TRAINING AND PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM: AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

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SUMMARY
This article is partly a response to McCourt and Sola (1999), who raised a number of important observations about the role and limitations of training in promoting public sector reform in Tanzania. In particular, their discussion of the relationship between individual and organizational change is referred to. The article outlines a possible alternative to the straight training approach to capacity building, and suggests it as a possible model for the kind of OD intervention mentioned in McCourt and Sola. The author describes a programme of capacity building for rural district councils in Zimbabwe, which tried to avoid the mistakes of earlier public sector training programmes. In discussing ways of integrating human resource development into programmes of capacity building and public sector reform, the article adds to the debate about process and blueprint approaches as discussed in this journal by Cook, (1997), Blunt (1997) and others. The article concludes with an attempt to assess some of the achievements and failures of the training programme after the initial three years. It draws attention to some of the external factors in the programme operating environment which combine with the internal coordination and management aspects, in determining the overall achievement of such a complex programme. Copyright © 2001 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Most human resource development (HRD) practitioners, whether operating in developing countries or in the corridors of large public and private corporations in the northern hemisphere, would subscribe to much written by McCourt and Sola on the subject of training and its limitations as a vehicle for bringing about organizational change (McCourt and Sola, 1999). The authors cite several sources for the view that much administrative training activity in developing countries has been a failure (Reilly, 1987; Turner, 1989; Hulme, 1990). This concern with the impact of training on organization effectiveness is not confined to the development literature. In a recent feature, People Management, the journal of the UK Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development looked at the work of the big consultancies in assessing the cost of HR-related problems to the bottom line (William Mercer); in relating the cost and value of HR to the business and HR strategy (Arthur Andersen); and business modelling and the value of HR’s contribution (PriceWaterhouse-Coopers; Cooper, 2000). Training is increasingly expected to provide returns which are quantifiable, and some companies now claim to have the technology to be able to do this.

From their experience of organizing an intensive training programme for Tanzanian Manpower Management Officers (MMOs) at local government level, McCourt and Sola specify a critical path at the design stage of any training intervention, which, if followed, will help ensure maximum learning transfer back to the workplace on completion of training. Attention has to be paid to content, process and environment at the design stage (Binsted and Stuart, 1979), so that there is harmonization between the training and the workplace, maximizing the possibility of learning transfer. The authors also reconsider the value of a stand-alone training intervention that is not itself an element of a programme of institutional development (ID), which applies a variety of organization development (OD) interventions. Only by so doing, say the authors, will we maximize the impact of training in support of reform.

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In evaluating the Tanzanian programme for MMOs, McCourt and Sola outlined four levels at which training impact has to be measured:

1. participant reactions immediately at the end of training;
2. participant learning;
3. individual behaviour change; and
4. impact on the organization (Kirkpatrick, 1959).

Their overall assessment showing that their programme had made an impact at levels one and three is a good illustration of what can be achieved by taking account of learning transfer in designing any training intervention. It is also a frank acknowledgement of the limitations of the MMO training programme in terms of its impact on the organizations in which MMOs worked. Their findings are a confirmation of experiences from a range of capacity-building initiatives outlined in a 1997 Working Paper of the European Centre for Development Policy Management in the Netherlands, (Mentz, 1997), which stressed that HRD needs to be approached as a sustained process within an overall capacity-building programme, which focuses on how well people function within the civil service as a whole. It is a question of attending to the non-personal as well as the personal aspects of capacity building.

The question of why various ESAs (external support agencies) continue to fund such discreet training interventions which have a limited capacity to improve organizational effectiveness becomes compelling, in light of the McCourt and Sola article. The answers are bound up with the way development assistance is managed, packaged and delivered. Most donor programmes are organized to deliver inputs according to relatively short (12–24 month) timescales, where programme budgets have to be spent and certain quantifiable indicators of success produced, within the lifespan of a programme, which is looked upon, all too often, in isolation from other preceding and parallel efforts in the same sector. Training and the organization of workshops—the ‘bread and butter’ of many HRD practitioners—lend themselves to this kind of horizon very neatly. Most HRD activity is regarded as a matter of putting together a workshop or training programme lasting a specified number of hours, days or weeks, with three or four neatly defined objectives. It delivers a package—wrapped in the flowery language of the end-of-course evaluation form, or ‘happiness sheet’—which can be pointed to subsequently as evidence that something has been done to develop skills, to improve budgeting or to produce a strategic plan, as the case may be.

