

Models, Models Everywhere and Not a One that Fits?
Cross-cultural Implementation of a DACUM-inspired Process
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Abstract

The goal? Design a one-year program to develop grassroots leaders in Sri Lanka. The time allowed? Less than three days. This paper describes situational constraints, requirements for the program and the process used to develop it, the basic planning model, what was accomplished, and evaluation results. The approach, inspired by the Developing a Curriculum (DACUM) process, proved to be efficient and effective – from both process and program perspectives.

Introduction

Most business and educational institutions are being affected by the increasingly global nature of our world and work. As adult educators we are called upon to work with international partners – cross-culturally and across distances. We must and will continue to function in group decision-making settings, often with people whose first language is not English and with people who have experienced only top-down, hierarchical decision-making processes. Also, we are being asked to create learner-centered, formal and informal educational experiences – in very short timeframes, with limited resources. To facilitate sound decision-making under these conditions, practitioners need research-based models, with proven track records of meeting practice needs in a global context. We offer our experience as one example where practice needs were met by using a research-based model. Here is the story.

An eight-member delegation from Sri Lanka arrived at the Northern Illinois University campus for a three-week professional development program in good governance. Their charter? Build a one-year diploma program to develop grassroots leaders in their country. Three weeks is a very short time to accomplish such a task, but they didn't even have that much time. Their itinerary included field visits, discussions with municipal government officials and university faculty, and ceremonial events. The actual time available for the task was less than three days, spread across the three-week period in half-day sessions. Typical of curriculum development projects, they faced serious time constraints, but time was not their only constraint!

Background

Sri Lanka is a small, tropical island nation situated less than 20 miles from the southern tip of India. Shaped like a tear drop, the island is about the same size as the state of West Virginia. Formerly known as Ceylon, this country is home to nearly twenty million people. Although the country is multi-ethnic, Buddhists comprise the 80% majority and the Buddhist world view has shaped every aspect of the society's traditions and culture. Tamil-speaking Hindus (about 12%) and Tamil-speaking Muslims (8%) remain politicized minorities, marginalized economically largely through language differences. Although Sinhala is the official language and Tamil the second language, many Tamils do not speak Sinhala. Currently, about 10% of the people speak English.

Sri Lanka's economy is basically agricultural with about half of the labor force working to produce tea, rubber, and coconut; its industry is dominated by apparel manufacturing. Sri

Lankan government, democratic and parliamentary, was a pioneer in granting voting rights to all male and female residents (74 years of universal franchise, the longest in South Asia). Education is free through the university level, but because of severe competition for admission, only 1% ultimately enter university. The country has a high literacy rate (90%). Health care is free, but suffers from the government's increasing inability to meet rising health care costs.

Although life in and around large cities is heavily influenced by a growing capitalist private sector, life in the 25,000 rural villages is very different, characterized by high unemployment, high rates of alcoholism among men, and poor to non-existent infrastructure (e.g., roads, water availability, sanitation). In spite of the country's impressive traditions, women in the bottom strata of the society, who constitute the majority of the population, are struggling to provide basic necessities for their families. Unemployment among women is high and double that of men. Elected female politicians comprise less than 2%, which restricts female influence in the political decision-making process. Gender-based violence is common: rape, emotional and physical abuse, sexual harassment, domestic violence. Civil conflicts have forced women into the position of main breadwinners. Violation of human rights for women is worse in war zones. Historically, non-governmental organization's (NGOs) main missions have been poverty alleviation, but constantly shifting global relations, donor priorities, and political conflicts leave poverty firmly entrenched.

Context

The visiting Sri Lankan delegates faced significant constraints on the program to be built, in terms of sponsorship, participant characteristics, and funding. Multiple stakeholder organizations, with very different interests and power positions, were sponsoring the program – academic institutions and NGOs would have to be satisfied with the results. Most of the program participants (people to be trained) would need to travel long distances to attend sessions and could not attend full time. They would be drawn from grassroots communities and would have neither a college education nor a common first language; they would speak either Tamil or Sinhala with limited proficiency in English. They would be familiar with either a local government or NGO culture (depending on their sponsoring organization) but not both. A grant was available from the US Department of State, but it would not be sufficient to cover all program expenses.

Added to these constraints were two requirements: To meet funding objectives, the curriculum development process had to be *participatory*. To meet the design team's concerns, the process had to be *transparent*: the decision-making – from needs analysis to final plan – had to be traceable (visible) to the planners themselves and to other stakeholders. All the stakeholders who were involved in the program design wanted the process, and the resulting program, to model and teach democratic, participatory and transparent decision-making.

Choosing a Model – Which Approach Should We Use?

