0513. Introducing a Results Oriented Management Culture in ADATS & the Coolie Sangha (Feb 2002)

1.   CONCERNS WITH SUSTAINABILITY

1.1.   Community Organisation – our Core Competency

The singular strength of ADATS has been our ability to organise the poor, mobilise them against injustice, undertake huge struggles against economic exploitation and extra-economic oppression, and see them to fruition. Gender, Empowerment, Capacity Building, Geopolitical Coverage, Presence, *et al* have a definite socio-political meaning for us.

Altered power balance in village society has given the small and poor peasant caste-class (colloquially referred to as "*Coolies*") a definite presence *vis-à-vis* the middle peasant ("*Ryots*"). An informed participation and struggle needs be at the core of any vibrant grass-roots democracy. This has become a way of life for the Coolies, and spectacular achievements have been made:

- Feudal oppression has been countered, and Coolies have gained a person status and identity.
- A larger unification of the poor, across narrow parochial caste lines, has been achieved.
- The Coolie Sangha has a strong socio-political presence and become a powerful force to contend with.
- Overall wages have risen, and women and men get equal wages.
- Coolies have transformed themselves into a small peasant, cultivating caste-class who also go for labour.
- An overwhelming majority of Coolie children are in school, and there is sex parity even in High School.

1.2.   Daunting Questions

The haunting question is of course whether it will all last beyond our intervention. Moreover, this is a rather generic description of most NGOs who started in the '70s and followed an empowerment model. Unique instruments at ADATS to make efforts last include:

- A 2 Organisations policy wherein ADATS (the NGO) and the Coolie Sangha (the CBO) are kept as separate.
- Structures and discipline of the Coolie Sangha in order to build it as a membership based, self-financed people's organisation that does not become merely an informal gathering of the poor at times of need.
- Verbal communication systems that ensure a 2 way flow of considered opinions, fostering truly bottom-up planning, monitoring and review.
- Phased intervention with ADATS withdrawal (and role transformation) at the end of 9 years.

2.   WHAT'S NEW IN MANAGEMENT?

2.1.   How it all started

Like most NGOs of the time, ADATS has always had sound management systems in place. A tested intervention strategy is couched in what we term an implementation technology, which
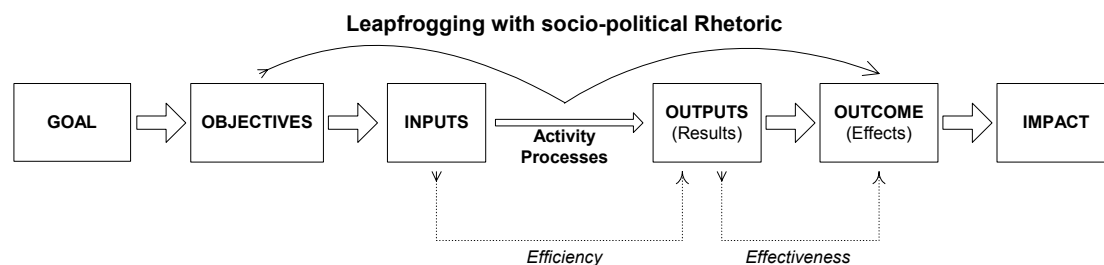
is a combination of management culture and ideological choice. Openness and transparency are exception-less. Grassroots participation is obtained through established systems. Policies are well articulated. Process documentation is excellent.

Our work has always been strong on Effects, with even greater emphasis on dramatic activity processes, carefully selected and designed to create maximum communication impact on our constituents.

Our model relied heavily on the oratory and creating a sense of the spectacular, which energised participants and strengthened the movement. Rhetoric created a powerful euphoria which, in turn, created major changes in the power balance of village society. Such change was very real, and achievements were neither imaginary nor incidental.

However, it was possible that the stunning success of rhetoric and rousing leadership had led to some degree of neglect of the need to focus on Results and painstakingly monitor their realization. This had probably created a notion that if all the required Inputs are provided and activity processes set in motion, the Outputs will automatically follow.

