

The Rural Immersion Program of the Civil Service Academy

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Rural Immersion is one part of the training modules of the Civil Service Academy focused on the Executive Leadership Management (ELM) Program. Its goal is to infuse managerial expertise in the participants even as they develop a high sense of commitment toward the improvement of the quality of life of the rural poor. This training module is divided into four components, viz.: the pre-departure briefing, the barangay immersion, the case history and project proposal, and the debriefing and critique. In the light of incongruent orientations between the change agents and the target clientele of development, the burden of effecting changes in the lives of the rural community rests upon the ELM graduates.

The training programs of the Civil Service Academy (CSA) complement similar undertakings by other government training institutions to supplement the universal recruitment processes into the Philippine public bureaucracy.¹ The urgency and the scope of new challenges confronting Philippine Public Administration require developing necessary managerial skills and appropriate social commitment for more adequate and effective delivery of public services. The government has attempted

to meet this need in many ways, especially through human resource development efforts. The Civil Service Academy, through its executive development programs, aims to develop career officials, at both the national and local levels, with the outlook and skills necessary to cope with the exacting demands of national and international forces affecting the operations of the governments; the career officials are also expected to adequately and satisfactorily manage development.

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¹Compared with the British and French recruitment systems, which developed over hundreds of years and which the Philippines cannot afford. Filipino bureaucratic leaders are drawn from diverse sources and in varying ways. Some are recruited by proven educational achievement,

some by work achievement, and a greater number by achieving familial and political linkages. The College of Public Administration does not perform functions similar to the "playing fields of Eton" or the *Ecole Administratif*. The recruitment system, being what it is, consequently lays some burden on the "on-the-job-training" which hopefully corrects oversights in the recruitment process. Also, assuming that the development outlook is not hopelessly negative, a working ideology is also sought to be impressed. Such speculations could be an interesting subject for future research.

Recent literature on development administration has identified the bureaucrats especially those at the decision-making levels who wield enormous command in the allocation of resources and in the selection of specific actions to effect development for the greater number of people, as the critical variable in the development process.

The problem is viewed by the College of Public Administration, University of the Philippines (CPA-UP) as one of finding out how development-oriented administrators can be produced.² This is called the "behavioral dimension" of development administration and its resolution should complement similar innovative undertakings in recasting the structural dimension of development administration.³ One could add that the third dimension is the social, political, economic, and physical environment⁴ upon which bureaucrats operate; and the issue is whether the bureaucratic structure and behavior exhibit a "tight fit" into the environment or whether the structure systems, and behavior of public bureaucracy are relevant to the prevailing environment of poverty and underdevelopment characteristic of Third World societies.

In this paper, the "behavioral dimension" of development administration is pursued further. Again, the CPA-UP,

²Raul P. de Guzman and Alex B. Brillantes, Jr., "Issues and Problems in Development Administration in the Philippines: Focus on Regionalization." Paper presented at the 5th Annual National Conference of the Philippines Political Science Association, University of the Philippines, Quezon City, October 21-22, 1978, p. 2.

³*Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁴James C. Anderson, *Public Policy-Making* (New York: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1975), Chapter 2.

citing studies of the International Studies of Value in Politics, suggested the value commitments of development-orientedness:

- (1) change orientation;
- (2) action propensity;
- (3) commitment to economic development;
- (4) concern for economic equality;
- (5) concern for public participation;
- (6) concern for conflict avoidance;
- (7) concern for the nation; and
- (8) selflessness.⁵

It is hypothesized that the training programs of the Civil Service Academy significantly contribute to the formation of these value commitments among senior public executives. The rural immersion portion of the training programs, aptly called the "rural development module" in the ELM or Executive Leadership and Management program, exemplifies a serious effort to infuse the managerial expertise in the participants and a sense of commitment needed in the upliftment of the poor in the rural areas. This learning approach is presented by the latest syllabus of ELM.

Module VII. Rural Development

The Philippines is predominantly rural and agricultural, and will remain so the next century. While census definitions place rural residents at only 7 out of 10 Filipinos, the proportion is actually higher: many urban areas are (like rural areas) devoid of even basic services to make living convenient, comfortable, and productive.