Adult educators have many programming models to choose from – some drawn from academia and others from the business training arena. Before selecting a process, we identified requirements: first, for the program, and then, for the process used to design it. The training program needed to be *practical* (i.e., focus on real world application), *efficient* (i.e., include only essential learning activities) and *experiential* (i.e., provide participants with experiences of democratic, participatory and transparent decision-making.) The design process needed to be rapid, participatory, and transparent. Because the program would be housed within a formal

setting, it needed to meet institutional requirements for length, level of content, etc.) Because the delegates were not course designers and were working in their second (or third) language, the design process had to be structurally simple, relatively jargon-free, and culturally neutral (i.e., neither reeking of Western corporate culture nor loaded with academic program planning jargon.). Because the delegates would become the program’s faculty, we wanted to foster ownership and accountability among them. Also, work had already been done at the village level to identify what the potential grassroots leaders believed they needed to learn, and this work needed to be the starting point for design decisions.

Developing a Curriculum (DACUM)

DACUM refers to (1) a *process* for occupational analysis, performed by expert workers in the occupation, (2) a *skill profile*, and (3) a *tool* to support initiatives such as program planning, curriculum development, training materials development, and evaluation of participant performance. Research and practice have established that DACUM results are as robust as more lengthy needs analyses conducted under other models (Adams, 1975). “Its use with many companies, community colleges, and government agencies has also shown the process to be very effective, quickly accomplished, and low cost” (“Ohio State DACUM Process Page”, 2006).

The DACUM process relies on a panel of expert performers drawn from the occupation, who work under the guidance of a facilitator for two days to develop a profile of the tasks and duties performed in the occupation (or profession). For our purposes, the delegates comprised the Panel and were joined by two NIU faculty members who had expertise in both the Sri Lanka situation and instruction. Creating the chart uses a *cards-on-the-wall* strategy. All members face the wall rather than sitting around a table facing each other. All information is visible to all participants at the same time. All work is done by the entire panel. Cards are shifted until consensus among group members is reached.

This technique focuses Panel members’ attention on content rather than on each other, which avoids (or at least minimizes) the extent to which people employ politics, posturing, and intimidation in group situations.

The Panel also identifies the knowledge and skills required of successful workers; the tools, equipment, supplies and materials needed; and future trends and concerns that might affect performance requirements.

The profiled observable behaviors become defined learning goals. The profile helps instructors avoid adding non-essential information into courses. The Chart helps avoid duplication within a curriculum, and when multiple instructors are involved, the Chart helps them all sing from the same sheet of music.

Comparing DACUM to Other Models

Tyler suggested that to develop a program, planners should answer four fundamental questions: What are the purposes? What experiences will attain the purposes? How should the experiences be organized? How will we know that the purposes have been attained? (Tyler, 1969, p. 1) Many models have surfaced since Tyler’s, but one can find responses to his questions within each program development model that has gained acceptance in the adult education field.

Another common aspect of accepted models is that, although the terms may vary, each addresses the elements of planning, design, implementation, and evaluation (Boone, Safrit, &

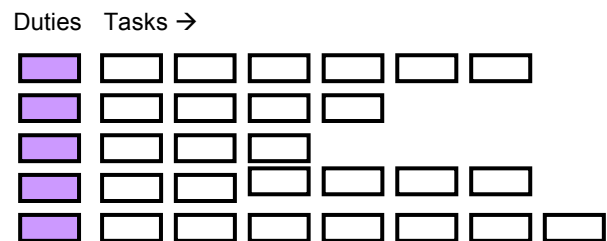


Figure 1. Cards-on-the-wall Technique

Jones, 2002). Areas where variation occurs include starting points and primary focus (philosophy, social context, institutional requirements) and the use of questions or designated tasks to guide the process. Freire's (1970) approach begins and carries through with the participants themselves. Although his approach could be a powerful one for our participants to use when helping their local communities identify and resolve local problems, we did not have access to the future participants and we chose not to create a program for which the design would change for each cohort. Businesses tend to use systematic training development processes – their own or a general one such as the ADDIE model: Analyze, Design, Develop, Implement, Evaluate ("ADDIE Model", 2006). What all of these models have in common is that their implementation requires a lengthy, involved process.

Our DACUM-inspired Process and its Results

From a purist's perspective, we did not apply the DACUM process exactly as outlined. For example, the panel members were experts in leadership, but they were not drawn directly from the target population. We relied on strong facilitation not only to orient the planners and lead them through the process (in the time available), but also to ensure that every person's voice was heard. Allowing only one voice at any given time and ensuring that everyone gets heard foster respect for each person's contributions.

We did not include the performance evaluation criteria-building component (for lack of time), but we did build formative and summative evaluation into both the process and the program, and we planned follow-up evaluation with program graduates.

The process elements that we retained included using facilitation and the seating style recommended for the process (everyone facing the wall instead of each other) and documenting all decisions using the cards-on-the-wall strategy and flip-charts. Because transparency was so important, each card on the chart was labeled to show its relationship to the initial list of skills identified by the villagers, as well as to learning segments the program would include.

By the time the group headed back to Sri Lanka, the Panel had produced a mission and goals for the program, requirements for individual candidates

(desired potential leader characteristics, education, language, etc.) and the cohort overall (quotas for Sinhalese/Tamil mix, male/female mix, etc.), the DACUM profile, learning module descriptions (content outlines, timing, materials, learning activities), the sequence for modules within the program, and assignments of faculty to content areas.

