**United Nations
Centre for
Human Settlements
(Habitat)**

The Councillor as Institution-builder

Handbook 1 1

Training for Elected Leadership

ISTANBUL, 1996 – "THE CITY SUMMIT"

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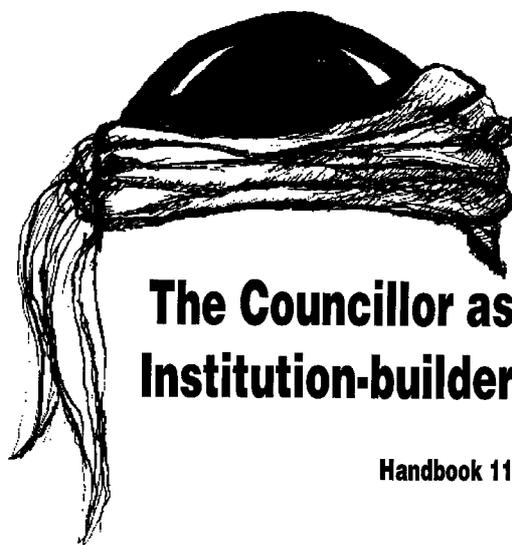
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FOREWORD

As shown by results of training needs assessments conducted by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), training needs of local government elected officials (councillors), or of local politicians, appear among the most urgent world-wide and, at the same time, the least attended areas of capacity-building for local development and municipal management.

In the last few years, a number of countries as varied as Nepal and Poland or Uganda and Paraguay have embarked for the first time in several decades, and in some cases for the first time ever, on a process of electing their councillors and mayors. Training needs of local-government elected officials are also at the top of the agenda in established municipal democracies such as Ecuador, India, and the United States of America.

To respond to these needs, the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) has developed and tested a series of training handbooks to assist councillors to represent the citizens, provide civic leadership and effectively work with central government and with the management, technical, and professional staff in local authorities and other local institutions. The handbooks cover policy and decision making, communication, negotiation and leadership, attending, managing and conducting meetings, councillors' enabling and facilitating activities, financial management and other related needs.

This handbook, *The Councillor as Institution Builder*, is one of the series of 12 and is intended for use primarily by trainers in national training institutions for local government or training units within local governments themselves. As an additional assistance for trainers using these handbooks, the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) has published a companion *Trainer's Guide for Training of Elected Officials* containing trainer's notes and information prepared exclusively for the benefit of these trainers in planning workshops for local elected officials based on the handbooks.

It is expected that this training handbook will contribute greatly to strengthening the capacity of local governments through the introduction of good Leadership leadership practices, one of the major objectives of the 1996 United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, Habitat II.

I wish to thank Dr. Fred Fisher and Mr. David W. Tees for preparing this and other handbooks in the series in collaboration with the staff of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) Training Section within the Centre's training programmes supported by the Government of the Netherlands. I also wish to acknowledge the contribution of the trainers and local-government officials in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Kenya, Lithuania, Romania and Uganda who assisted in the field testing of these training materials.

Dr. Wally N'Dow
Assistant Secretary-General
United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat)

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About the hat

The hat worn by the figure to the right and shown on the pages to come was selected to symbolize the councillor role featured in this handbook.

Cloth hat worn by opium growers on the Pakistan frontier

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WHERE TO FIND IT IN THIS HANDBOOK

The Councillor as Institution Builder

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HOW TO USE THIS HANDBOOK

This training handbook on THE COUNCILLOR IS INSTITUTION BUILDER, like other handbooks in the series, can be used in several ways.

Self-study

The essay that opens this handbook is intended for self-instruction. All need is a quiet place to think, some time, and something to write with. For best results, we encourage you to write down your answers to the questions raised from time to time in the essay. The learning value of the information is multiplied many times for the reader who takes the time to do this.

Workshop training

The trainer's notes and exercise materials in this handbook are intended for use by experienced trainers in a training workshop for councillors from different local governments. We have included various types of learning activities and formats to provide trainers with considerable flexibility in adapting s workshop to specific needs of participating councillors. It has been our intention in developing this p handbook to encourage you to incorporate your own experiences as a trainer to heighten the learning value of these training materials for participating councillors.

As a trainer, you may decide to use the materials in the handbook in the exact order and manner presented. If you prefer, however, you may rearrange or modify the materials as needed to meet the objectives of a particular training situation. You may choose to offer three hours of training by using key exercises and activities included in the handbook. Or you may take advantage of the many materials in the handbook supplemented by content of your own to extend the length of the programme to a full day.

This handbook is one of twelve in a series for training in elected leadership. You might decide or be requested to provide a workshop that requires you to use more than one or all of these handbooks over a longer period of time. While each handbook can be used independently of the others, their use in sequence can provide a powerful, unified learning experience for participating councillors.

Team training

These materials also can be used, preferably with the assistance of an experienced trainer/facilitator, to improve the performance of councillors who serve together on the same governing body. When training councillors who serve together, we believe the facilitator must be prepared to organize the training activities in this handbook in different ways. There may be occasions where you, as facilitator, will choose to add new activities depending on the situation and the characteristics of the group. We hope in situations like these you will view this handbook as a "tool kit" containing many optional training ideas to be mixed and matched, modified or abandoned, as suggested by the situation.

You have many options to choose from with these training handbooks. We hope you take full advantage of them.

PART I
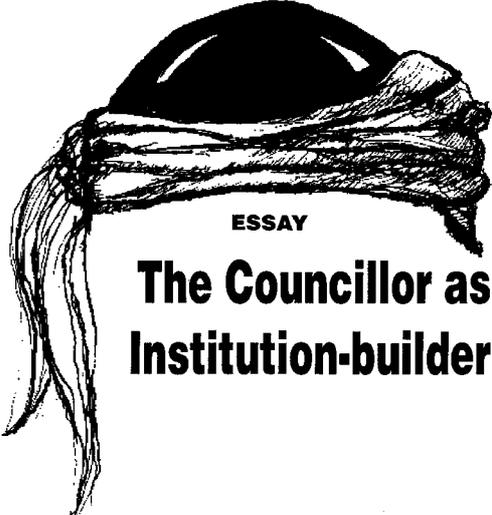
ESSAY

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Essay

Definition

The councillor, in the role of INSTITUTION-BUILDER, supports the development of staff personnel and the local-government organization as important responsibilities of local elected leadership.