⁵Raul P. de Guzman and Aurora A. Carbonell, *Development-Orientedness of Filipino Administrators* (Quezon City: National Science Development Board-University of the Philippines, Integrated Research Program, University of the Philippines, March 1976), p. 9.

If households receiving P3,000 per annum would be our poverty line, then 80 percent of Filipinos would be considered poor in 1975; of these, 8 out of 10 would be in agriculture and the bulk of them in subsistence fishing and farming. Therefore, it is easy to see where our priorities lie: in rural development.

The aim of this module is to develop a sensitive awareness among affluent government corporate executives of the poverty and underdevelopment now prevailing in our rural areas. By so doing, it is hoped that somehow, in the course of their work in the urban areas, they would keep these rural poor (always) in mind and if the right opportunity comes, to develop some mechanisms that will alleviate the grinding poverty in our rural areas.⁶

The Civil Service Academy is conducting three other executive development training programs aside from the ELM wherein the participants stay in rural communities for a specified period of time. The ELM's Social Laboratory, however, is the *primus inter pares* among the four CSA programs because it not only trains the highest level officials in public enterprises, but also ensures that the proper rural orientation is cast before the actual rural immersion. This is done through a whole day lecture-discussion about rural development. A post-immersion critique focusing on in-depth barangay case histories finally brings home the importance of developing positive attitudes and values to reinforce the concern for rural development and the desire to assist the rural poor.

In the other CSA programs, there is less emphasis on rural development.

⁶Civil Service Academy, Executive Leadership and Management Training Program IV, Development Academy of the Philippines, Tagaytay City, June 9-July 5, 1980, Mimeo.

Division chiefs and other officials of comparable rank who are participants of the Junior Executive Training and Supervisory Training for Effective Administrative Management (JET-STREAM) are made to undergo a four-day Social Laboratory activity. The Laboratory is intended to provide them first-hand experience on rural life while gathering empirical data and identifying the needs and problems of very depressed rural communities. Their reports used to serve as inputs for the ELM Social Laboratory until it was realized that the interface between the JET-STREAM and the ELM is not mutually reinforcing.

Prior to the launching of a social laboratory activity, JET-STREAM participants attend sessions on the dimensions of rural poverty to broaden their understanding of rural-urban dynamics and inter-governmental linkages. The written reports of the learning teams which contain a brief profile of the communities (demographic, economic, socio-cultural, and level of technology and capital); identified needs and problems, summary and recommendations, are presented to the class in a plenary session.

The DMT (Development Managers Training) is actually more of a learning exposure rather than a rural development effort because it is an exercise in transfer of technology. The DMT participants who are the highest appointive local government officials are billeted for a week in a poblacion where they monitor and evaluate a municipal project from planning to implementation. It is hoped that this exposure can improve the participants' skills in public policy analysis, thereby increasing

their administrative capacities in local government. Unlike the ELM and the JET-STREAM, DMT brings the participants, not to depressed areas, but to progressive municipalities so that they may study the various development projects of the local government units; the impact of these projects on the development of the community, as well as on the people directly and indirectly affected by these development projects, and the probability of adopting these projects in their back-home situations.

The two training programs for school superintendents and supervisors take participants (usually from teachers' Camp in Baguio City) to community projects of the Central Luzon State University to capture, within a two-day stay, the dynamics of project planning and implementation. Thus, except for the ELM and the JET-STREAM, the CSA programs are management skills development-oriented and do not have the ideological orientation of the ELM and JET-STREAM programs towards adopting rural development as a working philosophy in public service.

This paper on the Civil Service Academy's efforts on rural immersion will, however, focus only on the ELM Program.

Rural Immersion of ELM

The rural development module of ELM unfolds over an eight-day period out of about 26 days of residential training or about one-third of the total training man-hours. It is actually more than a third of the whole program, because during the barangay immersion, participants are known to work up to midnight and beyond; Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays included and

with home-visits waived.

The learning module is divided into four distinct submodules, each one equally important and a part of the learning process. They complement each other. These are: (1) Pre-Departure Briefing, (2) Barangay Immersion, (3) Case History and Project Proposal, and (4) Debriefing and Critique.