We use the expression, "Leapfrogging with socio-political Rhetoric" to describe this tendency:

Leapfrogging with socio-political Rhetoric

| GOAL | → | OBJECTIVES | → | INPUTS | Activity Processes | OUTPUTS (Results) | → | OUTCOME (Effects) | → | IMPACT |

Efficiency   *Effectiveness*

The case summarized below gives a good example of the "Leapfrogging" tendency, which had to be identified and corrected.

- Early in the year 2000, ADATS gave out a general call asking that all family properties should be registered in the joint names of husbands and wives.
When discussing progress a few weeks later, Narayanamma, the elected Taluk Secretary from Chintamani, asserted that it had been done in over 50 villages in her Taluk. We were flabbergasted! No amount of pressure would make her take back the fantastic claim.
When gently coaxed, she explained that the matter had been well received in all the Mahila Meetings. Even most (male) CSU Meetings had agreed that this was a long overdue step. Coolie women were very angry with the few oddballs who were resisting the call.
"Everyone has whole heartedly agreed", Narayanamma said, *"Now it is only a small matter to actually go out and do it!"*

The problem with attempting to achieve Effects in this manner (i.e. by leapfrogging over Outputs or Results) is that performance would be left completely to chance. They do not always lead to a lasting Impact.

On the other hand, Effects that are the outcome of systematic Results obtained through the coordinated efforts of a whole lot of ordinary people tend to last. They do not owe their existence to quick-fix solutions by extraordinary change agents. Impact created in this painstaking manner is Sustainable.

2.2.   The Role of Rhetoric

It was a fine blend of socio-political rhetoric and sound management which made possible all that has been achieved thus far.

Rhetoric played a big role in the hostile socio-political environment that we were in. It established a political will that sustained struggles and gave identity to the poor. It instilled a determination to change situations, against heavy odds. It challenged official apathy. It killed a culture of poverty. It helped us face severe resource crunches. It brought the impossible into the realm of the possible.

But these same slogans did not have the punch to take us much further. The situation had, by and large, changed. Cruel and senseless social oppression and stark economic exploitation were now more the exception than the rule. Semi-feudal realities had given way to a more democratic political economy.

To continue speaking of Results obtained in the past may have evoked a wistful sentiment, but done little else to attract small and poor peasants to remain within the folds of the Coolie Sangha. Unless accompanied by a provable promise of continued response to changing needs, brand loyalty created by rhetoric alone would not have convinced Member Coolie families to stay on.

2.3.   Rhetoric Hides Non-Accomplishment

Rhetoric goes hand in hand with a projection of personality. There can be no fine oration without the orator. Personal bonds get muddled with organisational objectives.

Rhetoric relies upon anecdotal proof. It is enough to convincingly share a single startling Result obtained in some particular village or family. Rhetoric suggests that if it can be done once, somewhere, anywhere, it can be achieved everywhere. When delivered effectively, rhetoric fills the audience with a hope, yearning and belief that borders on faith.

Results are taken for granted. It is enough to prove one single instance and leave the rest to wild imagination. A mindset, an attitude, a structure, a discipline, and a style of functioning are offered as strategies. Earlier, we exalted faith in a new future, physical bravery, and relentless struggle as a way of life in order to escape *Ryot* tyranny. Today we have replaced it with a call for functional unity, fiscal discipline and hard work to overcome poverty. Proof for these prescriptions can be found aplenty, provided the orator has intimate enough an acquaintance to know where to look for isolated success stories.

Larger numbers and overall percentages are carelessly dismissed as just "waiting to happen". They are not recognised to be the non-accomplishments that they actually are. Instead, hapless members of the audience are made to believe that it is somehow their fault that good things have not yet happened to them.

2.4.   What is New in Management?

Nobody can ever deny the impressive Results that ADATS and the Coolie Sangha have obtained over the years. Problems have definitely been reversed and made to stand on their heads, and the numbers are neither small nor insignificant.

- Where there were hardly a handful of Coolie children going to school when we first started, there are now less than 6% OUT of school.
- Where not a single girl continued schooling after puberty, more than 40% of High School children now are girls.
- Where wife beating was the standard norm, incidents of domestic violence are now just a handful in each taluk.
- Where there were no houses for Coolies, only 15% now needed flat roof houses and electricity.
- Where the entire caste-class had no control over their lands, only 5% of holdings are now mortgaged to the rich.