Summary

Institution development, or capacity-building as it is often called by members of external support organizations, is critical to effective local-government operation. We will be looking at three aspects of the institution builder role: council/staff relationships; staff development; and ways to build the capacity of the total organization.

> *One hand will not clap.*
>
>   -Anonymous

Reflection

When I think of my role as an INSTITUTION BUILDER on the council, the following things come to mind:

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Role negotiation: A tool for many tasks

Before we delve into the council/staff relationship challenge, we want to mention a negotiating tactic that has broad application in keeping an organization, like a local authority, operating more effectively and efficiently. After a more general discussion of role negotiation, we will look at how to use it to improve council/staff performance.

How many times, in your experience as an elected official, have you had problems with other members of the "official family" of local government or experienced difficulty in working with someone at another level of government? Or maybe you have witnessed the council having difficulty sorting out its role with those of other official bodies, such as the planning commission, or its relationship with the staff. These kinds of role conflicts, or role ambiguities, are common enough to prompt those who work with organizations to develop a strategy for addressing them. Not surprising, the process is called role negotiation.

Role negotiation is more or less straightforward. Once you and the other party have decided to sit down and negotiate your roles (this assumes the other party feels the need to look at the role issue as well), set a time and place to conduct your discussions. Pick a venue that is quiet, comfortable, and roomy and a time that is both convenient and gives each side time to reflect on the issues to be discussed before you convene. To help prepare for the meeting, it is recommended that each side complete a form that includes the following statements:

1. If you (e.g., the management team) were to do the following things more often, or better, it would help us (e.g., the council) to increase our own effectiveness.

2. If you were to do the following things less, or stop doing them, it would help us increase our effectiveness.

3. The following things, which you have been doing, help to increase our effectiveness, and we hope you will continue to do them.

This seemingly simple approach to clarifying roles can be used between individuals, teams, and organizations. Role negotiation requires an atmosphere of openness by both parties, which may be the biggest stumbling block to its use in many organizations. It also requires an environment that is relatively free of status concerns between those who are trying to resolve their differences.

Recognizing cultural differences

We are aware that status, formality, and openness are behavioural traits that on, like are culturally sensitive but these aspects of organizational effectiveness are also possible to change. We will be discussing something called "total quality staff management" (TQM) later in this essay. It is a management strategy that has migrated from Japan to the United States and Europe, crossing cultural boundaries its journey. The installation of TQM in American corporations and even local governments has required many organizations to confront issues that tend to be sensitive, such as role status, communication barriers between functional units, and formal bureaucratic boundaries. What drove these organizations to adopt TQM, and those to bring about changes in their work cultures, was the desire to be more effective and competitive. Organization cultures can change, and may have to, if local government are going to be successful in meeting the needs of their constituents. It is reassuring to know there are techniques available to help institutions like local governments bring about behavioural changes in their efforts to remain responsive to the changing needs of their constituents.

Role negotiatioin between council and staff

Most councils experience role conflicts or ambiguities with the local-government staff at one time or another. We're going to assume that you want this situation to change. After you have discussed the possibility of role negotiating between the council and the staff (with either the chief administrator or a few key staff members), you can make arrangements for the session. These arrangements would include setting a date and meeting place and handing out a form that includes the statements listed above. Both sides should be instructed to complete the statements on the form in writing.

Role negotiation can benefit greatly when "facilitated" by a third party. You might want to invite a trainer from your local-government training institute to as you in this process. This trainer should be skilled in managing intergroup dynamics and group problem-solving techniques.

Two approaches can be taken to this task. The two groups (council and the staff) can respond to the statements in more general terms or they can be more specific. They might, for example, use the statements to explore the actions of an individual councillor who is doing something that annoys a staff member like the finance director. This latter approach (the one that identifies individual behavior) can be a bit more difficult but can produce better results in the long run. If there is resistance to this more personal approach, you can always begin with the group-on-group negotiations and get more specific as both parties become more comfortable with the approach and begin to experience positive results from the effort.

When you convene, copies of the completed forms should be exchanged and a discussion initiated. It is important to limit initial questions to those that can clarify the issues listed on the forms. There will be time to discuss the points in more depth later. While each side can present all of its information and suggestions before the other side reports, it may be more effective to have each side present their responses to each statement before moving to the next. If you use this alternate approach to reporting, you should still wait until all three task statements have been reported before any in-depth discussion takes place. The reason for this is the possibility of corollary information or suggestions being included on each list.

For example, the staff might say it wants the council to make fewer unannounced visits to operating units to "see how things are going." On the other hand, the council might say it wants the operating units to provide weekly written reports to keep councillors informed on progress in their respective departments. When these two issues are discussed, the staff might agree to provide the reports, and council says to curtail the practice of frequent on-site spot checks.

After each side has reported and explained its list of issues to be negotiated the total group would review the fists for those issues that are compatible (such as the example just given) and agree on a list of actions to be taken by each side in response to the suggestions and follow-up discussions. After all issues have been reviewed and action steps outlined, someone would either volunteer or be given the task of preparing a report listing all the issues and agreed-upon actions. Each party should enter the negotiation phase of this exercise ready to say either "yes," or "no," or "we need more information" to each action being considered. Both parties should meet periodically to review how well the agreements are being implemented and to determine if new issues need to be considered.

> *The stem of the lotus will tell the depth of the water.*
>
> - Thai proverb

Other strategies to improve council/staff performance

Another aspect of the council/staff relationship that is potentially disruptive and sometimes destructive is the council's responsibility for evaluating performance. Evaluation takes place at two levels: (a) evaluating the performance of individuals, and (b) evaluating the performance of organizational units or the organization as a whole. Let's look, initially, at some of the issues involved in evaluating individual employees.