Training is seen as a series of events—workshops, seminars, study visits—rather than a process of adjusting the knowledge and skills of employees to meet the new demands on the organization, as these change over time. Taken to the extreme in the development context, people engage in workshopping as a substitute for working. Key top and middle-level managers are constantly called away on workshops and courses which often have only a tenuous relationship to their actual work, but which can be justified in terms of the per diems available, if nothing else. Not only do such programmes add little value to the organization’s long-term effectiveness, but they actually compromise efficiency in the short term as there is little effort to delegate effectively in the manager’s absence. There is little or no feedback to colleagues or to the host institution after training is completed. Few programmes take a sufficiently strategic view to be able to evaluate the impact of training six months, say, after completion of the programme. Aggregated over the space of a year, the number of operational days lost to such training amounts to an investment which few organizations, particularly in developing countries, can afford.

PUBLIC SECTOR TRAINING IN ZIMBABWE: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

The Zimbabwe public service and the local government service in particular (on which this article is based) has attracted a substantial amount of government and donor resources since independence in 1980, to address the imbalances in experience and skill levels inherited from the racially divided pre-independence councils. The Land Apportionment Act (1930) and the Land Husbandry Act (1965) provided the legal framework for the separate and unequal development of the rural areas up to independence. At independence in 1980, the country inherited a dual system of local government, consisting of Rural Councils on the one hand and District Councils on the other. The former drew their resources from, and serviced, the white-owned commercial farming sector dominated by more
than 4000 large-scale commercial farmers who controlled 11.2 million hectares of prime farmland. These councils attracted qualified staff and paid to retain them, since their revenue was directly derived from the rich agriculture sector. The District Councils, on the other hand, represented the interests of one million communal families settled on 16.3 million hectares of poor land in the dry and unproductive natural regions 4 and 5. The viability and effectiveness of the District Councils were always constrained by lack of a strong resource base, weak local revenue capacity and reliance on central government transfers in the form of tied grants. A study at the time of amalgamation speaks of the great divide between the two systems, and cast doubt on the likely success of the entire amalgamation exercise (Roe, 1995).

The District Councils were set up to replace the African Councils at independence in 1980, but despite the name change, and subsequent attempts to legislate in favour of a more equal local government system in subsequent years (Communal Lands Act, 1982; Prime Minister’s Directive, 1984; RDC Act, 1988) wide disparities remained up to 1993 when the District and Rural Councils were amalgamated into a single Rural District Council, or RDC. The new councils administered a district which, in most cases, now combined the constituencies of the former Rural and District Councils. They assumed functions for which they were in most cases ill equipped, and they were required, by Government Circular, to absorb all personnel of the two former councils, leading to bloated and ineffective establishments.

Following amalgamation the task of blending the structures, systems and cultures of the former white and black councils began. Courses for local authority personnel were developed at the public service training centre at Domboshawa. But a more comprehensive approach was called for, if the government’s policy of decentralization was to become reality. This policy had assumed more urgency in the face of World Bank and IMF demands for fiscal and budgetary reform in the early 1990s, as part of the Enhanced Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) for Zimbabwe. One of the first experiments in council capacity building was the Pilot District Support Programme (PDSP), which ran for three years in one province and just two districts, shortly after amalgamation. The programme adopted a ‘process approach’ to the task of preparing RDCs to take on decentralized services, so avoided falling into the old trap of trying to train everybody in sight in a drive to make councils more effective in the core areas of planning and rural service provision. This programme was judged successful enough to be scaled up into a fully national programme in 1996, covering each of the 57 RDCs in the country. The design of the Rural District Councils Capacity-Building Programme (RDCCBP) sought to draw lessons from previous attempts at improving public sector capacity, both in Zimbabwe and elsewhere, among them the PDSP mentioned above. It had a training component integrated into the overall design in such a way that all forms of HRD activity would have to respond to weaknesses revealed through two other components.