Pre-Departure Briefing

A day before participants depart for their barangay assignments, a one-day briefing precedes the field exercise. Four topics are thoroughly discussed during this briefing:

(1) *Rural Poverty and Underdevelopment*. The materials being used were developed by the module consultant. A recent publication of Gelia Tagumpay-Castillo entitled *Beyond Manila* is included. As its title implies, the first topic impresses upon the participants that beyond the airconditioned offices of public enterprise executives are the vast rural areas peopled by millions of poor Filipinos whose future lies at the mercy of the elements;

(2) *Philippine Agriculture and the Agrarian Society*. This topic brings in to ELM the fragile supports of Philippine traditional agriculture and explains the low productivity and the high risks entailed for the majority of small farmers; the topic brings into ELM the wisdom of Agrarian Reform Institute (ARI), U.P. at Los Banos research and the travails of implementing agrarian reform from the Ministry in charge of this heroic attempt to eradicate land tenancy;

(3) *Dynamics of Rural Development*. This is a review of the concepts, ap-

proaches, elements, and an attempt to operationalize rural development in the Third World; finally,

(4) *Integrating Buzz Session.* The participants of the seminar are divided into four discussion groups to articulate how public enterprise executives see their future role in rural development by identifying what they think are critical issues in the development of the Philippine rural areas, in the light of their knowledge of Philippine government programs. The output of the buzz session is a one- to two-page write-up which is considered a base line since it lists issues isolated by participants *before* their physical exposure to the actual living condition in the rural area.

The sessions end with an organizational meeting in preparation for the departure of participants to the rural communities the next day. The participants are divided into four groups, each numbering about twelve. Each group is assigned to a selected barangay deemed to be "depressed" by the CSA staff. It is located in a remote area away from the urban center (the poblacion) by at least five kilometers and not along the national highway. Each group is further subdivided into six subgroups of two each (the buddy system). They are assigned specific tasks based on the outline suggested by the consultant. It is during this session that participants are given experiences of previous ELM groups and all are reassured that "so far, statistics have been consistent: there has been a 100 percent survival rate" despite sleeping on concrete floors of rural barangay schools or crowding into a small house, travelling a kilometer to fetch water, enduring all the flies and the dust during summer, mud

during rainy season, the lack of tiled flush toilets, and walking as the major means of transportation since motor vehicles cannot negotiate the foot-trails.

Social Laboratory

The participants leave the comforts of the facilities of the Development Academy of the Philippines in Tagaytay, pack their bare necessities, leave their cars behind, and board a bus for the rural barangays. They meet the municipal mayor, the municipal secretary, the barangay captain, and his council and settle down in a first meeting with the barangay council at the first evening. The purpose of the visit is explained and participants are introduced. They are billeted and arrangements are made for marketing and cooking three meals a day in the barangay. The poorly-clad children gawk at the well-dressed visitors and the participants are moved almost instantly into assisting the poor directly.

The group breaks up into six subgroups. They undertake the basic socioeconomic survey, analyze the data, and formulate the project proposal. At this point, very close consultations are made with the barangay residents and officials to check the group's findings and impressions. A final validating session with the barangay council is held before the group leaves the barangay on the fifth or the sixth day. The final meeting can become very emotional, as participants and barangay residents are moved to tears at the prospect of separation. Or, as what happened in Barangay Puting Kahoy (Calaca, Batangas), during ELM IV, in July 1980, an "amateur

night" sponsored by participants drew 500 of the 700 residents from early evening to after midnight. Both participants and residents fed the amateur singers and audience with native delicacies and soft drinks. The evening was capped by an emotional singing of "Auld Lang Syne" and "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow" to the mayor who was moved to tears upon being presented a printed report of the group's efforts. The "night" actually ended the following morning when at 4 a.m. the mayor invited the male participants to a *kambing* (goat) cook-out; the female participants were serenaded in the process.

Sometimes, there is bad news, as when the ELM team assigned to Lukban in Balayan, Batangas had to hurriedly evacuate on their third night because the barangay captain drank during a wedding banquet and had a shouting match with one of his barangay councilmen and threatened the latter with capital punishment for illegal discharge of unlicensed firearm. During that same period, however, another ELM team about ten kilometers away in a fishing village had fresh seafoods everyday. Although the sea was near, work prevented them from enjoying a cool dip in the enticing sea.