First, employee appraisal/evaluation in the local public service is often dictated by central government. Given this probability, it is difficult and probably foolhardy to be too specific about this responsibility in this essay. And it may be very difficult for individual councils to change the system if it is national in scope.

Secondly, council should have only a limited role in employee appraisal, at least directly. As a general rule, councillors should be concerned only with evaluating the performance of the chief executive of the local authority and perhaps the clerk of council. We say "should," but there are exceptions. If your local government is small, to councillors may be expected to assume direct responsibility for departmental management. If so, then these councillors may be perceived to have appraisal responsibility. Normally, however, employee appraisal is the responsibility of immediate staff supervisors, although others may become involved in reviewing a supervisor's evaluations. Some organizations use evaluation teams consisting of peers while others even include subordinates to the person being appraised (if there are subordinates) in the evaluation process.

Thirdly, while councillors may not be involved directly in employee appraisal, there is, nevertheless, an important role for council in this process. Council's role is to ensure that a performance appraisal process (that meets the needs of the organization and management) is in effect and operating effectively. An effective appraisal process should have several characteristics. It should be:

- formalized, standardized, and as objective as possible;
- job and performance related
- tied to a formal job description that is congruent with the employee's job responsibilities;
- use the supervisor's subjective evaluation as only one component of a broader appraisal process of employee performance;
- designed to provide skill training for those responsible for conducting the appraisals;
- an integral part of decisions to promote, transfer, or, if necessary, discipline or dismiss the individual employee; and
- used to assist in making decisions about the development of individual employees as well as programmes to develop work teams and the total organization.

To reiterate a point made earlier, the council, with a few exceptions, should not be involved in conducting individual staff appraisals. Nevertheless, the council needs to develop policy stances that: (a) are consistent with acceptable staff performance appraisal practices; (b) support the administration of the programme in a fair and objective manner; and (c) promote job performance.

Evaluating the chief executive

One person the council should be evaluating on a routine basis is the chief executive officer (CEO) of the local-government organization. In addition to any standard format that may be prescribed for evaluating the CEO, the evaluation should also look at three aspects of his or her performance:

1. Working relations with the council, staff, and citizens

2. Achievement of council goals and objectives

3. Ability to bring managerial leadership to the role and position

All these areas for performance review require some standards and benchmarks of acceptable behaviour against which the chief executive can be evaluated. This is not easy to do. And yet, without some mutually acceptable criteria on the basis of which the two sides can discuss performance, it will be difficult to make decisions about the chief executive's future in the organization.

This means, among other things, that the council and chief executive officer must have a mutual understanding about what is expected of the chief executive, not only with the council and its individual members, but also between the chief executive and the staff and citizens. These expectations should cover a variety of concerns, including:

- programme performance and fiscal control (somewhat easy to determine);
- intangibles, such as communications and trust with key stakeholders (admittedly more difficult); and
- managing an effective and efficient organization.

Each of these expectations should be committed to writing along with any specific tasks and responsibilities that might be included in the position classification/job description.

Reflection

How does your council evaluate the performance of the chief executive officer for your local authority? Do you think your current procedure is effective? What changes would you like to see in the way the CEO's performance is evaluated?

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Organizational performance

The final area of performance appraisal we want to mention is that of the organization. One of the most effective ways to conduct this kind of appraisal is against predetermined programme and service goals and outputs. This, of course, assumes that goals and outputs have been established as a part of the budget or strategic planning process. Each department and programme unit in your municipal organization should be encouraged to establish concrete, measurable production/Output targets or goals at budget time in collaboration with council. If your council works in committees to prepare departmental or programme-specific budgets, then these committees should make this a part of their budget discussions with the staff before funding recommendations are presented to the full council (if this is how your system operates).

Production/output projection helps council and staff make performance appraisals regularly throughout the fiscal year. They also provide invaluable information to council in determining how resources should be allocated in future budgets. Without performance data on the various programmes and services you are providing to your constituents, it is almost impossible to make rational decisions about how to allocate scarce resources among competing interests and needs.

Insitution-building: This and much more

We've looked at two issues that seem to be problems between many councils and their staffs, role conflicts and performance evaluations. In terms of institutional development, both are important, but they only represent part of the challenge of building the capacity of your local government. There are many other issues, or opportunities, for strengthening the organization, but first we want to address a set of seemingly insurmountable circumstances faced by many councils.

It is essential that council have a dedicated and competent staff to carry out policies and programmes. Without such a staff, chances of being effective are greatly diminished. This is true even if local government relies heavily on NG0s and the private sector to implement a large share of programmes. But, you say, we have a staff that is currently underpaid, under skilled, and unmotivated. The compensation issue is, admittedly, complex. If your local government is not paying a living wage, then employees may be forced to pursue other sources of income. These outside employment arrangements may diminish the time and energy employees have to devote to their local-government jobs and can create dysfunctional problems for the organization and its managers.

First and foremost, inadequate employee compensation creates problems for members of the public, your constituents. For example, business owners might come to city hall to renew their operating permit and find there is no one to help them. It causes resentment on the part of those employees who are trying to meet their full-time employment commitments. It can destroy any semblance of a work ethic that may have been established within the organization over the years. And, of course, it is difficult to get much accomplished under these circumstances.

This, no doubt, sounds familiar. While the way out of this quagmire is not easy, there are strategies that can help local governments gain back some of the control needed to build a strong, productive organization. Here are a few suggestions.

- Trim the staff to get rid of "ghost employees" and others who have been equally unproductive. Reallocate the savings to those staff members who are dedicated and productive. You may say that this alternative is politically unacceptable, to which we would respond, "Does this make it politically acceptable to run an inefficient local government that is unresponsive to the rest of your constituents?"

- Find alternative ways to provide certain services. Consider using NG0s and community management strategies to "enable" your constituents to provide some of their own services. Contract with private-sector firms to perform certain services that they can do more inexpensively than the local government can with its own employees. The service that always seems to come to mind is refuse collection, but there are many more.