ENDS AND MEANS: DEVELOPMENT IN PRACTICE

Much has been written on the choice of appropriate methodologies and delivery systems for development assistance, some of which is relevant here. Cook (1997) advocates the ‘process approach’ of Schein and the OD school both in the practice of development and in the training of development practitioners. This is justified on the basis that development activity is more than just training and the imparting of skills, but implies a wider organizational focus. It is contrasted with other consultancy models—doctor–patient, expert–client—in that it puts the client at the centre of both the problem analysis and solution seeking/implementation, and in the process increases ownership and sustainability.

Blunt (1997) takes issue with Cook and his espousal of the clinical perspective, ‘process consultancy’ and all dominant paradigms, arguing instead for an adaptive approach which values analysis stemming from a variety of paradigmatic positions, and which puts ends before means. In support of this ‘logical position’ he cites many sources, himself prominent among them, who have found it necessary to factor in the effects of different cultural environments on programmes of leadership training, motivation, job satisfaction and organizational culture, for example. O’Donovan (1995) goes further to emphasize the need for balance between the classical elements and relationship elements of contracts that would be required in the kind of process approach to programmes which ODA was trying to adopt in the early 1990s.
Table 1. Theories of development (based on Joy)

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<th>Process to be managed</th>
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<td>1. Marxist</td>
<td>● Social justice</td>
<td>The class struggle</td>
<td>Socio-economic classes</td>
<td>The exercise of power between classes</td>
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<td>● Victory of the workers</td>
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<td>● A classless society</td>
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<td>2. Growth</td>
<td>● Growth of material productivity</td>
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<td>● Increased choice</td>
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<td>3. Sustainable human development</td>
<td>Government capacity to:</td>
<td>Public–private decision making and implementation</td>
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The Zimbabwe Capacity-Building Programme had the following features of a process approach:

- Emphasis was placed on the facilitator’s role in stimulating a learning process rather than providing solutions according to certain rules and standards.
- The need for CEOs of Councils to own problems and their causes was fundamental; these were very often rooted in weak organizational systems and practices which the CEO is employed to manage.
- The need for the Councils to reassess their core values and spell out the role of all levels in achieving the mission.
- Emergence of the need for key policy-makers and managers at district level to re-examine the kind of roles they currently play, and how these needed changing in the face of the demands of decentralization, and the need for more accountability.
- An emphasis on changing.

In designing a development intervention, it is the view of this author that the means need to be considered closely at the outset. The way we deliver development—for want of a better phrase—is tied up with issues of sustainability and ownership which are at the heart of all true development, and which determine, in the end, the degree to which any intervention has had a positive impact. The theory and practice of development are not a matter on which there is agreement in the field of development studies, any more than in the practice of development. The potential for conflict between the multiplicity of ends and means among donors supporting large-scale programmes of capacity building and institutional strengthening should not be underestimated, and strategies to deal with the complexities should be worked out as part of ongoing programme management. Table 1 places this conflict in the context of theories of development which different parties can bring to a single programme.

The next section seeks to sketch out the reasons for adopting such an approach in the Zimbabwe context. It draws heavily on studies into different approaches to development practice, principally the Strategic Plan for Capacity Building (1994), which set the parameters for the programme which was subsequently to emerge.

**TRAINING, TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND CAPACITY BUILDING**

The role of training in building broad-based capacity within public service organizations has never been disputed. Jaycox reminds us of the critical importance of building human, as well as institutional capacity, in the struggle towards economic development, and in improving public service management (Mentz, 1997). What is open to
debate is the effectiveness of that training, and the form which much training has taken in the past. In Zimbabwe, for example, several studies (LOGOT Study, 1992; Municipal Development Programme Report, 1992) have pointed out that much training relevant to local government suffered from being too abstract and theoretical; there was little responsive, problem-oriented training to assist local authorities to address their current problems; and much training activity was uncoordinated and badly delivered due to lack of any kind of policy on training within local authorities (see Zinyemba et al., 1994).