Case History and Project Proposal

On the sixth day of the Rural Development Module, the participants are once more enveloped by the lulling comforts of the DAP in Tagaytay to compose the barangay case history and reduce into writing a project proposal designed to alleviate, in whatever little way, the suffering of the rural community where the ELM participants stayed. The case

history is designed to detail the indicators of rural poverty in the barangay, trace the probable causes of underdevelopment, and present a comprehensive picture of the barangay as a baseline profile. The idea is to describe a rural condition against which future developments in that community may be compared and to enable future evaluators to trace the differences between the barangay circa 1980 and the barangay at, perhaps, year 2000 and determine whether changes occurred. The objective is, that during the process of articulating the poverty and underdevelopment of a barangay, the ELM participants are able to internalize the grinding poverty of the people they have been associated with the previous week. As the module consultant puts it: "It is one thing to talk about poverty; it is another witnessing it personally and then writing down the experience."

The other and equally important half of the Group Report is the Project Proposal. The participants are cautioned beforehand by the module consultant that the suggested project should be implementable by the barangay people themselves and therefore should be within their existing capacities and interest. It should not be large-scale nor of a long-term gestation and must not require too much external assistance. Very frequently, the ELM participants realize that rural people do not participate in development projects because they cannot do so due to the scale of projects. Usually, many government programs demand much of the barrio people's organizational competence *before* having a chance to develop such an organization (which is *sine qua*

non to meaningful participation). It is also emphasized that the nature of the projects, especially the design, should be of the villagers, not of the ELM participants, if participation in planning and implementation is sincerely sought from the barrio people.

The process of formulating the project proposal, aside from the rural development orientation, makes use of basic managerial techniques learned by ELM participants in learning modules previous to MODULE VII. They cover subjects, such as project identification, feasibility analysis, policy formulation and strategy development, monitoring and evaluation. Participants learned to emphasize the following aspects of project development: benefits and beneficiaries, "spread" effects, project size and complexity (*vis-à-vis* village capacities), vertical and horizontal linkages (functional and geographic), problem definition, timetable, commitment of rural resources, participation, and organization. A very important element is the process of monitoring project progress and the approximation of project impact. Finally, the proposal must indicate whether the undertaking is at all replicable (a built-in check on whether the project has too much external inputs as to render similar barrio-level efforts unworkable).

Debriefing and Critique

The week-long rural immersion, which for many urban-based executives has become quite an emotional experience, is capped by a formal report presentation to the entire class in an afternoon plenary session, the day before graduation. It is held in the afternoon because intense interaction between the groups

forces the session to spill over into dinner and beyond (the ELM III presentation in June 1980 ended at 10 p.m., well after coffee was served after dinner). This final session of the Rural Development learning module is designed to provide participants and their consultants an opportunity to exchange views on their rural immersion experiences, isolate the lessons learned and arrive at general conclusions about the major issues of rural development within the context of the absence of essential opportunities for development in the rural areas.

The session is structured in such a manner that each participating group is given all the chances to articulate and air their views on a particular village's pattern of development. The major parts are as follows:

- (1) Each group presents its findings and proposals for 30 minutes; a total of two hours for the four groups;
- (2) A buzz session for 30 minutes is declared and each group goes into a huddle to formulate the group questions and comments to the presenter groups three out of four);
- (3) An open forum is conducted for 30 minutes. Each interpellating group reads out its questions/comments and the presenter group answers or clarifies the points raised;
- (4) The module consultant for Development of Corporate Policy and Strategy is requested to make a critique on the project proposal for 30 minutes.

- (5) The module consultant for Rural Development makes a critique by citing the groups' findings to reinforce rural development concepts and focus the thinking of the participants on major consequences of rural poverty, as their reports indicate;
- (6) Finally, the participants are invited to share with the others the lighter side of their stay in the communities or narrate their "most unforgettable experiences"—bits of treasures in the social laboratory that do not go into the formal reports because "readers might misunderstand the events, especially our rural friends."

The session declared over after four hours, usually a *tete-a-tete*, lingers on as participants recall their experiences in the rural communities. Many having developed some kind of commitment to the communities which claimed their sympathy (and, perhaps, pity), vow to return.