- Develop alternative work schedules with employees who cannot afford to work full time for the municipality even though they are "fun-time" employees. For example, the council might cut the length of the workday but require everyone to be on the job at the same time. This will allow for proper supervision and ensure citizens that someone is available to assist them at predictable times of the day. This suggestion is often met with "WE CAN'T DO THAT!" Why not?

- Find other ways to motivate employees. If a work team in one of the departments demonstrates that they can save the local authority money and improve the quality of the services they are delivering, you might want to provide a cash bonus to them for their efforts. Training is another motivator, particularly if the employee is given the opportunity to use the training on the job, and the training is associated with a career path that could mean promotion at some future date.

Fixing some of the long-standing problems that have kept your local government among the least productive organizations in the community will not be easy. And doing more of what you have been doing that hasn't worked is probably not the answer. We believe the greatest resource for building the competency and capacity of the local-government organization is creative thinking on the part of council and staff - finding new ways to implement programmes and services with the resources you have available.

Sometimes the only way to solve a long-standing problem is to redefine it, looking at it differently by stepping outside the self-imposed boundaries of our past experience; then to stand the problem on its head; and, finally, to do the unthinkable (which may be thinking things you have never thought before).

Reflection

Is your local government caught in some seemingly unsolvable dilemma like the one described above? If so, spend a few minutes brainstorming ways your council might solve the problem differently. Since this exercise doesn't commit you to anything, don't hesitate to think of "wild, crazy" ideas. Many times, such thinking produces brilliant answers.

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Assessing the organization

Any systematic institution-building effort will benefit greatly by assessing the organization's products, customers, and customer satisfaction with these products. assessment we have in mind looks at all the organizations products, including those "consumed" by the organization (e.g., stores, personnel, accounting). The assessments also identifies who is doing what and whether someone else could, or should, be d a better job in performing each particular task or service. A comprehensive organizational assessment of this kind, if conducted in earnest, can provide a wealth of ideas about ways to strengthen the organization and to rethink what your local government should be doing to service its constituents.

This assessment need not be expensive, although it will take staff time and commitment from the council and staff It is a process that can be facilitated by consultants from your local-government training institute using a methodology developed by UNCHS (Habitat). A copy of the assessment manual can be obtained by writing to the Training Unit, UNCHS (Habitat), P.O. Box 30030, Nairobi, Kenya). [1]

The implementation gap

An organizational assessment should provide the council with information the implementation gaps that exist between their policies and what actually happens when the staff gets hold of them. There are often implementation gaps, and the reasons for these gaps are varied. Contrary to popular belief, it's not always the fault the staff. Here are some of the questions you and the other councillors should be asking if gaps begin to develop. Better yet, ask these questions before you get to the implementation stage while you are still drafting policy.

- Did the staff have an opportunity to comment on the proposed policy before it was adopted and to voice any concerns they might have about implementing it?

- Does the staff understand what you want done?

- Do they have a commitment to implementing the policy? If not, why not?

- Did the council provide the necessary resources to implement the policy?

- Is the policy realistic and implementable within the time-frame provided?

- Will your constituents accept and support the policy and its consequences?

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While we have been talking about ways to strengthen the local-government organization, these questions apply equally well to the problems of relations between the council and the staff Fortunately, finding answers to many of the questions posed above will cost the organization very little and could pay big dividends. Among these dividends are:

- giving the staff an opportunity to be consulted during the decision-making process;

- giving the staff a better understanding of what the council wants done;

- building staff commitment into the implementation process;

- developing a level of trust and respect between the council and staff that allows for disagreement and honest discussion; and

- testing the acceptance of constituents to ensure there will be compliance with the policy's intent.

> *If you sow grass, you won't reap rice.*
>
> - Malaysian proverb

Transparency and accountability

We have mentioned the issues of transparency and accountability in earlier handbooks and want to mention them again. They are qualities of governance that are growing in importance almost daily. Some councillors resist the notion that these factors have anything to do with governance once they have been elected to public office. But many councillors have come to realize that these personal qualities can be mobilized to help councils get their programmes initiated and implemented more effectively and efficiently. In other words, transparency and accountability are political and managerial strategies to get things done. The questions we have stated above to keep the implementation gap under control can also be used as a base from which to build a more transparent and accountable local government.

Something called TQM

Private and public institutions worldwide have become more concerned about how they can improve the management of their resources. For many private corporations and companies, the incentive is increased pressure from their competitors. In the public sector, the pressure is not from competing public agencies but rather from shrinking resource bases and growing constituent demands for better programmes and services. To compete in this difficult world, managers in both lie public and private sectors have embraced an operating strategy called total quality management, or TQM.

There are some aspects of TQM that can help councils and staff build more competent organizations, strategies that can help you meet the needs of your constituents. These include:

- treating your constituents as customers or consumers who have choices;

- being more attentive to the quality of the products and services you are providing to the public;

- preventing problems rather than having to fix them later at a greater cost to the organization and citizens

- sharing decision-making and problem-solving responsibilities throughout the organization;

- putting more emphasis on teamwork, with teams involving more than just those who belong to the specific work unit concerned with the problem at hand; and

- a commitment to continuous improvement the way the local government operates and the manner in which its citizens are served.

These strategies may be conventional wisdom to many councillors and senior officers. But the fact is, they have not found their way into the everyday operation of most local governments. Let's look at them from the perspective of your role as institution builder.

1. **Mission driven**. Institution-building, as an operating strategy, is difficult to accomplish if the local government doesn't have a clearly defined mission and sense of future direction. Whether you call it a strategic plan or something else doesn't matter. What does matter is the articulation of a set of goals and objectives for the community that are: (a) agreed upon by members of council and the local-government management team; (b) supported by a broad spectrum of public opinion; and (c) provide a clear road map for current and' future decision making. These goals and objectives will be stronger if they are constituent oriented and define a strategy for, and commitment to, improving the quality of public programmes and services (the customer-driven quality orientation mentioned earlier).

2. **Pro-active problem-solving.** Most local governments are forced to "Play catch-up," focusing much of their energy and resources on long-standing problems, sometimes created by previous councils. Turning this reactive management style around will not be easy. But the probability is increased if your council has a strategic plan to: (a) guide the allocation and use of scarce resources; (b) conduct feasibility studies on new projects to ensure their viability; and (c) budget adequate funds for operation and maintenance of current investments.