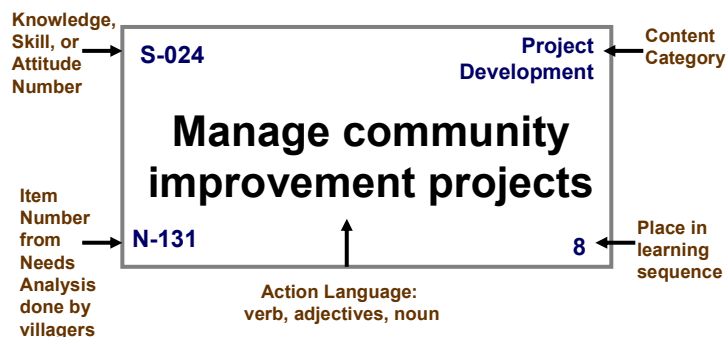


Figure 2. Sample card from the Profile chart.

Learning from the Experience

A basic principle of DACUM is that Panel members be drawn from people considered to be expert performers within the occupation. Our Panel members were expert leaders, but none were drawn from the target population who would be the program's participants. It would have

been helpful to involve at least one or two representatives of the actual target population, but funding did not allow for it.

Although our attempts to implement a culturally-neutral process were genuine, our participants still experienced the process as very counter-cultural. (Perhaps, any group that tries to use this approach to decision-making would find it counter-cultural, regardless of what the members' cultures were.)

Gender Issues. During early discussions, only the men talked. They asked each other for opinions, but did not ask the women. If a woman tried to speak, the men talked over her or simply ignored what she said and moved on with their own conversations. The men seldom interrupted each other, but usually interrupted when a woman was speaking. Facilitation created space for the women to gain voice; this was crucial.

Hierarchy Issues. Not only was the facilitator a female, but she held a much lower position (graduate student) in the academic hierarchy than did the NIU faculty members participating in the design process. Both male and female panel members found it amazing that the NIU faculty members followed whatever directions the facilitator gave and spoke only when called upon. They also found it amazing that the facilitator did not seem intimidated by the asymmetrical power positions

Design Decisions. After considerable debate, the Panel decided to break away from the teacher-centered, lecture method used in traditional Sri Lankan pedagogy. Instead, they decided to include participatory and experiential methods of learning (e.g., discussions, case study analysis, tours, reflection journals.) They also decided to use performance assessment methods other than objective-style tests. Decisions such as these were evidence of the panel members' growing sense of empowerment and commitment.

Evaluation Feedback

Formative, summative and follow-up evaluation methods were used with this project. Both the process and the program were evaluated. The delegates commented on three areas with respect to the process: Comments on the process itself and facilitation were discussed earlier in this paper (hierarchical, gender and asymmetrical power relationships.) With respect to the design and course content, delegates mentioned how the Chart helped them keep themselves and each other accountable to focusing only on the agreed-upon behaviors. They also admitted that until they saw their end result (the entire program, holistically represented), they really didn't believe that an authentic and transparent program could be built in so short a time. In the third area, implementation, the issue of language remained a concern. The Panel had decided that the program would be offered in English (and materials provided in English only). Their wish was to foster a sense of equality between Tamil and Sinhalese participants. Choosing one of those languages would leave the other participants feeling disadvantaged. Providing materials and lectures in both languages was not a viable option in terms of costs. Using English would be a disadvantage, but all participants would be equally disadvantaged. Although they remained conceptually committed to their decision to use English, they also knew that it would be a difficult decision to implement.

Reflections on Program Results to Date

During the first cohort's graduation ceremony, the graduates expressed their appreciation not only for the content provided, but especially for respect they had experienced. They appreciated how the faculty members and program modeled democratic, participatory, transparent decision-making – in their terms, good governance. They talked about the new

appreciation that they had for each other's cultures. They left feeling prepared and empowered. High praise for a program that was designed in two days!

Several people who have gone through the program have been promoted. They are now managing people and can create more participative and empowered teams within their own organizations. Two women from the first cohort are pursuing a Bachelor's degree and one is pursuing a Master's degree. Open University is accepting their diploma program in place of A-levels, and is accepting the program in lieu of certain prerequisites for graduate programs. These actions by academia speak volumes in terms of their respect for the program.

Conclusions

The DACUM-inspired process met and exceeded our expectations. It provided powerful experiences to the Panel members of democratic, participatory, transparent decision-making. Those experiences enabled them to design learning modules that would foster those same kinds of experiences. The design document provided a sound frame of reference for ongoing program design decision-making. It helped the faculty team hold each other accountable for intended results. It provided participants with a picture of what they would need to be able to do as they pursued grassroots leadership, what they already knew, and what they still needed to learn.

This experience has been powerful for the authors as well. Although we believed that research can inform practice and practice can inform research, we now have wonderful success stories that emphasize that point. When faced with clients who need a new program design fast, as well as one that is culturally elastic, we have one more process in our practice that can help us help our clients achieve their goals.

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