The same authors state that a great deal of time and money was wasted providing training which was of little or no long-term benefit to the institutions concerned. They stressed that several decisions have to be taken at each stage of the training process to ensure training leads to a transfer of learning and an improvement in the effectiveness of the trainee, and ultimately the organization. For example, the appropriateness of on-the-job training in developing practical skills needs to be complimented with formal courses, accredited where possible to boost morale. Training providers should be encouraged to adapt existing material to the situation on the ground with which most participants are familiar; relevance is all important in adult learning. Short-term courses and workshops, located away from the workplace, interspersed with periods of on-the-job supervision and support, are more appropriate than long-term courses which take essential staff—usually middle and top management—away from the organization for extended periods; balancing the demands of the organization with individuals’ own development needs has to be handled in such a way as not to alienate the people on whom the reforms depend.

Closely allied to the training activity within the Zimbabwe local authority setting described above has been the provision of substantial levels of technical assistance by donors. The form of this provision has had serious implications for the recipient institutions over the years (Zinyemba et al., 1994). This support has typically taken the form of filling certain posts on a temporary basis, or providing other specific support to line functions within local authorities. Strengthening has been directed specifically at these functions, or discreet project-related activities, without much attention being paid to the wider organization, or the network on which the target institution relies for effectiveness. The tendency has been for resources to be concentrated in and diverted to the sector or department which is the target of donor assistance, thus disadvantaging other parts of the organization. As these other sections and departments fail to deliver the required level of support, the donor-assisted department begins to set up its own—parallel—systems for achieving its end-of-project goals and objectives.

The design of the RDCCBP was careful to try and address these constraints in conventional capacity building. It did this in a number of ways. The three components of the programme were linked in such a way that only by the interplay of one against the others could a ‘synergy’ emerge, which would force the Councils to address their present problems. A shortcoming of much existing government support to Councils was that it provided little opportunity for local autonomy in the way funds were spent—most grants were tied. It also induced a dependency on the centre based on an overriding concern with control of government and political processes, which characterized the public administrations of most sub-Saharan countries, in the years after independence (Mentz, 1997). In the era of government cutbacks which began in the 1990s, this dependency left local authorities vulnerable to several shocks as government transfers were cut substantially, leaving them without the capacity to finance even the most basic level of services from their own revenue.

Through a District Development Grant (DDG) Rural District Councils, in 1996, were provided untied funds for development of their district, for the first time. The only conditionalities had to do with the basic principles of good development planning—consultation, accountability and transparency, M & E. Otherwise, Councils received the money into their bank accounts, were free to decide on which projects and programmes to spend it, and the level of funding would increase yearly based on assessment of success with implementing the projects of the previous year. Also, the levels of grant awarded to Councils would become variable after year two, when councils with good implementation capacity would receive more funds than others who were having difficulties bringing projects to completion. The DDG therefore differed substantially from the many other grants coming into RDC Finance Departments in that it was not targeted at any particular sector, or intended to fulfill any externally driven agenda, of government or donors—water and sanitation, poverty alleviation or improved market access. It fed into the Council’s existing planning process, as it existed.
The second component of the programme sought to ensure that these planning processes were jolted out of their existing inertia, and became more responsive to the needs of communities, in terms of the Rural District Councils Act. This was done through external facilitation of the change process by a District Facilitator, whose task, among others, was to expose the weaknesses and get those in decision-making positions to take responsibility for tackling them. A number of models were developed for this, one which developed the conventional learning cycle into a combined Activity and Learning Cycle with the facilitator acting as catalyst in the learning process. In the course of facilitator-Council interaction, individuals with decision-making power are encouraged to move beyond the conventional activity cycle (action-seeing results-thinking about results-planning new actions) to one which incorporates more reflection on cause and effect. HODs and CEOs are encouraged to take responsibility for the weaknesses which are exposed. Some of these require restructuring. Others might imply an overhaul of existing systems. Many require training of staff and councillors.

This is where the third component of the programme becomes relevant, providing funds for HRD, which is responsive in some way to the weaknesses identified in the course of facilitating Council development planning processes. This requirement is enforced through completion of Outline Training Plans and Budgets each year, which are monitored to ensure funds are properly utilized before further funds can be drawn down. The lessons from this monitoring are fed back to Councils in quarterly meetings with Provincial personnel, so feeding into the learning process which underlies the whole programme. Training ceases to be seen as just a one-off event, but part of a wider strategy to build capacity at individual, departmental and organizational level.