It can be asked whether all this could have been achieved without any management at all, and the obvious answer would be that it couldn't. Goals were set and resources intelligently used to reach objectives. The milieu was honest, sincere, frank and open. Otherwise such spectacular achievements would not have been possible.

Therefore it can be argued that there is nothing new in our recent emphasis on introducing a Result Oriented Management Culture. Such argument may sound true, but is nevertheless flawed.

The contribution of management is far more subtle and far reaching. The truth is that good management practices contribute to Sustainability and ensure continued Relevance. Managing Results in order to ensure the continuity of the independent Coolie Sangha is quite different from our having to manage resources to build the people's organisation in the first place.

It is only after going through this torturous path of self-doubt and questioning that ADATS could make the move from a reliance on grand strategy and rhetoric to objectively verifiable results and accountable performance.

3.   FORMAL MANAGEMENT PLANNING (STRATEGIC PLAN)

3.1.   PME Workshops

In October 2000 we entered into an agreement with a Management Consultant to help develop a Strategic Plan incorporating Vision, Mission (Goal), Purpose, Project Outputs and Activity Schedule, on the basis of planned inputs and processes for ADATS and the Coolie Sangha, and to assist us to participatively monitor its performance against the plan.

This was a 17 month long exercise wherein Ajit Mani of Intervention (India) Pvt. Ltd. provided 2 days consulting time each month. He carried out consultations, surveys, workshops, training sessions, seminars, qualitative and quantitative data analysis, document preparation and other activities required to achieve the objective.

Ajit Mani first told us that if we strip away all the buzzwords and glitz that surrounds the word "Management", we will find that there are really only 2 simple ideas...

> PERFORMANCE (TASK)
>
> "Performance" deals with *Why* the organisation (or individual) is undertaking the project. This can be further broken up into:
> - the *Greater Why* : which is what the project <u>hopes</u> to achieve (Goal)
> - the *Why* : which is what the project <u>proposes</u> to achieve (Purpose)
> - the *What* : which are specific Results obtained by a careful husbanding of resources (Project Outputs)
> - the *How* : which are component works and activities (Processes)
>
> ENABLING PERFORMANCE (RELATIONSHIP)
>
> "Enabling Performance" covers the entire range of leadership, motivation, group processes, etc.
>
> Now we add on Process Management, Staff Empowerment etc.

We can call these the Technology and the Sociology of Management.

3.2. Earlier Experience with the Logical Framework Analysis

3 years earlier, in February 1997, we had used a Log Frame to communicate the project design and intent. After getting the project approved by our funding partners, LFA was largely forgotten. It was merely a means of communication. It did not go on to become an instrument to guide systematic implementation and monitoring of Activities and Results.

This time, we adopted LFA for our own internal development. Compelled by concerns for Sustainability, we consciously opted to introduce Management By Objectives and create a Result oriented management culture in order to responsibly prepare for ADATS withdrawal and ensure the sustainability of the Coolie Sangha.

3.3. Strategic Objectives

At the heart of any participatory management system is the Strategic Plan, developed through a participatory process. It is this plan that derives objectives from an analysis of the focal problem and the lower level problems. Ideological choices influence the making of unambiguous strategic plans with a definite bias towards a chosen caste-class, desired direction, style of functioning, etc.

We began by building our Problem Tree and Objective Tree. From this came out the 8 Objectives to which ADATS and the Coolie Sangha has committed itself to:

A. Coolies Take Control Over their own Lives
B. Political Presence of Coolie Sangha established
C. Coolie Women Strengthened
D. Coolie Children have Secure Future of their Choice
E. Survival Capacity of Member Coolie families Established
F. Sustainable Resource Use Practices Set In Place
G. Diversified Economic Development Initiated
H. Staff Capacity Developed

In April 2001, 7 months into the PME workshops, we finalised a 10 year Strategic Plan for ADATS and the Coolie Sangha.

4. PROCESS MANAGEMENT

4.1. The Next Step

After making a participative Strategic Plan, our emphasis was on the 4th row of the 4 x 4 Logframe – i.e. Activity Processes.

This was not easy. Even staunch evangelists of LFA admit that it says very little about Processes. Everyone is concerned at the poor implementation of projects, even in situations where sound strategies had been devised through Logical Framework concept planning.

