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DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT AS REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

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Abstract: This paper examines development management through the reflections of development managers themselves. They are seen to grapple with the global and local contexts that frame their actions; with operationalising their individual values and ethics about development; and with issues concerning inter-personal and inter-organisational relationships. The paper argues that such reflections potentially form the basis of transformations in learning and development practice. However, for this to happen development managers have to embed their reflections within their work, and conceptualise their relations with other stakeholders beyond operational management challenges towards joint learning opportunities. Copyright © 2006 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Keywords: development management; reflective practice; learning; sensemaking; stakeholder participation

1 INTRODUCTION

This paper is about how development managers make sense of their jobs. It takes as its starting point the agency-centred definition of Thomas (1996) where development management is a multi-actor field of practice associated with deliberate action for development, while also drawing on approaches such as those of Brinkerhoff and Coston (1999), Cooke (2001, 2003, 2004) and Edwards and Fowler (2002).

The paper analyses development manager reflections as espoused in University Masters' projects in the subject area.¹ It argues that the motivation to reflect consciously on the

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¹This refers to the Development management Project (Module code TU874) which gives post-graduate (MSc) students on the Open University's distance-learning programme Global Development management (GDM) a chance to integrate their personal experiences of development management with what they have learnt from the programme. The project is a report of about 10 000 words submitted in the final year. Further details of GDM programme are available on <http://gdm.open.ac.uk>.

practice of development management, that has created the data presented here, also demonstrates the potential for re-framing development management in terms of learning and communities of practice (Wenger, 1998, Wenger *et al.*, 2000). In turn this can help meet the challenges of context and ethics of development management that so concern the managers themselves.

The paper starts with a review of the main currents within the development management literature before going on to describe our study and findings. The paper ends with a discussion of development managers as potentially conscious agents of a process of change.

2 DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT AS PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION OR AS SOMETHING DISTINCT?

In the early 1960s, the term ‘development administration’ (as a ‘natural’ progression from ‘colonial administration’) was used to signify management of the developing world. Modernisation and industrialisation, which were seen as a way forward for developing countries, required administration. At the same time, the large bureaucratic legacies of colonial administration began to be influenced by western management techniques and a new version of ‘public administration’ emerged.

The mid-1970s saw a radical shift where ‘administration’ became viewed as hindering rather than helping progress. Top heavy, bureaucratic ‘administration’ itself began to be regarded part of the economic and political crisis that was looming in many developing countries. By the 1980s, as ideas of ‘bottom-up’ participatory approaches started to take hold,² the term ‘management’ became increasingly associated with development practice.

At the same time, dominant neo-liberal ideology encouraged what was perceived as superior private sector management practices in the public sector—a public sector that needed to be managed more efficiently and competitively within an overall context of rolling back the state. New development policies in Third World countries were also led by the need for efficiency of management in the hope of generating economic growth under World Bank ‘structural adjustment’ programmes. In both the developed and developing world these policies were labelled ‘New Public Management’ (NPM) (Gow and Dufour, 2000).

As Clarke (1994, p 2–5) suggests, ‘Thus “development management” rose in the 80s against these contrasting backgrounds, involving a range of external and internal influences and vastly different concepts of management, with only a thin area of common language and practice’.³

In these circumstances it is hardly surprising that development management has become a much debated concept. This debate has sharpened from the mid-1990s and into the 21st century, where the discussion over the conceptual boundaries of ‘development management’ has been between (a) those who consider it to be about ‘development’ which requires something distinct; and (b) those who maintain it is still about public administration. Below we explore these two contrasting views.

²Led by Chambers’ (19740) classic *Managing Rural Development*.

³This and the preceding three paragraphs rely heavily on Ron Clarke’s (Institute of Development Policy and Management, University of Manchester) summary of ‘The emergence of development management’ for course TU870 Capacities for Managing Development Box 3. p 25–26, GDM Programme, The Open University.

2.1 'Management for Development' or 'Management of Development'

In keeping with contention (a) above, Thomas (1996) suggests that development management is distinctive in the sense that it is 'counter to the idea that management principles are universal', and because it involves intervention that is essentially about deliberate effort towards progress and social change. It is thus different from conventional management in that it extends beyond internal, organisational goals towards meeting external social goals (such as sustainable development). Such wide and challenging aims can only be achieved through mobilisation and coordination of resources from multiple sources, each having its own goals, values and interests. In turn, it becomes necessary for development managers to enter into inter-organisational negotiation and brokering in order to maximise resources and steer through this inherently conflictual landscape.

