreement and support for clearly stated goals and objectives among the key individuals and organizations involved in the effort,
- * ensuring that local control and ownership for the project are present, and the project effort is linked

¹ Information on each of these applications as well as a more in-depth presentation of the Team Planning Methodology can be obtained from the references cited at the end of this paper.

to the larger development program's objectives and activities,

- * getting common understanding of the problems and opportunities to be addressed, and identifying the needed and most appropriate technologies and skills to be introduced or strengthened,
- * creating and agreeing on plans, budgets, and organizational and individual roles and responsibilities required for achieving the project objectives, and
- * putting into place appropriate mechanisms for ongoing coordination, monitoring, problem identification and resolution, and for replanning project activities.

In most development efforts, little explicit attention is given to meeting these management requirements. But if they are not addressed, the predictable, inevitable results are confusion, delay, limited achievement, wasted resources, and disillusionment. To improve the chances for success, developing countries and donor organizations have tried various techniques to address some of these deficiencies.

One technique has been to explicitly identify in project design documents the institutional development goals to be met by the project, in hopes that they would then be addressed. Another has been to require the use of specific management tools and approaches for project planning, monitoring and control (e.g. AID's use of the logical framework and the linkage of project reimbursements with achievement of project targets). However, despite steps such as these, difficulties continue. Most projects suffer from slow and delayed start-ups, their key elements sometimes never getting fully off the ground, and institutional development goals are often left unmet. Indeed, these steps have sometimes backfired when an emphasis on meeting specified project targets or using specific technologies has been accompanied by neglect of overall project effectiveness and long term sustainability.

IMPLEMENTATION-FOCUSED TEAM PLANNING

The implementation-focused team planning approach was developed to address these management requirements during project implementation. The heart of this approach is the use of structured, collaborative planning processes that involves the range of individuals and organizations that are key to project success. At whatever stage of project implementation it is used, the team planning approach brings together these individuals as a

team to assess the current status and needs of that effort, to define or reaffirm its goals and objectives, and to make specific plans for what needs to be done.

The planning approach focuses both on the small team of individuals directly responsible for carrying out the effort, as well as on the larger, extended team of people and organizations that have an interest in the successful outcome of the effort. For example, top level national, regional and donor officials need to be involved in the planning, but in ways appropriate to their responsibilities for overall project guidance. Individuals with direct operational responsibility for the project, project beneficiaries (or their representatives) and technical assistance providers need to be more intensely involved in actually analyzing project issues and developing implementation plans.

At particular points in the life of a project, when it is critical to address implementation management and sustainability issues, is when a planning intervention can have the greatest impact. These points include: the start-up period of the project, times when there is the need to change direction or respond to new conditions, and the times for periodic project reviews. This approach is best used repeatedly during the life of a project. Its impact is greatest when specific interventions are planned and carried out periodically, over time.

The start-up of a project is a key point for addressing implementation management issues. Even though donors and country officials may invest hundreds of hours in designing and negotiating a project or program, special attention to implementation during start-up is often necessary because:

- * the kind of planning done for project design and approval is different from that required for implementation, when priorities and strategies for implementation need to be defined and specific plans made;
- * the lengthy time in-between project design and implementation start-up (usually well over two years) means that some key individuals and conditions will have changed, requiring a reassessment and reaffirmation of the general focus and strategies; and,
- * since the designers are rarely the same people as the implementors, implementors need an opportunity to develop an in-depth understanding of the project and plan for implementation in light of their own understanding of actual conditions.

Experience with implementing teams shows that most members are not fully aware of the complete project design as laid out in

the project documents, or as modified by post-design changes. To be successful, implementors must go through their own planning process to reach a shared understanding of the larger context and the project and program objectives, as well as further articulate their implementation approach and strategy. They must negotiate and agree to the roles and responsibilities of all participating organizations and individuals, establish methods for updating and revising plans and budgets, develop techniques for monitoring and reporting progress, and think through these issues as a team to internalize their understanding of the project and make it their own. They must clearly understand how shorter range project objectives and activities link to and support the achievement of longer range development goals, and must plan accordingly.

In addition to the implementing team, executive and policy level officials must be fully aware of the project and give it ongoing guidance and support. The role of these individuals is often quite central to the success of the effort, as in projects and programs which require extensive review and revision of policies and procedures, or in efforts where clear mandates from the top are essential. Beneficiaries, often inadequately considered during design phases, must also be involved in the planning and implementation of the effort in a way that supports their expected contribution to the project's success.

STRUCTURE OF AN IMPLEMENTATION PLANNING PROGRAM

While each implementation planning program is unique, it is possible to generalize a pattern for them. The implementation planning program is usually conducted by a team from outside of the project. This team (or in some cases individual) designs and facilitates the planning program which may take place over a very brief span of time (one to two weeks) or over a more extended period (one or more months). It usually involves one or more workshop events as well as a number of carefully focused meetings leading up to and following the workshop(s).

The design of each team planning program involves tailoring the general approach to meet the needs of the particular development context and effort. Therefore, an initial needs assessment is usually critical, and should occur before final design decisions are made.

Despite individual variations, most of these programs can be described in terms of the three separate activity phases presented below. Depending on the overall length and focus of the program, these phases would vary in length, and in the detail and depth with which they address their objectives.