While the earlier project proposals of ELM are actions which participants hope to implement, the consultants discouraged such an objective because busy executives will hardly find time to do an earnest follow-through action of their project plans. This follow-through is not built into the ELM Program. Instead, the orientation was changed to thoroughly documenting the rural immersion experience as a case study and proposing a partial solution to the complicated rural development problem, more as an academic research than as an action-oriented undertaking. The reason adopted was that raising the

expectations of the rural poor without effectively doing something about it is not only a futile exercise but also a cruel act inflicted by urbanites upon the unknowing rural hosts.

Evaluation

The evaluation schemes of all Academy programs intend to assess the effectiveness of each program in terms of acceptability to the participants, the amount of gained and applied knowledge, and demonstrated leadership skills. Findings derived from the results of these evaluations are used as basis for redesigning and improving future programs.

Evaluation results of the Social Laboratory module of the DMT, JET-STREAM, and ELM programs reveal wide acceptance and high degree of gained knowledge. The participants feel that the exercise is one of the most fruitful and meaningful learning experiences of the program.

All the participants of the ELM found the Social Laboratory as one of the most insightful experiences having given them the chance to interact with the people in the rural areas. The activity opened their eyes to the problems, aspirations, and attitudes of the rural folks. For the DMT participants, it was recommended that the field research component be retained as the practicum portion of the program.

An Alternative

The ELM experience in rural immersion in definitely educational, if a little unsettling for the well-off urbanite that a government executive is. One single empirical lesson stands out: the government executive develops values, attitudes, working concepts, living

comforts, language, outlook, and orientation vastly different from the rural poor majority of whom he is pledged to assist; however indirectly it might be and however remote in the future it could be. The ELM participant's income and education, let alone his working environment and organization, are so far removed from the rural barangay that the gap is staggering to behold and saddening to realize. This is the irony of rural development: that those who can do something about rural development are people so far removed, physically, economically, and, most critical of all, socially and culturally, from the people they must help.

The question therefore is: how can the ELM participants (and the legion of bureaucrats like them) be oriented towards the rural areas and its poor people? How can we make their paths cross and their interests coincide? Will there be a confluence in the rivers of their future? Or, will they remain as parallel as the rigid tracks of a railroad as they seem to be so today?

These questions are indeed of interest, for whereas the tracks do not look that parallel yet, somehow in the whirlpool of everyday living, the lives of the upper class and the lower class overlap. The basic gap may thus be reduced, though imperfectly, if the people in the upper classes—to which the urbanites will belong—will gain the necessary inputs to their role as primary instruments in bringing about changes. The ELM graduates are expected to act on the knowledge that it is not so much the poor themselves who can hardly see what is wrong with their lives but they, the educated and learned, who must realize the need for change.

One good alternative, therefore, is for each ELM Learning Team (the group of 12 members) to adopt a rural barangay (assuming they liked their stay there). This will mean that participants must be so grouped that future attention to the community is possible, such as proximity to Manila. It also requires that ELM participants participate in the selection of the venue for rural immersion, perhaps increasing the CSA criteria beyond a depressed barangay to more considerations of the practicability of adopting a longer term "big brother" program. For, after all, it has been proven in many rural development researches that the rural village cannot be liberated by its people alone: external inputs are certainly basic ingredients.

The writings of ELM participants articulate their exposure to the rural villages:

The six-day rural immersion of executive Learning Team II has been a very rewarding experience. Done in Sitio Kabaritan in Sto. Domingo, Bay, Laguna, this social laboratory has given the team an opportunity to empathize with the people of the sitio. It has allowed us to understand the feelings, hopes, and aspirations of this simple but friendly people. . . . During the immersion process, the Team was able to view rural life in a different context. Gone were the ivory tower perspectives from the executive swivel chair. In its place came the realization that the lives of our brothers in the countryside, problems that executives consider petty are real and overpowering. While our stay in the sitio was brief, we also found that Government Corporate Executives with their management training and sophistication have a real opportunity to contribute something for the benefit of rural communities.⁷

⁷Civil Service Academy, ELM I, Executive Learning Team 2, Group Report, Development Academy of the Philippines, Tagaytay City, December 5, 1979, preface page, Mimeo.