TEAMS ACROSS ORGANIZATIONS*
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"Getting people in an organization to pull together is difficult enough. How do you get people coming in from different organizations, with quite different expectations, to work as a team? I wonder what the word team means to each of them." And in a quick afterthought she added, "Myself included." That was Dr. Veena Joshi, the Programme Officer at the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) in New Delhi. Veena headed the Energy Sphere of SDC's programmes in India, promoting the development and dissemination of alternative technologies, within the larger mission of facilitating development processes for poor and disadvantaged populations.

The project on the Vertical Shaft Brick Kiln (VSBK) presented an opportunity for SDC to attempt an alternative model of project management. Veena was keen on a system that would promote decentralization, participation, transparency, and a far greater level of ownership of the task of managing projects among the partners brought together. The need to decentralize was a practical one. There would always be a limit to how much SDC might spend on itself from the public money put at its disposal for the programmes. This would mean, among other things, a lean staff organization within SDC. However, the added reasons for seeking an alternative model for managing projects arose from the need to practise the values of participation and empowerment espoused commonly in all development programmes.

The VSBK technology was pursued by the India Brick Project (IBP). The partners in IBP were a mixed group–some large organizations and some small, some old partners and some new, some with strengths in R&D and some with grassroots community development experience. There were also a consultant to brickmakers and a consultant in project management. The P&P Group was introduced to the partners as a "facilitator with experience in organization and institutional development." The principal consultant from P&P was Vijay Padaki. The role of the consultant was defined as accompanying the project in developing and implementing an alternative project management system.

"How do we begin?" was the natural question on the minds of Veena and her colleagues. Vijay explained that moving from one longstanding system of project management to another was not a task in procedural design but one of internalizing an alternative value system. At the core, what distinguishes any management system is the set of value premises on which it rests. This was as true for MbO (Management by Objectives) and TQM (Total Quality Management) as for team-based performance management. "Oh oh, lectures, seminars, orientation programme … no operating system till people's thinking is changed." Quite to the contrary, the approach to be adopted was to do away with inputs, or at least keep them to the bare minimum. *Doing* things together as partners in well planned exercises was considered more appropriate. Would this not amount to social engineering and, therefore, be a form of manipulation?

The question led to the articulation of a few principles that SDC would subscribe to and uphold in the project:

- Partnership Management must be based on multilateral relations, with mutual respect and acceptance among partners. (It must not be viewed as Partner Management.)
- Participatory processes must be authentic, and they must drive the partnership. (It must not be a mere technique.)
- There must be great transparency in all transactions in the partnership. (It must not be selective in practice.)
- Following from the above, SDC must be open to learning, change, and influence from the partnership process. (It must not be dogmatic.)
- There must be multilateral accountability, including points of SDC's accountability to partners. (It must not be unilateral and one way.)
- There must be congruence between the values in SDC's developmental vision and the values governing its management practices. (It must not be viewed as being different.)

Did the principles answer the original question about manipulation? The SDC group acknowledged that they did, at least as a start. However, two things became clear immediately. First, the proof of the principles was in their practice and not merely in their articulation. Second, for practice to succeed, the project management system should have feedback mechanisms built into it constantly to monitor and correct one's departures from the desired course. Vijay explained that, as a facilitator in the system he would himself be governed by the principles. To start with, his role as a facilitator would need the mandate of the participating partners. Once mandated, he would choose appropriate methods for the facilitation process–i.e., they would be in line with the principles and would, in fact, reinforce them.

The first task in the new India Brick Project was seen as having a learning objective: Learning how to work in a collaborative, partnership mode.

An extended workshop exercise was undertaken to explore and strengthen interfaces across partners, and to work towards "rules of the game" in the collaborative set up. The workshop was spread over two and a half days and had the following processes:

Stage 1–Bazaar Set-up. Each partner (including SDC) "set up shop" by using any combination of display materials. The guidelines given requested each partner to make sure the following points were communicated through the displays:
- What business are we in?
  The products and services.
- What ideas do we have of expansion and/or diversification in the foreseeable future?
  The products and services.
- What are the businesses, products and services of the other participants in the bazaar?
  The current understanding or assumptions.