PHASE I: START-UP AND PREPARATION

For any planning process, the start-up and preparation period is key. It is a time when the manager of the development effort and the facilitation team collaborate closely in clarifying the focus and goals of the planning intervention. During this time the team conducts interviews and meetings with a wide range of people in order to:

- * get understanding, mandate and guidance for the kind of planning effort to be undertaken, its relationship to the larger project/program, and the involvement needed of key organizations and individuals at each stage of the planning effort,
- * explore and clarify the issues impacting upon and/or to be addressed by the intervention, and
- * finalize a design for the implementation planning event(s) and organize needed resources for carrying it out.

PHASE II: IMPLEMENTATION PLANNING EVENT(S)

Based on the understanding developed in Phase I, one or more planning events are carried out. During the events, the responsible implementation team engages in an intensive project review, problem-solving and planning process. These events are typically led by a combination of the facilitator(s) team, and the project manager. In addition to the implementation team, other key individuals provide input to the plans being developed and conduct final reviews of the work, in ways congruent with their roles and responsibilities. In this phase the implementation team:

- * uses a collaborative process to assess current status of the effort and to clarify and explore priority issues and problem areas to be addressed,
- * develops (or refines) long and short range goals, strategies, and action plans,
- * identifies and clarifies the roles, responsibilities, and inter-relationships of the organizations involved in carrying out the work,
- * identifies and plans for coordinating, monitoring, and replanning, including establishing ongoing organizational mechanisms and

- * through a review process of work accomplished and plans made, obtains agreement and support from the higher level officials and others who are providing guidance and mandate for the work.

PHASE III: WRAP-UP AND NEXT STEPS PLANNING

The final phase of the planning program is carried out through a series of meetings that focus on initiating the plans to follow-up on the implementation planning program. In view of the results achieved in Phase II, the team identifies immediate next steps that must be taken to ensure the plan will be implemented, and identifies needed follow-up monitoring and planning activities and how they will be carried out.

INITIATING AN IMPLEMENTATION-FOCUSED TEAM PLANNING PROCESS

Experience in using this approach indicates several major areas to explore when considering its use with a specific development effort. First of all, it is important to be sure that conditions are supportive of the undertaking. The project or program must be of significant priority, with adequate leadership from key individuals who endorse this kind of planning process. Also, there must be a general openness to the kind of collaboration and learning that is implicit in the approach.

Second, it requires the assistance of a trained and experienced facilitator who can manage the team planning process. Several private and public institutions in the U.S. and elsewhere have developed the professional resources to support this kind of work -- though far from all "management" professionals will be able to carry out this role.

Third, financial resources need to be present to underwrite the cost of the effort. While it is easy to argue the cost effectiveness of attending to implementation management issues during a project, many project budgets do not have funds earmarked for implementation support. It then becomes a matter of redirecting or locating additional funds that can be used to support the program.

Finally, for maximum benefit, this kind of assistance requires a willingness to follow-up and continue to support over time planning activities designed to support implementation. While implementation planning assistance is critical during project start-up, it is even important to continue to provide similar support over the life of an effort. Ongoing attention to implementation issues is critical if project investments are to

return useful and ultimately sustainable contributions to a country's development.

REFERENCES

- Brinkerhoff, D. W., & Ingle, M. D. (1987). Integrating blueprint and process: A structured flexibility approach to development management. College Park, MD: University of Maryland, International Development Management Center.
- Edwards, D. B., & Pettit, J. (1987). Facilitator guide for conducting a project start-up workshop. (Technical Report No. 41). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Agency for International Development, Water and Sanitation Health Project.
- Isman, P. A. (1984). Caribbean Agricultural and Research Development Institute Farming Systems Research and Development Project: Project management implementation consultancy report. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Development Program Management Center.
- Jones, A. L. (1987). Improving international development efforts through organization development. College Park: International Development Management Center.
- Jones, A. L. and Clyma, W. (1988). Improving the management of irrigated agriculture: The management training and planning program for Command Water Management, Pakistan. Ft. Collins, CO: Water Management Synthesis II Project, Colorado State University.
- Kettering, M. H. (1985). Implementation planning workshops: Starting up projects on the right foot. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Development Program Management Center.
- Kettering, M. H. & Levine, D. B. (1986). The ASTD Invitational International Roundtable: International training and human resource development practices and effect. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Development Program Management Center.
- Levine, D. B. (1987). Project Document Thabana-Morena Integrated Rural Development Project Phase II. Lesotho: United Nations Development Program
- Levine, D. B. (1988). The team planning methodology: Shaping and strengthening development management. Washington, DC: U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Development Program Management Center.

- Levine, D. B., Kettering, M. H., Johnson, R., & Steele, G. (1985). Interim report: Pre-implementation planning for Malawi's agricultural research, extension and planning support projects. Washington, DC: U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Development Program Management Center.
- Schmidt, T. D. (1984). Implementation project management information systems in USAID missions: Case study of the Thailand experience. Washington, DC: U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Development Program Management Center.
- Schmidt, T. D. and Kettering, M. H. (1987). Planning for successful project implementation: Guidelines for the project team. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Development Program Management Center (revised from original dated Sept. 84)
- Schmidt, T. D. and Kettering, M. H. (1987). The action-training approach to project improvement: Guidelines for the trainer. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Development Program Management Center (revised from original dated Sept. 84)
- Poley, J. (1985). Some lessons from the Tanzania Training for Rural Development Project (TRD). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Office of International Cooperation and Development/Development Program Management Center.
- Silverman, J., Schmidt, T. D., & Kettering, M. H. (1986). Action-planning workshops for development management: Guidelines. (Technical paper No. 56). Washington, D.C.: World Bank.