3. **Delegated decision making.** One major resource that remains locked up in many organizations is the delegation of authority and responsibility to appropriate levels of decision making and problem-solving. There is nothing more depressing than visiting a town clerk's office and seeing his or her desk and filing cabinets piled high with files. You've all seen them. They contain dozens of pieces of paper, have slowly but surely nudged their way up the bureaucratic chain of command (evident by the long list of signatures appearing under the cover), are bound together by that tell-tale piece of "red tape," and are awaiting the chief administrator's attention. Somewhere down in the organization are capable department heads and professionals who are stopped in their tracks because they don't have the authority to act.

This archaic administrative process, which perpetuates the colonial need to control all decisions from the top, creates an enormous case of organizational constipation. In addition to creating a costly and inefficient barrier to day-to-day operations, total control from the top undercuts staff motivation and commitment. We can't think of a more important practice than this to target for early retirement under a council-driven institution-building effort.

> *A big gourd with a hole in the bottom can't be filled.*
>
> - African proverb

Reflection

Stop for a minute and visualize the offices of your chief administrative officer. Are there stacks of files on his or her desk, tables, and filing cabinets that look like they have been there for some time? If so, you might also want to consider the consequences of these "stalled" files. Jot down a few notes on how you might address this issue with the chief administrative officer in a way that would produce continuing results.

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4. **Promoting teamwork**. Tied closely to the delegation of decision-making and problem-solving to the most logical level of operation is the development of work teams - teams dedicated to the notion that most problems can be solved if teams of competent and experienced people are given the freedom authority and responsibility) and necessary resources to act. Much of the success of the Total Quality Management (TQM) approach, mentioned earlier, has been attributed to the use of self-managed work teams with the authority and resources to act when they encounter problems that need to be solved.

5. **Training, training, training**. Institution-building means training, although there are many things that can be done to strengthen organizations that don't require training. Staff development is often equated with sending full-time employees off for long-term training at some national training institute. Unfortunately, this kind of training is very expensive. Fortunately, some of the most effective and least costly training can take place right on the job. In-service, on-the-job employee development requires supervisors who are trained in such skills as coaching and teamwork and have a commitment to helping others learn. Consequently, the key to successful on-the-job training is in the careful selection, development, and continuing support of a cadre of first line supervisors who have the authority to make decisions commensurate with the tasks assigned.

6. **Structural barriers to organizational performance**. Have you ever wondered why the local-government organization is organized like it is? Probably not. Most of us simply accept organizational structures as though they are sacred. And yet, most local governments were established and organized decades ago when the challenges of governing were quantitatively and qualitatively different. Effective institution-building requires a fresh look at the institution from time to time to determine if the way it is structured and organized is serving the current needs of council, the staff, and the constituents. If not, change it!

Institution-building incentives

The Ministry of Policy Planning and Implementation, the Government of Sri Lanka, in collaboration with the Provincial Ministries of Local Government, conducts a yearly local-government performance-improvement competition designed to encourage visible performance by local governments in that country. We want to describe a few of the criteria the Ministry has established for this competition which they believe are important areas for local government attention. They also describe some of the factors to be considered in any institution-building programme a council might undertake.

Here are a few of the activities and criteria the Ministry uses for assessing performance in their local-government competition programme:

* preparation of a Performance Improvement Programme in accordance with Ministry guidelines;

* institutionalization of management-team meetings with a minimum of 12 meetings during the year;

* a public-relations programme including a public day to meet with rate payers and the issuance of an informative annual report;

* an efficient office system, including installation of a proper filing system and signs in public buildings to help citizens transact business;

* routine maintenance of public buildings and quarterly reports on the condition of these facilities;

* preventive health services, including survey and registry of mosquito breeding areas;

* the installation of financial management systems, including standards to be met on various revenue and expenditure categories; and

* many more criteria and standards that can be used to measure specific levels local-government performance in Sri Lanka.

Local governments in Sri Lanka compete with each other in their population category for prizes and recognition of their performance. It is an excellent way to motivate a council and staff to improve their performance. It also educates officials and officers about higher standards of performance that are possible for them to achieve in the operation of their local governments. This is the kind of activity that larger local governments can manage within their own organization to create competition among various departments and to encourage operational improvements.

Conclusion

When you ran for council, you probably didn't give much thought to your role as an organizational specialist. And yet, your success as an elected leader will depend, in large measure, on the quality and performance of the local-government organization and staff Given this, the role of institution-builder should not be taken lightly. The effort you and your colleagues on the council put into capacity-building will pay dividends for you as policy-makers and to your constituents who look to the local government for quality programmes and services.

Key points

- Institution-building is more than improving council/staff relations, although this is a good place to begin.

- Role clarification is an important element in good council/staff relationships and the boundaries between these roles may need to be negotiated from time to time to keep relations positive and productive.

- While councillors should not get involved in staff appraisals (it's a supervisory function), you have a responsibility to ensure that an effective performance-appraisal system is in place and operating as planned.

- There is one exception. The council should evaluate the performance of the chief executive officer and perhaps the clerk of council.

- Appraising the performance of the organization is definitely a council responsibility and should be conducted as a collaborative effort with the senior staff.

- Conducting an organizational assessment of products and customers, using the UNCHS(Habitat) model, will form a firm foundation for organizational development planning.

- Implementation gaps are not always the fault of the staff.

- Transparency and accountability are important building blocks for establishing organizational competency.

- Effective local governments are mission-driven with clearly defined goals and objectives providing the road map to the future.

- Institution-building requires the delegation of decision-making and problem-solving to the lowest logical level of performance in the organization.

- Teamwork is crucial to institution-building and improved organizational performance.

- Competent first-line supervisors and on-the-job training are key elements in sustainable performance.

- When it comes to reorganizing the local-government system, remember that form should follow function, not tradition.