If we look again at McCourt and Sola’s model I think we will find it conforms quite closely to the approach adopted over the past four years with Zimbabwe’s rural local authorities. The next obvious question is ‘Does it work?’ A full evaluation of the impact of such a complex programme is beyond the scope of this article, and remains a task for some committed individuals in the future. The need for such an evaluation is all the more relevant, given the warnings about the failure, generally, to properly assess donor agency programmes in time to address policy failures during earlier phases of the programmes in question (Hintjens, 1999). However, it is possible to draw some early lessons on the value or otherwise of integrating training within an OD approach in this way, and this will form the final section of this article.

MEASURING THE SUCCESS OF THE APPROACH

In approaching an interim evaluation of the success of the HRD component there is an immediate problem in adopting the four criteria specified by McCourt and Sola, and outlined at the beginning of this article, namely:

1. participant reactions after training;
2. participant learning;
3. individual behaviour change; and
4. impact on the organization.

The objective of improved performance of Councils in carrying out their basic functions stresses the need for more emphasis on level four evaluation, rather than at the level of individual learning, for example. McCourt and Sola pointed out that in the Tanzania programme no attempt was made at evaluating the impact on the organization, recognizing this as a weakness.

A second problem arises with any attempt to ascribe to one component of an integrated programme certain improvements which have become apparent in the client organization. How sure can we be that the positive change has been as a result of training or facilitator interventions and networking? Such an integrated programme which relied on the ‘synergy’ of three components must also be evaluated holistically. Yet there is a tendency for donors still to be interested primarily in evaluations of the particular component which they have funded.

The primary focus at successive district, provincial and national review meetings, held every six months, has been to determine what improvements had been made in Councils’ institutional capacity. Little use was made of end-of-course Assessment Forms (‘happiness sheets’), the first level of evaluation, nor were any tested models of
participant learning employed—level two (Honey and Mumford, 1989) With this in mind, the following observations are made, based on an analysis of review reports over two years:

1. HRD funds have been used consistently in most Councils alongside major facilitator agendas in performance management, budgeting, organizational restructuring, financial management, training skills and development coordination. Previously, there was no explicit linkage between training and the need to address organizational weaknesses.

2. For the first time Councils have had to produce Outline Training Plans which were evaluated at provincial level in order to access funds for training. However, good practice has not yet become institutionalized in Councils, and where provincial level is lax in monitoring Training Completion Certificates, substantial training activity has gone on which was not planned, and which benefited just a few people in the organization.

3. There is improved corporate management in 60–70% of councils with Mission Statements being produced for the first time, as a step towards refining some objectives for the Council to guide planning decisions.

4. In a few Councils real efforts have been made to restructure and right-size bloated establishments which have been consuming the bulk of resources. There is also increased attention to human resource management issues across a large number of councils, with policies being developed on recruitment and performance management accompanied by training on employment legislation, Codes of Conduct etc.

5. Training on the production of a district strategic plan, by several other programmes as well as that under examination here, bore little fruit. Few if any Councils are working from such a plan at the moment. Priorities for development of the district are set annually, and appear to change monthly, when the Councillors meet. One view could be that no amount of training is going to revive a planning process which has become discredited due to failure year after year to match the plan with the required level of resources. Existing planning structures at village and ward level are defunct, and many programmes work to their own district development plans.

6. An extensive amount of training has taken place on budgeting and financial management, for councillors and staff. Now, approximately 95% of councils have up-to-date audited accounts, which has removed a huge backlog. This required substantial amounts of outside technical and financial assistance, however, and relied only partially on the skills of Council staff.

7. Council budgets are still impenetrable to ratepayers who might want to know how much is being spent on operational costs compared to service delivery and district development. But this area has now been targeted within a refocused programme, and there is a clear recognition of a role for HRD in equipping councillors and officials to produce and monitor a clearly written, balanced budget.

8. Improvement in Council service delivery has been harder to discern. Judging by press reports about ratepayer resistance to increases in budgeted fees and charges, people are seeing no appreciable return for the taxes they are paying Councils at the moment. Training resources have been used to hold consultative workshops with traditional leaders, and community organizations using PRA approaches very often. But Councils have shown little creativity in the use of ‘sub-district training’ grants, to ‘sell’ Council and improve its image, based on an open dialogue about how Council spends what limited resources it receives at the moment.