Stage 2–Bazaar Tours. After all the shops were set up, all partners toured the bazaar, i.e., visited all the shops set up by other partners. Questions, comments, and discussions at each shop were encouraged.

Stage 3–Within-shop Review. After the bazaar tour, each partner team was encouraged to review its experience on the following guidelines:
- How are we seen by others?
- How do we see the others?
- Are there any common grounds?

Stage 4–Deriving an Organogram. With the understanding gained through the bazaar tour, each partner group prepared a tentative organogram of the composite organization, comprising all partners, for the purpose of the dissemination project. The only guideline provided was not to be bound by conventions and precedence, to think of creative but workable structures, and to depict the organogram with whatever innovative graphics as were felt to be needed. After all the partners had displayed and explained their organograms, the assumptions underlying the organogram models were examined.

Stage 5–Purpose. In a plenary session, all the partner groups were engaged in a discussion to arrive at a common, shared articulation of the purpose of the inter-organizational endeavour. From this discussion emerged a clearer idea of:
- the mission
- the key tasks towards mission accomplishment
- the value premises in the mission.

Stage 6–Roles and Interdependencies. Each partner group was required to view its own role in the larger inter-organizational system. The following guidelines were provided.

Step 1. Regarding itself as a business unit in the larger enterprise (either as a cost centre or a profit centre, or a combination), to visualize the key tasks for itself–in line with the key tasks at the level of the mission.

Step 2. To visualize the interdependencies across partners:
- What outputs of ours may be inputs for the key tasks of others?
- What inputs do we need from the others to accomplish our key tasks?

Negotiations across groups were encouraged for the second step. With the presentations from all the partner groups displayed, it was possible to visualize the interdependencies across the groups as a role network. Revisiting the organograms attempted in Stage 4 helped in visualizing the structures needed to facilitate the collaborative processes sought.

Everybody agreed that the workshop exercise was educative. The next big question was: What do we actually do to manage the project in a collaborative mode?

A compact Project Facilitation Unit (PFU) was set up comprising an invited project management consultant and two representatives of SDC, including Veena. The PFU was part of a larger Project Leaders Forum. The PLF itself was an experiment in structure within the team-based approach to managing the project–as agreed upon by the Heads of all the partner organizations in the earlier workshop exercises.

Figure 1 shows the structure of the PLF in IBP. The most significant outcome of the structure was that it was congruent with the rules of the game–especially in the multi-lateral

accountability among partners. That included the accountability of the PFU (and SDC) to the operational partners. Veena was particularly happy with the diagram of the structure. She said it depicted a sunflower.

The team-based project management system developed for the PLF was called RAGA: the Review → Assessment → Goalsetting → Action cycle of tasks around IBP goals, key tasks, milestones, and operational targets. The PLF chose a 4-month period as the cycle time for RAGA.

Over several cycles of RAGA in the PLF meetings, the following observations were made:

- The PLF has risen to the task of project management very well.
- The particular structural positioning of PFU has aided the desired multilateral processes.
- Although the interdependencies across partners might appear limited (vis-à-vis individual partner goals), the recognition of possible synergies from collaborations has led to greater interface processes.
- The RAGA process is well understood, appreciated and largely implemented. The operating procedures have been standardized. More important, the larger partner organizations have found its value in internal project management tasks as well. (Tier 1)
- The role of PFU has gradually transformed to a much more facilitative one, as desired.
- The internal consistency needed across structures-systems-values has been recognized. (In the third meeting of the PLF, there was a deliberate revisiting of the values adopted one year earlier.)
- The self sufficiency of the PLF in project management is reflected in the dispensability of the external consultant in later PLF meetings.

In the last PLF review meeting, the participants asked themselves the following questions:

- How can we use the experience in the inter-organizational setting to bring about changes in the work culture of our individual organizations? (Or will this work only in a detached context?)
- How can we become effective facilitators and change agents ourselves in future project management settings? (Or will there always be a need for an external facilitator?)
- Was the high degree of self-driven accountability in the group a natural effect of the structure and system adopted? (Or do we necessarily need to have checks and balances to ensure conformance?)

*Given the context in which this case is set, the original spellings have been retained.

Exhibit 1
TWO-TIER STRUCTURE FOR
AN INTEGRATED PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM