

Barrio Immersion: A Career Executive Service Development Program Training Tool

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Barrio Immersion, in the context of the Career Executive Service Development Program, highlights the government's concern of providing government executives the opportunities to plan and implement rural development programs. As a training tool and learning activity, it tests and validates development and management theories in actual developmental situations. Its concerns, therefore, are not only the participants but also the communities serving as learning laboratories. While it is an effective tool in developing managerial skills and orientations, its success as a strategy to effect development in the target communities may be measured against the support it can generate from its "back home" environment and from the clientele in general. More importantly, the participants could take the lead in dispelling the people's doubts about the government's concern for their welfare and develop the people's trust and confidence in the government's intentions.

Introduction

The government has the greatest responsibility for promoting the welfare of every citizen of the country. The ability of government to carry out such a responsibility in the most efficient and effective manner, however, depends on its leadership. The numerous and complex development problems and concerns, coupled with scarce and limited resources, highlight the need for competent government administrators who can provide synchronized leadership and direction to national development efforts and who can manage the development process in conditions of scarcity.

The Career Executive Service

It is for the above reason that the Integrated Reorganization Plan (Presidential Decree No. 1) created a Career Executive Service (CES) which forms a "continuing pool of well-selected and development-oriented career administrators who shall provide competent and faithful service" (Section I, Art. IV, Part III). The CES, governed by the Career Executive Service Board (CESB), constitutes the third and highest level in the civil service, and it is from this pool of career administrators that candidates to the following CES classified positions are drawn: Deputy Minister, Assistant Secretary, Bureau Director, Assistant Bureau Director, Regional Director, Assistant Regional Director, Chief of Ministry Service, and positions of equivalent rank. Holders of these positions, therefore,

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compose the leadership in the Philippine government who:

- (1) formulate policies that provide the general direction of development efforts and determine development priorities;
- (2) translate these policies into developmental programs and services;
- (3) administer and supervise the delivery of services; and
- (4) shape administrative structures and systems.

Entry into the CES requires the satisfactory completion of the Career Executive Service Development Program, a management education program, the design and implementation of which was commissioned by the CES to the Development Academy of the Philippines.

The Career Executive Service Development Program

The Career Executive Service Development Program (CESDP) is designed to adequately prepare selected government managers to assume positions in the CES and perform the myriad functions related to the country's development tasks. It responds to the need for competent government leaders who must share a common vision of and a commitment to national development. Given the responsibilities and corresponding powers and authorities of CES positions, CESDP is concerned not only with the efficiency but also with the effectiveness of government managers.

At present, CESDP consists of two phases: Phase I, for incumbents of CES positions, is a seventeen-week residential program with a six-month

on the job performance monitoring component. Phase II, for well-selected and rigidly screened middle-level managers who will eventually assume CES positions, is a nine-month residential program which is more comprehensive and more detailed in treatment than Phase I. Phase II emphasized the acquisition of skills which can be tested and demonstrated even during the program.

Barrio Immersion: Education/Training Tool of CESDP

The barangay-based experience in CESDP, commonly referred to as "Barrio Immersion," is a component of the Planned Change Module which focuses on the dynamics and processes of planning and managing change efforts. It highlights the necessity for shifting the government's concern from merely delivering goods and services to providing opportunities for people to gradually assume an active role in the planning and implementation of development programs.

The use of Barrio Immersion as a training tool and as a learning activity in the CESDP was first tested in early 1978 when the first session of CESDP Phase II was launched. It has since then become also a part of CESDP Phase I, although in an abbreviated fashion.

Barrio Immersion requires the participants, in teams, to live, interact, and work with the barrio people for a period of time (9 weeks for Phase II, 4 weeks for Phase I).

To structure the learning experience, the program faculty meets weekly with the participants in the barrio to process

their learnings and insights, using as guidelines previously agreed upon objectives with corresponding milestone outputs.

Barrio Immersion in its initial form had objectives at two levels:

Learning Objectives

- (1) to gain better understanding and appreciation of life in the countryside and of the disadvantaged, around which national development effort must revolve; and
- (2) to appreciate the intricacies and complexities of community and change processes.

Assistance Objectives

- (1) to assist the community develop beginning participatory and problem-solving skills; and
- (2) to assist the community in identifying partnership opportunities with government in the task of community building.

However, for reasons which will be discussed later in this paper, learning objectives may well become a sole emphasis of the exercise for CESDP Phase I.

The use of this methodology is consistent with the CESDP training strategy which provides opportunities for the immediate application, testing, and validation of development and management theories and concepts in the classroom through simulation exercises and in real developmental situations. Barrio Immersion is also seen as an attempt to translate and analyze, in operational and real terms, the philosophies and orientations espoused by the CESDP. Among these are the following:

- (1) Development is much more than growth in national income, savings ratios, and capital coefficients; it is fundamentally *About, By and For Human Beings*. Barrio Immersion provides the opportunity for the participants to assess the extent to which various government development programs substantially and operationally reflect the above tenet.
- (2) The CESDP, particularly Phase II, articulates a strong bias for the disadvantaged sector of the population in that they must be the main constituents of government to which its assistance must be addressed. By living and closely interacting with the rural and urban poor, the participants are able to learn on first-hand basis the poor's struggles and problems, as well as their aspirations and dreams. A consequence of the emotional experience is greater empathy which in turn will hopefully lead to more relevant and responsive development programs.
- (3) Related to the above, the CESDP also believes that the disadvantaged must not only benefit from, but should also participate in development efforts. Barrio Immersion provides the opportunity for the participants to learn that, with the necessary assistance, the disadvantaged communities can be helped to discover and develop their capabilities to engage in community problem-solving endeavors, initially, and, eventually, to meaningful

participate in the process of national development.

In the process of interacting and working together, the participants, the people, and the representatives of line and local government agencies are able to identify possibilities for operationalizing oft-espoused concepts, such as citizen participation, partnership between people and government, and self-reliance.

- (4) The Career Executive Service Officer (CESO) ideal states that "the CESO is one who individually, and in collaboration with others, systematically generates high grade contributions for the greater welfare of the people." Barrio Immersion, by exposing them to an actual developmental situation, helps the participants identify opportunities to make such meaningful contributions, in the form of improvements in the existing development programs, innovative programs, or more effective systems and procedures in managing change programs or in the delivery of services.

Given the above as a backdrop, this paper will now discuss some of the more significant challenges and problems encountered by the Program and by the participants. In the process of doing so, some issues related to the use of Barrio Immersion as a training tool inevitably will surface.

Challenges and Problems

On the Part of the Participants

- (1) The communities, to some degree, have been found to be cynical about the government's intention and desire to be of real service to the people. This is traceable to past experiences of undelivered promises, previous dealings with indifferent and uncaring government officials, and entanglements with bureaucratic red tape. Indeed, if Barrio Immersion is to establish the beginnings of partnership between the government and the people, the participants, during Barrio Immersion, face the challenge of transforming the cynicism into trust and confidence without raising undue and false expectations. Thus, throughout the immersion period, the participants devote a great portion of their time and energy in defining and helping the people accept the roles and responsibilities of government, as well as their own, in the task of community building.
- (2) Another attitudinal wall which confounds the participants is the communities seeming acceptance of their community problems as givens which they have to live with. Problems have been with them for generations and previous attempts to solve them, if any, have proven fruitless. In addition, they have been used to waiting for government officials to come and identify their problems for them and subsequently prescribe and implement solutions. These, the participants discovered, have

somehow contributed to the people's utter sense of helplessness and powerlessness. One successful strategy was to help the people successfully embark on a simple problem-solving task such as putting up a *bahay pulungan* (meeting house). Assistance is given in a way that people discover and use their own potentials for problem-solving. The taste of success motivates them to consider and work on more complicated community problems.

- (3) One of the most common community problems encountered by the participants is the poor quality of leadership in the barrios, perhaps the most critical factor in the maintenance of the problem-solving process which the participants have attempted to initiate. Thus, development of leadership skills became a favorite focus of attention. Applying previous learnings in leadership development, the participants helped formal and informal barrio leaders acquire beginning skills in the areas of meeting management, conflict management, and project planning and management.

For the participants, the challenge was in their ability not to take over the leadership role (which in many ways was the easier way) but to assist the leaders in discovering, developing, using their own leadership capabilities.

- (4) While most efforts are focused on the organization of the community and in creating its readiness

to assume a partnership role, the participants find it imperative to work with the other party in the partnership—the government, represented by the line agencies and local government units in the locality. The participants, in the process of analyzing the present service delivery system and the congruence of agency programs with people's needs, inevitably engage in some reeducative activities. Participants, however, first have to deal with a lot of resistance as they are seen as "critical intruders" who make unreasonable demands and who upset established work habits. There is also some resentment with the participants' seeming over-identification with the people rather than with their co-workers in government. Breaking these barriers and gaining acceptability for their interventions pose a great challenge to the participants.

In some instances, however, work with national line agencies and local government representatives at the provincial, municipal, and barangay levels has produced positive results, some of which lasted beyond the immersion period. Examples of these are better coordination and collaboration among agencies; greater sensitivity to the needs of the people, setting up of mechanisms to insure continuous dialogue between line agency representatives and barrio organizations; and increased ability to quickly respond to requests for technical and material assistance.