Process management aids participative project monitoring, making sure the project achieves its goals. The basic tenet of Process Management is that it is not Strategies that deliver value to the customer, but well thought out Processes.

4.2. Only Process-centred Organisations can Produce Results

Without an explicit recognition of and emphasis on Processes, it is impossible to get Results. At the planning stage it is necessary to reflect on vision, mission, goals, objectives and project purpose. They serve to clarify intent and communicate the direction of efforts. But once

they are completely internalised and established at every level within the organisation, it is time to move on.

They need to be put on the back burner for 3-4 years till it is time to once again evaluate the relevance of goals and objectives and revisit the Project Purpose.[1]

4.3. Measuring Results

One of the important issues ADATS Staff internalised was that:

"What cannot be measured cannot be managed"

When this premise was conceded, the question, "What are we measuring?" followed. It was a short step from there to systematic listing of objectives with measurement criteria – i.e. the criteria for success.

Current and ongoing measurement of Results was something new in the management practices that we introduced at ADATS and the Coolie Sangha. This is not the same as quoting impressive achievements of the past. Nor is it a presentation of aggregated Results. It is the introduction of systems and procedures that measure the Results of each set of actions, *then and there*, *as and when* they are undertaken. And then using these same systems to let the Results speak for themselves.

The textbook describes the Outputs (Results) of an order fulfilment Process as (a) delivered goods, (b) satisfied customer, and (c) paid bill. It goes on to state that of the three, only Paid Bill need be considered as an indicator.

Management demands that in our work too, the key indicator needs be only Paid Bill.

- How many families declared their income, paid Sangha Tax and renewed Membership?
- How many Coolie Credit Fund borrowers returned their loans?

Instead we had, till very recently, glossed over these key indicators and spoken at length on the delicate intangible and ethereal impact of our work.

4.4. Activity Processes

A Process is a complete end-to-end set of activities that together creates value for the Customer. The difference between task and Process is the difference between part and whole. A task is a unit of work; a Process is a related group of tasks that together create a Result of value to the Customer.

Processes are sets of activities best described by their Beginning State and End State.

- The Coolie Credit Fund, for example, is a functional unit or department. It is not a Process.
  "Loan Request to *CCF Release"* and *"Utilisation* to *Rotation"* are descriptive names of Processes that the department ought to promote.

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[1] This does not mean that Logframes and Strategic planning can be forgotten. We should be careful not to confuse strategy with operational effectiveness. Even business is very cautious on this point. Michael E. Porter, in the Harvard Business Review, says:

"The quest for productivity, quality and speed has spawned a remarkable number of management tools and techniques: total quality management, benchmarking, time-based competition, outsourcing, partnering, reengineering, change management. Although the resulting operational improvements have often been dramatic, many companies have been frustrated by their inability to translate those gains into sustainable profitability. And bit by bit, almost imperceptibly, management tools have taken the place of strategy.

"Competitive strategy is about being different. It means deliberately choosing a different set of activities to deliver a unique mix of value."

- Similarly, Children's Programme is not a Process.
  "School Enrolment to *Scholarship Support"* and *"Retention* to *Performance"* are Processes that can be implemented, monitored and measured.

4.5.   Process Centring

Being a lean organisations with a flat structure, Process-centeredness turned out to be a natural way of working. The next logical steps in our organisational evolution was:

- Toning down on the rhetoric
- Drastically reducing the role of personalities
- Recognising major Processes
- Learning to better manage them.

The 3 steps for Process-centring our work were:

- Recognising and naming our Processes, without fooling ourselves by simply re-labelling existing functional units (departments)
- Making everyone in the organisation aware of these Processes and their importance to the total effort
- Developing Process measurement systems and linking them to appropriate compensation packages
  Digitisation was a vital and essential tool in this regard

4.6.   Customer Centricity

Centring attention on the Customer, on the other hand, was neither easy nor natural.

- We had to deliberately remove pretentious halos from above our heads, and stop looking at the poor as our "beneficiaries".
- Development NGOs have 2 sets of customers they need to satisfy – the people for whom the NGO ought to deliver goods and services, and an entirely different lot of people who pay for these services.
  We call them Primary and Secondary Stakeholders, and make a shrewd choice as to which set of customers we prefer to keep satisfied.