References

[1] United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), Manual for Collaborative Organizational Assessment in Human Settlements Organizations (Nairobi, Kenya, UNCHS, 1992.)

PART II

WORKSHOP

The Councillor as Institution-builder

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Workshop

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Purpose

Institution-building might be defined as any effort made to improve the performance of an organization. As institution-builder, the councillor commits to actions that can leave the institution he or she serves a better place than it was before. The challenge for the elected official while serving a local authority is to understand what needs to be done to improve organizational performance and to work within the system to bring about the necessary changes.

This workshop concentrates on the role of the councillor in making changes for the better in organizational performance with emphasis on how to act responsibly to change conditions that weaken the organization and how to improve council/staff relations through performance evaluation and role negotiation.

Contents

A brief description of each learning activity is shown below with an approximation of the amount of time required. If you wish to change the order, to omit something, or to add training material of your own, feel free to do so.

11.1 **Warm-up exercise: What's the problem?**

Participants recall what irritates them about the performance of their own organizations and discuss underlying causes and remedies. (45 minutes)

11.2 **Trainer presentation**

Brief presentation on how to use role negotiation to resolve difficult council/staff conflicts and misunderstandings; methods for improving council/staff performance, including ways to evaluate the chief executive officer; and how to use TQM to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of overall programme implementation in local authorities. (30 minutes)

11.3 **Critical incidents in organizational performance**

Participants read five incidents that show organizational weaknesses and decide on the proper roles for councillors in doing something about them.(60 minutes)

11.4 **Case study: Changing Croptown's personnel system**

Participants read a case about a councillor who attempts to force a change on a local-government department and discuss the councillor's behaviour. (60 - 75 minutes)

11.5 **Exercise: Council/staff role negotiation**

Participants, playing staff and councillor roles, share their irritations about one another, share their expectations for change, and negotiate role changes. (120 - 150 minutes)

11.6 **Guided discussion: Evaluating the staff**

Participants discuss and respond to questions about the performance of their own management staffs. (75 minutes)

11.7 **Skill transfer exercise**

Participants reflect on what they have learned and make personal commitments to put it to use after the workshop. (30 - 45 minutes)

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11.1 *Warm-up exercise*: WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Time required: 45 minutes

Objective

This exercise is to create a dialogue among participants about organizational irritations and the need to focus on the causes of these irritations.

Process

Divide participants into small groups of five to seven participants each. Ask each participant to describe on the top-half of a 3 x 5 inch card something specific that is irritating about the way their own local authority operates. The statement might describe something that the local authority does that it should not be doing or something that the local authority does not do that it should be doing. When participants have completed the task, ask them to use the bottom half of the card to write an answer to the following question:

> *If you could do one thing to deal with this irritation, what would that be?*

After participants have written their answers on the cards, ask them to tape or pin their cards around the walls of the room and to spend a few minutes walking around and reading what is written on other participants' cards and, after reading them, to return to their seats.

When participants are seated again, point out that many of the irritations identified by participants are really symptoms of deeper, more fundamental organizational problems. Ask participants to think about what lies behind their own organizational irritations; to identify what is causing them. Ask them why they believe it is important to search for and seek ways to remove the causes of organizational problems rather than treat just the symptoms.

11.2 TRAINER PRESENTATION

Time required: 30 minutes

Objective

This presentation is to provide participants ideas and perspectives on the institution-builder role and a conceptual foundation they can use for the individual and group exercises included in this workshop.

Process

Prepare the presentation based on information from the preceding essay on the institution-builder role. Most especially, focus your remarks on how to use role negotiation to resolve difficult council/staff conflicts and misunderstandings; methods for improving council/staff performance, including ways to evaluate the chief executive officer; and how to use TQM to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of overall programme implementation in local authorities.

Outlined information on note cards may help you cover the information systematically and stay on schedule. Ask questions from time to time during the presentation as a check on participant comprehension and to hold their attention. Augment the presentation with visual aids including pre-printed newsprint sheets and overhead transparencies as a further aid to comprehension.

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11.3 CRITICAL INCIDENTS IN ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

Time required: 60 minutes

Objective

This exercise is to stimulate participants to recognize the proper role of councillors in bringing action to overcome weaknesses in organizational performance.

Process

Distribute copies of a handout on the next page containing five common organizational weaknesses (critical incidents) that might be observed by or reported to a councillor. Ask participants to read the five incidents.

When participants have read the -incidents, divide them into several small groups. Ask each group to answer the following question:

> *What is the proper role for councillors in improving the organization's performance?*

Give the small groups about 30 minutes to discuss the incidents and to answer the question about each of them. After 30 minutes, bring the small groups back together and ask for reports from each of them. Discussion.

FIVE CRITICAL INCIDENTS IN ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

Incident No. 1

In a recent visit to the chief administrator's office, you notice that the desk and a nearby work table are piled high with files. The situation has changed very little since your last visit to the administrator's office a few months ago. Apparently, little is being done to reduce the work load.

Incident No. 2

You have received a complaint from a neighbourhood resident. During her attempt to get a pit latrine cleaned by the city health department, she was told that it would take three weeks to get the work done because of the number of approvals required by various administrative offices.

Incident No. 3

A new councillor with an occupational background in accounting reports that there is no delegation in the treasurer's office. As a newly-elected councillor, she asks what can be done about this poor work distribution situation.

Incident No. 4

Several visitors to city hall have commented to you on separate occasions that they could find no one in their offices early in the morning or late in the workday.

Incident No. 5

A vendor has come before the council complaining that, despite persistent efforts to collect, the city has not yet paid for asphalt paving materials purchased many months earlier.

11.4 *Case Study*: CHANGING CROPTOWN'S PERSONNEL SYSTEM

Time required: 60-75 minutes

Objective

This case study is to illustrate what can happen when a newly-elected councillor uses his or her position and professional experience to force changes on the reluctant staff of a local government.

Process

Provide each participant with a copy of a case called *Changing Croptown's Personnel System*. Ask participants to read the case. When participants have read the case, divide them into four or five small groups. Ask each group to answer the three questions that follow the case and report back with its answers in about 20 minutes.