- (5) The participants, too, have to deal with their own struggles. While they are able to mouth principles of citizen participation and self-reliance, there is a burning need to see tangible accomplishments of their stay in the barrio, facetiously referred to as the need "to build monuments." There is a great temptation to "jump" the process of building the capability of people especially in communities where the pace is found to be painstakingly slow. The resulting impatience lead a number of participants to *think of* and *do projects for* the people who then end up as mere spectators. Close monitoring by the training staff and consultations with the faculty ensure, to a significant degree, the balance between task and process. It has also been helpful to assure the participants that their performance in the training program will not be measured by the extent to which they are able to plan and implement projects.
- (6) There is also a constant struggle to balance the concern between learning and assistance objectives. In their eagerness to be of service to the people who articulate their need for various types of assistance, the participants tend to pay more attention to the accomplishment of the assistance objectives. The more difficult task of drawing insights from their experiences and defining learnings and determining the significance of such to them as individuals, as government officials and as future Career Executive Service Officers, tends to be relegated to the background. The faculty and the staff then have to constantly refocus their attention to their roles as learners.
- (7) Many participants have difficulty appreciating the need to live the life of the poor, even if only for a short period of time. Admittedly, there is some difficulty in adjusting to the inconveniences and hardships of barrio life. This, however, is a necessary component of the barrio immersion, for it is only by going through the accompanying emotional experience that one can truly empathize with those who are in most need of government assistance. To help ease and hasten the transition, the participants, previous to immersion, are psychologically prepared for and made ready to accept the exercise. In addition, mechanisms are set up so they can draw support from each other and from the faculty and staff. In the case of Phase II, participants are moved from the Development Academy of the Philippines (DAP) Tagaytay Conference Center to pre-immersion sites so that adjustments need not be so drastic.

On The Part of the Program

- (1) The Program management is fully aware of the moral and ethical issues related to the use of people and communities to achieve some of its training objectives. The Program management, in choosing to use barrio immersion as a training tool and as a learning activity, fully recognizes that its

responsibility is not only to the participants but also to the target communities which in effect serve as a laboratory for learning.

The Program reflects its concern for the communities through the following:

- (a) In the process of selecting target communities, permission and clearance is sought from the barrio councils, the mayors of the municipalities, and the governor of the province. Objectives of the program in general, and Barrio Immersion in particular, are discussed in detail. The barrio councils are encouraged to discuss the matter with the whole community preferably through an assembly. Only those communities who agree to participate in the exercise are chosen as immersion sites.
- (b) Prior to immersion, participants discuss in great detail the objectives of barrio immersion and their roles. They eventually agree on guidelines in terms of "dos" and "don'ts" while in the barrio. *Makibagay* (be adaptive) has been adopted as the battle-cry, stressing the point that they are not to make any demands on the people and that the greater bulk of adjusting will have to come from the participants.
- (c) The Program requires that team processing sessions monitored by the training staff be regularly scheduled to

discuss and approve any intervention, to solicit and give feedback and support to each other, to share what they learned and their insights, and to assess the team's efforts. Participants are likewise required to daily record in a Learning Diary their action plans and activities and their reflections on the significance and meaning of their experiences.

Structured processing sessions with the faculty are held weekly to discuss accomplishments/activities of the previous week and plans for the coming week and to share their significant insights and learnings. The faculty also reads and comments on their Learning Diaries.

A major output required from the participants are maintenance plans prepared with the people. This is to insure the continuity of projects, as well as to reinforce the community's newly acquired skills. The plans are formally turned over to the community and the concerned line agencies at the end of the immersion period.

- (d) The Program, in its initial barrio immersion experience, sets up a system to measure the impact of the barrio experience on the participants. It also developed a research study conducted by a research team to assess and determine the impact of the experience

on the community. The combined results of these served as the basis for a decision to continue the use of barrio immersion as a training tool. The document containing the research study is now a DAP publication.¹

- (2) On the matter of follow-up, the Program management also recognizes that its commitment to the communities cannot end with the departure of the CESDP participants. The process of problem-solving and community management has been triggered off—it has to be continued, enhanced, and maintained. If not, the newly-acquired skills and orientations of the people will fall into eventual disuse and the experience may add to their heap of frustrations. This may mean reverting to their cynicism about government.

The Program management admits that it is in this area that the greatest problems have been encountered. Several schemes have been developed and tried out, some of which have been unsuccessful.

- (a) In the initial experience, a tie-up was forged with an agricultural college concerned with developing its extension service. Extension workers to be assigned to the target communities were trained with

the participants and were considered members of the barrio teams. With experience in community work almost nil and by virtue of their technical training, the extension workers were mostly concerned with implementing agricultural projects, giving little attention to the community problem-solving process.

- (b) In view of this observation, the Program management recommended the fielding of community workers for at least a year under the guidance and supervision of DAP. Thus, was born the sequel to barrio immersion—the *Tuklas-Yaman* Project. *Tuklas-Yaman* was not only DAP's response to live by its commitment to the communities but also the opportunity to test an operational model of community problem-solving which was evolved from the first barrio immersion experience. It is important to note that the level of organization in *Tuklas-Yaman* barrios has reached a point where they are now ready to engage in larger scale economic activities through another DAP Project—the Rural Enterprise Management Development Program.
- (c) Realizing, however, that is is not within the purview of DAP's mission to provide direct service to communities except when testing and

¹Ledivina V. Cariño and Emma S. Viñeza (eds.), *The Indang Experience: Lessons from the First CESDP Barrio Immersion* (Makati: Academy Press, DAP, 1980).

validating models and concepts, another scheme for the succeeding Barrio Immersion was developed. This time, negotiations were made with two line agencies involved in community work to take over the projects in the barrios when the participants leave. Once again the workers and their supervisors were invited to join the participants in the training so that they would have a common conceptual framework. The agency workers worked with the participants in the barrios and attended processing sessions. Maintenance plans developed with their involvement were turned over to them. Follow-up visits of DAP, however, revealed that the workers, by force of circumstances beyond their control, had to abandon their efforts. Apparently, their agencies had different priorities.

- (d) Following the above unsuccessful attempt, the next Barrio Immersion sites were chosen on the basis of their contiguity to the Tuklas-Yaman barrios, working out an arrangement whereby Tuklas-Yaman workers and some of the trained barrio leaders would lend a hand to their neighbor barrios after the barrio immersion period. While they were able to do during the period immediately after the immersion, the Tuklas-Yaman workers and the barrio leaders were

unable to continue extending assistance as it was at that time that the Tuklas-Yaman reached its peak, requiring their full time attention.

- (e) The most recent scheme was to assign a DAP staff member with extensive experience in community work to regularly visit the barrios, monitor their progress, and extend consultation services to the core of leaders to maintain the momentum gained during the immersion period. It has been the observation, however, that each of the communities need the full-time attention and assistance of a community worker. The intermittent visits, no matter how regular, cannot produce the desired results.

At this point in time, plans are underway for the implementation of the next session of CESDP Phase I. In view of observation and experiences in the past Barrio Immersions, significant changes in terms of the objectives and the concomitant roles of the participants in Barrio Immersion are being worked out. These changes will take into consideration the following factors:

- (1) The Barrio Immersion period of four weeks for CESDP Phase I is too short a time for any change effort to take root. Considering the adjustments to be made, both the barrio people and the participants

are only able to establish a relationship a little beyond the "getting to know you" level at the time when the immersion period ends.

- (2) The CESDP participants are being trained primarily to become managers, not community development workers. The Barrio Immersion can be restructured to afford the participants the opportunities to learn, appreciate, and understand the necessity for and intricacies of participatory community problem-solving without their involvement in it.
- (3) Doing away with the assistance objectives and focusing solely on the learning objectives will totally eliminate maintenance problems. The possibilities of "disturbing" the communities will be almost nil.
- (4) Corollary to the above, the emphasis on learning objectives will remove any pressure on the participants to undertake projects. They can therefore concentrate on drawing insights and acquiring lessons from their experiences. As a further step, the participants must be helped to determine the application of these lessons to their present jobs, not only as agency managers, but more importantly, as managers of development.

Conclusion

Learning is a very individual matter and the responsibility for learning rests with the individual participant. The CESDP can only provide opportunity and structures for learning and growth, one of which is the Barrio Immersion.

There is no doubt that Barrio Immersion has proven to be an effective tool in developing desired managerial skills and orientations. And yet, the usefulness of the skills and orientations upon the participants' return to their jobs greatly depends on the answers to the following questions:

- (1) How hospitable and supportive will the home agencies' environment be? Does or will top management in the agencies share the philosophies espoused by the CESDP, particularly those pertaining to citizen participation, and capability building of communities for self-help and self-management?
- (2) The overall performance of agencies and the performance of agency workers are most often measured by indicators, such as the number of projects undertaken, the number of people served, and the number of infrastructures set up. How then can attention be given to the difficult task of helping people assume responsibility for their own development?
- (3) The prevailing administrative, as well as social, economic, and political systems and structures, make it extremely difficult to equitably allocate resources

despite the oft-repeated intention to do so. How then can poor communities embark on development projects for which they have prepared?

- (4) How can people meaningfully participate in identifying development needs and problems and in planning and implementing development programs when workable mechanisms for such have yet to be set up?

The CESDP will not and cannot wait for the answers. It addresses these questions to the CESDP participants, who are in the best position to initiate and bring about desired changes in government.

In the meantime, Barrio Immersion will continue to be part of the CESDP. Needless to say, as CESDP gain and learn from more experience, the form, structure, and substance of Barrio Immersion may, from time to time, take on changes.