

# Learning and Development for Management

By Olivier Serrat

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## Background

To improve the performance of development agencies, international assistance has traditionally employed three approaches. They are

- **Improving technologies.** This approach has centered on deploying electronic platforms and databases to managers, thereby enabling them to use resources more efficiently and to make their performance more effective. Transfers of technology have centered on tools for budgeting, accounting, and expenditure control; the speed and accuracy of information flows, particularly through computers; and more rational methods of scheduling, monitoring, and implementing projects and programs.
- **Rationalizing organization and procedures and adjusting structures and methods.** This approach has sought to enhance management control, save resources, increase efficiency, and speed the delivery of services. Basically, it has entailed applying to government operations the prescriptions and experiences of the scientific management movement.
- **Strengthening bureaucracies as social institutions.** This approach has focused on building institutions in ways that enhance their internal capabilities and improve their ability to interact productively with their external environment and thus sustain the activities for which they are responsible.



All three approaches are fairly technocratic, however, and have not always been fully adapted to the uncertainties, complexities, and societal pluralism that characterize

the environments in which development agencies operate. Hence new methods have been developed to complement them. They have to do with

- **Reforming structures.** Structural approaches have been concerned with administrative deconcentration, institutional devolution, the organization of work to relax the rigidities of conventional bureaucratic structures, and the use of paraprofessionals from local communities and associations to implement projects and programs.
- **Reinventing operational procedures.** The reform of operational procedures has been concerned with information management to maintain the integrity of information in bureaucratic structures, and social marketing to determine what society wants, and what methods of supplying services it would prefer.
- **Motivating.** Motivational approaches relate to rewards and punishments, working conditions, participatory management, and compensation.
- **Strengthening accountability.** More recently, we have also seen greater attention to responsiveness and accountability, and a desire on the part of the public sector to resist political pressures at the level of project and program implementation.
- **Eradicating corruption.** We are also witnessing renewed efforts to minimize corruption, negligence, and arbitrary behavior in the public sector.

### **The Importance of Learning and Development for Management**

International assistance to improve the organizational performance of development agencies may have underestimated the value of enhancing managerial skills by learning and development, and by establishing and strengthening training institutions and programs. Management capacities can improve. This is necessary because the insights, attitudes, and skills that equip managers for their various responsibilities come from many sources outside formal education or training. To identify the areas for improvement, however, it is first necessary to identify what these responsibilities are. Five functions or roles can be identified for managers and, for each, targeted management learning and development is required.

- (i) Instrumental functions.** For the instrumental functions of managers, learning and development might enhance
  - Generic management techniques (e.g., financial, personnel and human relations, informational, supervisory, structural, and procedural).
  - Project and program management skills (e.g., the processes of design, implementation, and evaluation of individual service, regulatory, enterprise, and promotional activities sponsored by governments).
- (ii) Political functions.** For the political functions of managers, learning and development might reinforce
  - Skills in policy analysis, both generic and as they apply to the substantive sectors in which managers are expected to achieve specialized competence.
  - Sensitivity to methods for coping with inter-bureaucratic influences, societal forces, and political interventions that impinge on projects and programs.
  - Appreciation of the differential benefits and costs of policy and program outputs on the publics they affect.
- (iii) Entrepreneurial functions.** For the entrepreneurial functions of managers, learning and development might improve
  - Appreciation of the opportunities and limitations of proactive management styles outside normal operating routines. These include management interventions that attempt to modify policies, invigorate operations, recombine resources in fresh patterns, and enhance both staff and public participation in projects and programs.
- (iv) Inter-organizational functions.** For the inter-organizational functions of managers, learning and development might develop
  - Analytical insights, such as linkage management.

- Operating skills, such as environmental mapping, required for policy and program implementation that involve two or more government agencies and multi-institutional service networks.
- (v) **Public interest functions.** For the public interest functions of managers, learning and development might strengthen
- Skills in identifying and articulating long-term societal goals and in shaping policies and projects and programs that implement these goals.
  - Criteria and methods of dealing with the ethical dilemmas that inevitably confront managers.

### ... and Performance Evaluation

Although the specific functions and roles of managers vary, the criteria by which their performance should be evaluated can be grouped under five headings. The common management goals of effectiveness (e.g., achieving intended outputs) and of efficiency (e.g., the economical employment of resources), of course, remain necessary. They are not, however, sufficient guides for managers. Accordingly, management performance must also be oriented toward, and assessed by, three other interconnected values. These are responsiveness (e.g., success in meeting actual demand and the needs of society while heeding its preferences and convenience); outreach (e.g., success in promoting participation and resource contributions from society); and sustainability (e.g., success in insuring the continuity of services by innovating and adapting to new circumstances, maintaining support from society, and garnering the required resources). These are the demanding but nevertheless attainable criteria by which managers should expect to be evaluated.

### Further Reading

ADB. 2009. *Growing Managers, Not Bosses*. Manila. Available: [www.adb.org/documents/information/knowledge-solutions/growing-managers-not-bosses.pdf](http://www.adb.org/documents/information/knowledge-solutions/growing-managers-not-bosses.pdf)

### For further information

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#### Asian Development Bank

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Knowledge Solutions are handy, quick reference guides to tools, methods, and approaches that propel development forward and enhance its effects. They are offered as resources to ADB staff. They may also appeal to the development community and people having interest in knowledge and learning.

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