It has taken us 2 whole years to convince ourselves that, since we are being paid to deliver goods and services, Member Coolie families are our Customers.

4.7.   ADATS/Coolie Sangha Process Map

It is cardinal to remember that a Process Map is not the same as an organisational chart. Processes are not new names for old departments. Processes are those sets of activities that produce Outputs which have value for the Customers/Primary Stakeholders – i.e. Member Coolie families. Customers are not overtly concerned with how the organisation is set up or it's hierarchy. In fact they are not concerned with the Process Map either. They are concerned *only* with Outputs than can be delivered by various Processes.

It is equally important not to project our ideological convictions in a Process Map. Our professed concerns with gender and environment, for example, are not Outputs. Very concrete Results that we pursue in order to translate these concerns are.

"Empowering the Girl Child" and *"Inculcating Fiscal Discipline"* are not Results. They are Objectives. *"School Retention & Performance"* and *"Utilisation & Rotation"* are concrete Results.

ADATS Staff and Coolie Sangha functionaries were asked to enumerate the Outputs of our effort. Though their answers largely coincided with Project Objectives defined in our 10 year Strategic Plan, this exercise was uninfluenced by the Strategic Plan.

6 Major Processes were identified as current to the project effort:

- Income Declaration *to* Tax Paid Membership & Functional Unity
- Baseline Making *to* Problem Solving
- Land Holding Surveys *to* DLDP Works & Good Crops
- CCF Loan Requests *to* Utilisation & Rotation
- Identification of Single Women *to* Utilisation & Rotation
- School Enrolment *to* Retention & Performance

Another 3 Support Processes were also identified:

- Strategic Plan *to* Total Acceptance
- Data Capture *to* Informative Reports
- Remittances *to* Financial Reports

Placing the boxes onto a Process Map took time and needed much shuffling/rewording. It was finally decided to split the Major Processes into 2 levels, and embed the superior (sub) Processes within the Customers/Primary Stakeholders:

- Relatively simple and straightforward efforts made by ADATS Staff resulted in *Efficiency*, and
- Far more complex efforts undertaken by elected Coolie Sangha functionaries, resulted in *Effectiveness*.

The Primary Stakeholders themselves were embedded within the larger group of potential Customers − i.e. Normal Member families from functioning CSUs were embedded within the total of all Normal and Suspended/Cancelled Coolie families from functioning and dropped out village CSUs.

ADATS/COOLIE SANGHA PROCESS MAP

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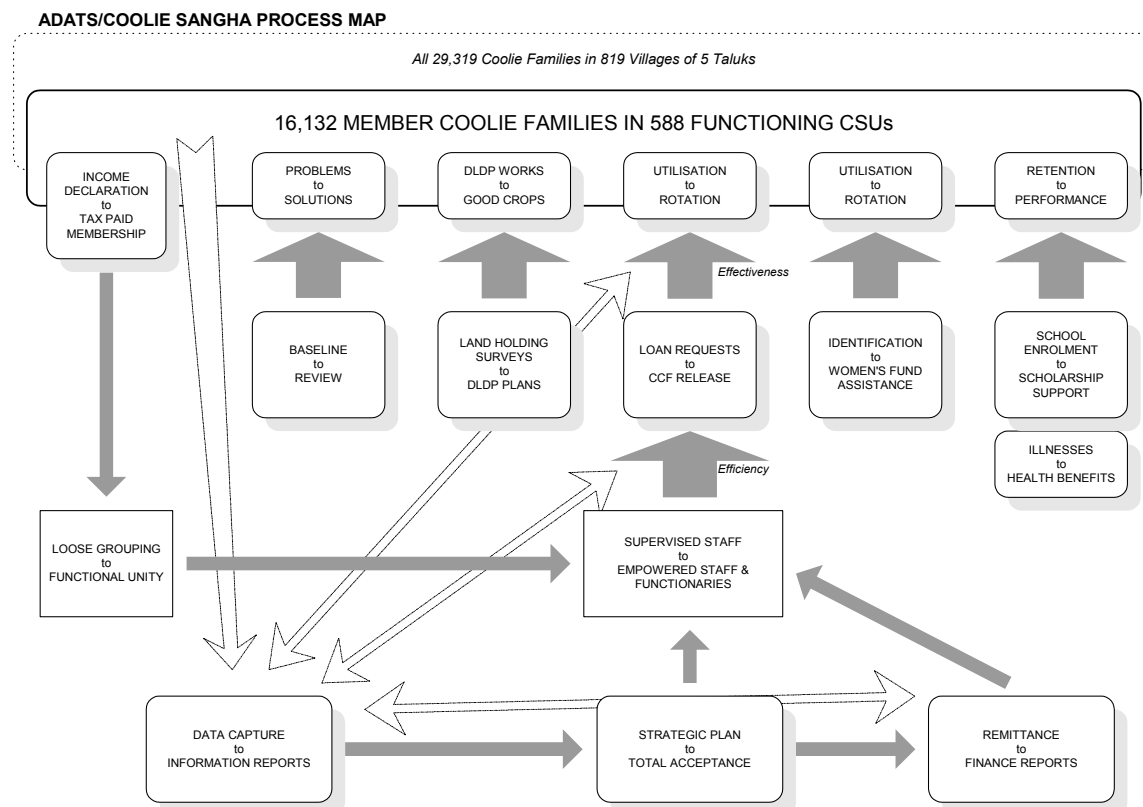
4.7.   Sub Processes

