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## Organizational learning - aiming the unreachable

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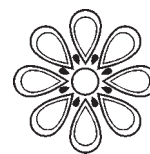
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## Organizational learning — aiming the unreached

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JUDICIOUSLY PLANNED AND implemented water supply and sanitation (WATSAN) programmes have all the possibilities and potentialities to facilitate the integrated development of the most vulnerable section of the society, which is the central concern of our developmental process. But it is continued as a cause of critical concern that in spite of government intensified efforts and extensive investment particularly during the last two decades in the WATSAN sector, no significant impact has been visible in the target section. The need for evolving the appropriate approach for achieving the challenging task of enhancing the quality of life of unserved and underserved have strongly being felt.

Various approaches (viz., adoption of cost-effective technology, involving NGOs, evolving community participation, etc) have been advocated. Whatever may be the viable approach or the combination of approaches for reaching the unreached, it must be appreciated that for achieving the desired objective, government organisation must have to play a more purposeful role, re-orienting its efforts as facilitator.

To be an effective facilitator the organisation has to enhance its social skill and service culture. Organisational culture is the perceived aspect of the organisation's internal environment. Organisational culture to be influenced through three elements, viz., norms, values and tradition which can help the organisation in internalising the service to the downtrodden, as attitude and practices, acquiring:

- Positive attitude towards the community to be served, with sense of caring, warmth, liking and respect towards the deprived section.
- Clear understanding about the needs and aspiration of the targeted group.
- Credibility, as to be perceived by the community as trustworthy, dependable and consistent.
- Capability to communicate unambiguously with sensitivity and purpose.
- Spirit of achieving excellence through service, dedication and commitment.
- Attitude for problem-solving by working as a team without blaming or scape-goating.

For evolving a sound approach for sustainability, growth and effectiveness of WATSAN sector, Assam Public Health Engineering Department (APHED) have been implementing the following 'demonstration cum

pilot' project with UNICEF support in the rural areas of Assam:

- Strengthening information, education and communication (IEC) back-up to the sector and boosting sanitation activity as a package creating 'communication and sanitation' cell since 1991.
- Intensive village level operation and maintenance (VLOM) concept with women caretakers in handpump maintenance.
- Intensive sanitation project in the Kamrup District;
- Control of diarrhoea through water supply and sanitation intervention.
- Promotion of self-help sanitation programme through sanitation mart established by a NGO with UNICEF programme, etc.

These pilot projects have provided the privilege of experiencing the following:

- *Positive impact of IEC:* when the opportunity is created for participation, the requisite information is provided at the disposal of the masses, technology is suitable and skill can be transferred at the grass root, the community acquire the initiative, skill and confidence of involving in their own problem solving with a sense of joy and pride which can assure their growth.
- Implementation of water supply and sanitation programmes by a single agency as a package provides more purposeful directions to the sector.
- APHED have already acquired experience, specialisation in the WATSAN sector and have an excellent network of infrastructure and large number of trained personnel. Through rigid rules and regulations and hierarchical authority of bureaucracy, provide predictability and stability to cope with uncertainty and complexity, but it has got unintended dysfunctional aspect also. There is a lot of waste of effort and time for following bureaucratic procedures and many cases the principal objective of providing service to needy got displaced. In this context availing [!!!!!!] the support of viable NGOs which have the flexibility of functioning and motivation to work with missionary zeal among the downtrodden found to be very effective. APHED have been helping the NGO in developing their conceptual framework, providing support and guidance for better management and perform-

ance. While doing so care has to be taken that the NGOs are not subjected to the pressure of dysfunctional rules and regulations of bureaucracy which may dampen the spirit of enthusiasm and creativity of the NGO.

- In the APHED out of a total of 14,600 employees about 11,400 are of grass root level. Through them only the organisation has a linkage with beneficiary. They are actually performing the basic work directly. The quality of service rendered by the organisation depends mostly on their effectiveness. Furthermore most of our grass root level workers hail from the weaker section of society therefore have the strong sense of belonging with the community to be served. Developing the grassroots level workers by HRD programmes and empowering them is a must for effective functioning. When more people feel powerful and acquire competency, more is achieved.

Focus, direction, content and mechanism of HRD for the grass root level have to be specific according to job requirements, existing level of knowledge and competence, etc. Suggested HRD may have the following component:

- *Training* should focus along with job skills, interpersonal skills, collaborative skills, team building skills.
- *Counselling*: aim for timely guidance to worker so that they can learn even from their own mistakes.

- *Quality circle*: it is a bottom-up functional approach where grass root level workers participate actively as a group for evolving solutions and send up the same for consideration.
- *Job enrichment*: providing improvement in the content of the job for inducing more challenges, opportunities for performing complete tasks, and more responsibility with a scope of contributions.

Relatively permanent change in behaviour resulting from experience is known as learning. For effective change there is a need of:

- Systematic integrated and planned effort focusing on human behaviour and organisational dynamics.
- Top management support and commitment.
- Adequate planning and preparation period.

The organisation that had a value orientation of developing strong ethical codes, consistent managerial philosophies, mechanism for learning from experience and system of review can provide better service.

Let our mission be service to the unreached. Let us develop our skill and attitude to work meaningfully with the community as accountable partners enlarging our role boundaries beyond the narrow confines of departmentally defined duties and responsibilities. The human element, spirit, ethos and values should be our source of guidance and motivation.