9. Workshops and review meetings also focused on building a multi-sectoral team drawn from different sector ministries at provincial and district levels, in support of Councils. This translated very often into improved fieldwork and many Councils benefited from technical advice coming at regular intervals in face-to-face meetings as a result of this coordination. However, failure to adequately address the issue of Key Result Areas at a policy level means that any gains are rapidly eroding. At another level, however, HRD interventions in a couple of provinces, in the form of role-set analysis workshops, for example, managed to forge better working relationships between councils and government administrators whose job it is to oversee their performance.

10. A look at Council Outline Training Plans for 2000 indicates a far more systematic approach to HRD.

- There is a good spread of activity across the different target groups at district level—councillors, staff, sector ministry officials—and community level.
Councillors in particular are benefiting far more than they did in the past, with substantial training activity aimed at raising the calibre of elected members, by getting them to understand and play their role in relation to certain core areas of Council performance.

Training clearly reflects a concern with the core activities of budgeting, performance management, planning and human resources management, which are central to improved effectiveness and which have been dominating the facilitation agendas of programme staff.

There is still inadequate attention to the ‘sub-district’ or community needs in terms of human resource development. This may partly be a reflection of the caution with which most civil servants now regard such work, in the rapidly changing political environment in the country where political pluralism is emerging strongly for the first time in 20 years.

CONCLUSION

The RDCCBP can teach us some useful lessons about setting up such an integrated programme, and managing some of the conflicting dynamics where a diverse range of stakeholders is involved. The different paradigms of development outlined in Table 1 were well represented across the donor group which supported the Capacity Building Programme, and indeed among the implementers on the ground. The goal of *enhanced capacity of rural Councils to develop their districts and deliver improved services* was one to which all could subscribe from the outset. A choice between a blueprint or a process approach to achieve this goal (O’Donovan, 1995) would not have been a particularly difficult one for ODA/DFID, given its shift earlier in the 1990s towards the latter. Only through a process approach with the emphasis on ownership, participation and commitment from partners could this goal be achieved. Whether other partners such as the World Bank held the same commitment to process over blueprint became more and more of an issue as the programme moved forward, until the Bank finally terminated their support, mid-way through 2000, as a result of deteriorating macro-economic factors in Zimbabwe.

As the goal of sustainable rural development remained elusive, progress was more persistently demanded at the objectives level, namely, indications of improved Council capacity to produce, among others:

- a balanced budget;
- a workable staff structure;
- some sort of strategic plan;
- up-to-date, audited accounts;
- project implementation plans.

For some of the weaker Councils especially, this placed an unbearable administrative and technical burden on unqualified staff, and gaps began to open up between these and Councils with more responsive management and better levels of resources.

When we speak, therefore, of enhanced governance capacity, we can regard it as both an end (a core development goal) and the means to attacking poverty and improving people’s livelihoods. This touches on the interplay of different programmes on the ground, adopting different approaches which have spin-off effects on each other. It could be said that a weakness of the programme was a failure to get Councils to better integrate all training going on in Council and in the district, with the support of different donors and NGOs. It helped perpetuate the ‘work-shopping syndrome’ mentioned earlier, which has created such familiarity with the training situation, that the contempt can be measured in the continuing failure to implement Action Plans and end-of-course Workplans. This interplay of different programmes has to be recognized and managed.

Despite these qualifications, however, it is the contention of this article that the RDCCBP does represent a useful and tested model for integrating HRD into mainstream programmes of institutional strengthening and capacity building.
REFERENCES

O’Donovan I. 1995. The ODA’s process approach to projects: experience in India—lessons for project management. Paper prepared by DAG, School of Public Policy, University of Birmingham.
APPENDIX: THE PROCESS APPROACH

Schein advocates a process approach in both development practice and in the training of development practitioners—both of which were requirements within the RDCCBP.

An acknowledged risk in the OD approach was its emphasis on analysis and action at the micro levels of individual, group and organizational behaviour at the expense of a broader focus on society and policy levels. So, while the programme objectives and the main focus of facilitation were at the level of organization (and individual) effectiveness, successive reviews and continuous donor interventions focused on the impact on communities and civil society, of improved organizational performance—the goal level.

The approach was based on a number of principles, based on experiences of the consultancy team, which coincide with the three principles underlying process consultation, as set out by Cook. The first was that the clients’ (in this case the Rural District Councils) understanding of their situation is far more comprehensive than anything the facilitator can develop in the course of his/her interventions. The secret is how to unlock this reserve of accumulated yet widely dispersed knowledge in support of the development effort. Second, the process of facilitation needs to impart a sense of ownership in the client, both of the weaknesses exposed and the solutions proposed to address them. To do this a model was developed, based on the Learning Cycle of Kolb and others, which emphasized particular activities at various stages of the cycle of facilitation activity, designed to induce this sense of ownership before progressing to the next stage. Finally, the clients are responsible for identifying solutions and strategies to address exposed weaknesses, with facilitator support, based on their (the clients’) superior knowledge of their situation mentioned earlier.

The approach contrasts with other consultancy models, such as the doctor–patient model, or the ‘expert–client’ model, where the outsider is seen as the one with substantial expertise and knowledge which, if applied to the situation of the client, will result in a ‘prescription’ which in turn will solve the client’s problem for him. It makes some fundamental assumptions about the timescales needed to deliver results and, by implication, the capacity of external support agents (ESAs) to sustain support over a long period.

In response to Cook, Blunt has this to say about the process approach

Process consultancy (and the clinical approach) have been the dominant paradigms among development practitioners for some time. Like all paradigms, this serves to blinker them to the merits of other approaches, confirming them in their view of a ‘one best way’ approach. There is too much emphasis on means rather than ends. Instead Blunt argues for an approach which recognizes the advantages of analyses from several different paradigmatic positions as a first step to addressing ‘the great variety and complexity of organizational issues in developing countries’. In support of this logical position Blunt cites several sources, who have found it necessary to factor in the effects of different cultural environments on programmes of leadership training, motivation, job satisfaction and organizational culture, to name but a few.

The paradigm of process consultancy is also criticized for its insistence on a necessary level of pain before there is any gain to the client organization. Such pain comes in the form of requirements for open exchange of ideas, confrontation of issues and an assault on hierarchy wherever it is found. These elements of a consultancy intervention are often regarded as prerequisites for organizational success, but this has dangerous implications, for example, in a culture where openness and frankness carry entirely different connotations from what they do in the West. Blunt mentions Asia, but this is largely true also for many African cultures, from which the culture of the public service is not far removed. Particularly in relationship to leadership and authority, we can see evidence of a deference in the face of poor management practices, corruption and nepotism, for example.

Blunt also attacks the ‘primacy of the client’s view of the problem’ which lies at the heart of process consultancy. It violates the common-sense view that in many situations the client is so immersed in the day-to-day melee of trying to run the organization that they fail to see the wood for the trees, as it were. They are blinded to certain features of the organization and how it operates; they have become stuck in a certain mode, and can’t work out why it is no longer effective. The introduction of an ‘outsider’ who stimulates and challenges the organization to look in
other directions can be more beneficial than somebody who is convinced that all that is needed is ‘sensitive facilitation’ to draw out the knowledge which is already there.

Where does the CBP approach fall here? Unquestionably there was an emphasis on ownership by the client of the problem, and the solutions to address it. But the assumption was not that the reservoir of knowledge and experience within RDCs was sufficient to expose the weaknesses in existing approaches to underdevelopment in rural areas. Facilitation would expose them, but the internal ownership came at the stage of identifying solutions and addressing them.

The efficacy of being prepared to apply different methods and approaches depending on the circumstances of the client organization is put forward, and the choice depends on things like the nature of the problem, its complexity, urgency; the circumstances surrounding the problem within and outside the organization (culture, resources, governance); the capacity of the people involved with the problem (interest and understanding, capacity for dealing with it).

Blunt’s insistence on ends rather than means risks losing sight of the critical factors like sustainability, ownership of situations and solutions, and ultimately autonomy over one’s resources, environment and destiny.