When small groups have reported back, ask each group how it did or would answer each of the three questions. Encourage a general discussion and a comparison of points of view.

CHANGING CROPTOWN'S PERSONNEL SYSTEM

Croptown is a major marketing and distribution centre of 50,000 population serving one of the country's predominantly agricultural regions. Until recently, local governments like the Croptown Town Council have functioned as agents of the national government with little independent authority of their own. Traditionally, policies have been made centrally and carried out locally. After years of irresponsible and corrupt governance and economic hardship for rural and small town residents, an enormous backlash of public sentiment against the central government has placed a new reform government in the capital. In less than six months, many so-called "self-determination" laws have been enacted by the new congress to convey sweeping powers of local self-government throughout the country. A new day is dawning for Croptown. But the transition is far from smooth and trouble-free as this case will illustrate.

Peter Malla was recently elected to a two-year term on the Croptown Town Council. A businessman and corporate vice president for personnel at a local agricultural implements firm, Malla is holding office as an elected official for the first time. Councillor Malla was elected from a district with many small businesses. He was viewed by his backers as a reform candidate, and his pledge was to bring efficiency and economy to local government in Croptown.

In his private business dealings, Councillor Malla is an aggressive manager, driven to get things done quickly and efficiently. He is respected rather than liked by his employees and co-workers. His election to the Croptown Council was more a result of his competency as a businessman than his skill in working with people. Since being elected, Councillor Malla, more than once, has been heard to say, "I've never pretended to be a politician; I leave that political stuff to the Mayor."

Councillor Malla has found his first couple of months on the council to be quite enlightening. Owing to his business background, Malla singled out Croptown's local-government personnel system for close scrutiny. He was most interested in the wage and salary system, an area he felt his knowledge and experience especially prepared him to evaluate. In short order he found many inequities in pay. The problem, he decided, was that the system, which had been in operation for many years, had not been revised to meet the needs of a government that was assuming many new services and responsibilities.

Because of the complexity of the problem, Malla felt that an outside evaluation of the personnel system should be conducted by a management firm. Therefore, he engaged a qualified staff member from the Institute of Public Administration in a nearby university to undertake the study. After a two-month study consisting of extensive job audits, the staff member proposed a total rearrangement of positions and pay based on job-related performance characteristics. Councillor Malla sent copies of the Institute's report to the City Council recommending its adoption. After a brief discussion of the report at a regular meeting, the council approved it by a vote of four to one.

The next day Councillor Malla sent copies of the report to the Town Clerk with a memo ordering him to distribute them to the personnel manager and all department heads with instructions to implement the new system as soon as possible. He stated that the new system would bring about needed changes in reporting arrangements, pay scales, and programme accountability.

Government employees were aware that the study was being conducted, but they had no idea of its extent until now. They reacted with resentment and fear. Those who held positions that were to be changed in responsibility or pay were upset. They had become accustomed to things as they had been done and dreaded the uncertainty of new conditions. Some complained that the new pay arrangements did not take into account seniority and many years of loyal service and would produce new inequities.

At a meeting with the Town Clerk a few days later, Councillor Malla was told implementation of the new system was running into trouble. Some of the more outspoken department heads were going so far as to say that the new system would cause more problems than it would solve. Malla was shocked. He could not understand why a system worked out so carefully to introduce efficiency and economy into the local government's operations and correct inequities in work assignments and pay could meet with such resistance.

Questions

1.   Discuss the appropriateness of Councillor Malla's efforts to improve the personnel system.

2.   What assumptions guided Councillor Malla in his efforts to improve the system.

3.   What assumptions about the council/staff role in making organizational improvements might account for staff resistance to the councillor's efforts?

4.   What could Councillor Malla have done differently to achieve the needed improvements?

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11.5 *Exercise*: COUNCIL/STAFF ROLE NEGOTIATION

Time required: 120 - 150 minutes

Objective

This exercise gives participants experience using an effective negotiation strategy for resolving conflicts or ambiguities in relations between councillors and staff members.

Process

Start the exercise by reminding participants that people in organizations with different roles to play often find themselves in conflict. Although inevitable in organizational life, conflict does not have to be destructive. Many strategies are available to help groups that depend on each other to resolve their differences so that their energy can be channeled away from self-defeating activity and into productive organizational work.

Continue by describing role negotiation as a six-step process for resolving role conflicts. These steps are shown on the next page and can be reproduced as a participant handout. Explain that participants will be divided into two groups, on group to play the role of councillors and the other to play the role of local-authority staff. The two groups can be created by having participants "count off," (1, 2, 3, 4, 5 ...) and asking them to remember their numbers. Participants with "even" numbers are told that they will be councillors for purposes of the exercise while participants with "odd" numbers are staff.

After participants know which group they are in and have read the handout, give them a few minutes to ask questions about the process and the role they will be playing. When participants are ready, give each group a newsprint pad some felt-tip markers, and a quiet place to work separated from one another. Suggest that each group appoint one of its members as a reporter/recorder and another as a timekeeper.

Initiate the negotiation process. Divide your time between the two groups while they are working separately. Use this time to answer questions about the process and keep participants working at a brisk pace on assigned tasks.

When participants have completed the six-step role negotiation process, lead them in a critique of the exercise using the following questions as a discussion guide:

1. Does your organization have a systematic procedure for negotiating role conflicts between council and staff? (Ask participants who say they do to describe the process they use and when).

2. What can you identify as the strongest and weakest aspects of this procedure as a councillor/staff role negotiation strategy?

3. What could be done to implement a role negotiation procedure like this one in your organization?

ROLE NEGOTIATION: A SIX-STEP PROCESS

Step No. 1

Make a list of things on a sheet or two of newsprint that irritate you about the other group. For example, it you are a group of councillors, include on your list of what irritates you about staff such things as:

* they are never in their offices when we call or come by for information;

* they rarely report to us on the progress of important projects;

* it always takes them longer to get things done than it should.