Only after creating this larger framework were we able to explode each box and look at individual sub processes. This is a huge and ongoing exercise involving Field Staff and Coolie Sangha functionaries.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to go into many more exciting experiences at ADATS and the Coolie Sangha:

- Process Reengineering & Digitization
- Redefining Work – Process Owners & Coaches
- Performance Appraisal & Compensation
- Process Monitoring (as different from performance measurement)
- Redefining day-to-day Life Activities as Development Processes & Baseline Surveys

5.   THE CREATION OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

To equip ADATS and the Coolie Sangha in our struggle against social oppression, we have been consciously creating various types of capital. These include Natural Capital, Human Capital, Physical or Produced Capital and Social Capital. Of all these, we consider that our stock of Social Capital has become our greatest asset.

> *Social capital refers to the internal social and cultural coherence of society, the norms and values that govern interactions among people and the institutions in which they are embedded. Social capital is the glue that holds societies together and without which there can be no economic growth or human well-being.*[2]

Social Capital is about the most vital components in a survival strategy of the rural poor. It creates contacts and networks that provide the means to cope with every day living, as also dire emergencies. It creates the appropriate form of cohesiveness needed for cooperation.

When wider societal changes demand a partial abandonment of long established survival strategies, the rural poor's stock of social capital suddenly disappears. When creating new support mechanisms to cope with the changed political economy, this stock is not automatically replenished. It has to be recognised as such and consciously built up.

Establishing village level associations could well lead to a perfunctory and/or functional unity without any deeper bonding. The fact that the Coolie Sangha has accomplished far more is because of a conscious lifestyle choice made by the Coolies themselves.

12 years back, when the Coolie Sangha adopted the slogan *"Become Rich in 3 Years!"*, it was not an economic agenda *per se* that they adopted. Rather it was an attempt to create the social milieu in which future generations could enterprise – a means to create new survival strategies in the emerging market economy.

The establishment of structures, systems and discipline in the mass organisation (as opposed to a loose social work mode), setting up self-finance mechanisms, promoting ownership and authentic autonomy, an emphasis on internal rectification, the inclusion of an engendered agenda, the adoption of a feminist ideology, all go to the creation of a particular type of bonding which is consciously chosen to provide a precise form of mutual support.

Our stock of Social Capital is secure and working to improve the lives of poor Member Coolie families. It will take their struggle to a wider arena from where government policies and programmes can be influenced.

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[2] Mapping & Measuring Social Capital : A Conceptual and Empirical Study of Collective Action for Conserving and Developing Watersheds in Rajasthan, India, by Anirudh Krishna and Norman Uphoff
– The World Bank Social Development Family Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development Network; June 1999

It is in this light that we considered our earlier emphasis of the past decade to be perfectly valid. Present changes have to be seen as an evolutionary development. Accenting on management and economics is the natural continuum to our work with Coolie families, taking the effort to the next plane.