On the other hand, if you are a group of staff, you might include on your list of what irritates you about councillors such things as:

* they make decisions without asking us for information or advice;

* they violate the "chain of command" by assigning tasks to lower level employees without consulting first with the employee's supervisor;

* they assign us new work projects without realizing how much we already have to do.

Step No. 2

After about 30 minutes, meet again with the other group. Have your group's spokesperson tape the group's newsprint sheets on the wall and present the group's list of irritations about the other group, beginning each item on the list with the words, "what irritates us about council/ staff is Your report should take no longer than five minutes. There should be no discussion during the report. When you have completed your report, listen to the spokesperson from the other group present its report.

Step No. 3

When your group and the other group have reported, return to your meeting area to prepare a list of requests which you want to make of the other group. Each request should relate to one of the irritating behaviours from your own list. For example, if your group is playing the part of councillors, you might request of the group playing the part of staff to make regular progress reports on all projects assigned to staff by the council. This request would be related to the concern that staff rarely report to the council on the status of important projects. If your group is playing the part of staff, you might request of the group playing the part of councillors that councillors who want tasks performed by employees should first clear what they want done through the supervisor concerned. This request would be related to the staff concern that councillors have a tendency to violate the chain of command. As before, the request lists are prepared on newsprint. The preparation of requests should take about 30 minutes.

Step No. 4

In about 30 minutes, meet again with the other group. If you are the councillor group, tape your newsprint sheets on the wall and present your list of requests. If you are the staff group, listen to the other group present its list of requests. Then, reverse the procedure. Have one member of your group write down the exact wording of each request being made of your group. This step should take about 10 minutes.

Step No. 5

When both groups have reported (should take about ten minutes) return to your meeting area to respond to each of the requests made of your group by the other group. Take about 30 minutes to respond to each of the requests made by the other group. Begin each of your responses in one of the following ways:

1. We can do that (what is being requested) easily by ... (continue by explaining what you are prepared to do to meet the request).

2. We would be willing to do that (what is being requested) if you would, in turn, be willing to ... (continue by describing what you want in return from the other group).

3. We can't do that (what is being requested) because ... (explain why doing what the other group wants you to do can't or shouldn't be done).

Step No. 6

When your list of responses to the requests made of your group by the other group is complete, rejoin the other group once again. Present your group's list of responses using newsprint sheets taped to the wall and be prepared to discuss your reasoning for each response. The other will do the same thing.

11.6 *Guided Discussion*: EVALUATING THE STAFF

Time required: 75 minutes

Objective

This exercise is to promote the sharing of experiences by participants in evaluating the performance of their own management staffs.

Process

Invite participants to take an active part in a discussion about different ways to evaluate the performance of a local government's management staff.

Select several members of the group to serve as discussion leaders. Give each selected leader one of the following questions as his or her topic for discussion.

1. Which members of your local-government staff does the council evaluate? Are there others that should be evaluated by the council? Who are they?

2. How often are these evaluations carried out? How often should they be? Should the interval be different for some staff than others? Should the behaviour of the staff, good or bad, influence the frequency of evaluations.

3. What criteria does the council use to rate the performance of the staff to be evaluated? If you were to prepare standard criteria for measuring staff performance, what might they include? (Write these on newsprint).

4. How satisfied are you with the results of the evaluations in which you have participated as a councillor? What aspects were above average? What accounts for the successes? What aspects were below average? What accounts for the disappointing results? What should be done differently next time?

Ask discussion leaders to come forward in the order the questions are presented above. Suggest that they ask all of the questions provided to them. Suggest further that they ask any supplemental (probe) questions they feel would be desirable to enlarge on a point or encourage other opinions. The use of when? where? what? how? why? and who? to introduce probe questions is a good way to keep things moving.

Before getting started, remind discussion leaders to budget their time (about 15 minutes per topic). Serve as timekeeper for the four discussions.

> *I once had six serving men,*
> *they taught me all I knew;*
> *their names were where and*
> *when and why, what and how*
> *and who.*
>
> - Rudyard Kipling

11.7 SKILL TRANSFER EXERCISE

Time required: 30 - 45 minutes

Objective

This exercise is to help participants transfer the learning experiences of the workshop into their real-world activities as elected officials. The focus of the exercise is on raising expectations engaging in realistic planning, and making personal commitments. Most of the work is done on a personal basis with some interpersonal sharing.

> *Between knowing and doing there is a wide chasm.*

It is generally agreed that the purpose of training is to improve the way people do things by showing them a better way. In fact, the success of a training experience can be measured by the amount of personal growth and change that takes place both during training and after the training is over.

Training rarely has the impact on workshop participants that trainers hope it will have, particularly after an exposure of only a few hours. The exhilaration of the moment fades quickly when the trainee is confronted with old work habits and the resistance of work associates who have not shared the training experience.

On the other hand, commitments to learning and change made at the close of a workshop can help participants overcome learning resistance in themselves and in the work environment. A trainer can help learners make a successful transition from the world of learning to the world of doing through a few simple planning exercises. The time taken to encourage learning transfer could be the difference between a brief exposure to some interesting ideas and a life-changing experience.

Process

Spend at least half an hour at the end of the workshop to focus the attention of participants on important learnings and encourage them to continue experimenting with these learnings in their council activities. Be in by giving participants about 15 minutes to work independently on a simple learning transfer questionnaire.

When participants have completed the questionnaire, ask them to share quickly with the group two or three things they intend to do differently in their council roles as institution builders to close the workshop.

A LEARNING TRANSFER QUESTIONNAIRE

Take a few minutes to reflect on the role of the institution builder, the new ideas you encountered in this workshop, and how you feel about them. Then, in the space below, write a sentence or two to describe something interesting you have learned about yourself during this workshop.

_____

_____

_____

Based on what you have learned about yourself and the many possibilities for change presented by this workshop, what two or three things do you intend to do differently in your council role as institution builder?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Finally, what obstacles in yourself or in your work environment do you expect to experience during your efforts to implement these changes? What will you do to remove or minimize these obstacles?

Obstacle	Action to remove the obstacle
1. _____	1. _____
2. _____	2. _____
3. _____	3. _____

If you can learn it, you can do it.