In a later paper, Thomas (1999) develops his original 1996 ideas, arguing that it is not merely the nature of the task that makes development management distinctive, but a particular *orientation* towards progressive change, that is not just getting the job done but the way it is done (which for Thomas means ways which promote 'the ideal of enabling all human beings to realise their full capacity'). This formulation represents a normative view of development management and places an even greater emphasis on values and value conflicts between agencies over what constitutes progressive change. He labels it 'management for development', as opposed to his earlier characterisation which he calls 'management of development', although he also concedes that it is an ideal rather than a description of what actually takes place.

In contrast with Thomas' agency-centred approach, and in keeping with contention (b) above, Cooke (2001) argues from a historical perspective that development management is actually development administration that has evolved from colonial administration. In this (*ibid.* p2), he draws on Said's (1994, p8) argument that imperialism and colonialism perpetuate through 'forms of knowledge affiliated with domination' arguing that development management is one such 'form' which filters through Northern institutions and organisations. Rather than 'development management', Cooke therefore prefers the term 'development administration and management' or 'DAM'.

In a later paper, Cooke (2003) develops his argument in the context of one of the defining approaches to development management signalled by Thomas (1999)—that of participation—by pointing out its legacy in the action research approaches of indirect colonial rule. He also notes that indirect rule contained a strong capacity building element, again one of the key features of Thomas' view of development management as management for development.

In the same paper, Cooke also examines the World Bank/IMF language that insists on country ownership of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and Comprehensive Development Frameworks (CDFs) that these agencies promote in aid-recipient countries. Rather than being empowering (one of the aims of Thomas), Cooke contends that, like its colonial antecedents, country participation in these processes is a manipulation of values and beliefs. Elsewhere (Cooke, 2004) he draws on a study by [Marshall^{Q2}](#) and Woodroffe (2001) to point out the homogeneity of PRSPs across a range of countries, despite their different histories and characteristics, where each one amounts to an extensive neo-liberal reform package in line with World Bank/IMF agendas.

It might seem from the above accounts that Cooke and Thomas are diametrically opposed. It appears to us, however, that they are referring to different things. For Cooke, development (administration and) management is distinctive because it takes as its subject,

not the organisation (which is assumed generally in management), but developing countries themselves. And, whilst management assumes that its primary subjects are situated within modernity, DAM assumes that its primary subjects (developing countries being managed) have yet to achieve modernity. He concludes therefore that DAM is another way of saying that 'Third World' countries require modernisation (neo-liberal modernity) (Cooke, 2004).

Thomas, however, is not so specific about the focus of development management. Rather, he implies that it takes place at a range of scales, from the very local to the international. What is distinctive for him (Thomas, 1996, 1999, 2001) is the inter-organisational at whatever scale, because of the multitude of agencies doing development, none of whom have monolithic power to wholly set agendas or determine outcomes. He (Thomas, 2001) recognises that uniformity and control are often exercised on poor countries by multilateral agencies, but he also points to the possibility of value-based agency to change things, including, for example agency that employs radical conceptions of participation. In this sense, continuities with the past there may be, but that does not mean that they wholly determine the present. His and Cooke's accounts are not therefore mutually exclusive as long as one accepts that development management takes place at a range of scales, including but not exclusively that of the nation state, and that, because of conscious agency, continuity with the past is by no means the whole story, although it is an important aspect of it.

Echoes of both Cooke and Thomas can be found in a further account of development management that is provided by two international development consultants, Brinkerhoff and Coston (1999). Thus, like Cooke, they recognise the continuity from development administration. Unlike Cooke, however, they argue that development management has become qualitatively different, because in a globalised world which shares many common socio-economic, political and environment concerns, the methods and modes of public administration between the developed and developing world have become fuzzier. Thus, they continue, the trend has been away from a technocratic, universalist, public sector administrative model towards a context specific, politically infused, multi-sectoral, multi-organisational model (*ibid.*, p. 348–349). Echoing Thomas, they point to distinctive features such as participatory approaches, development management as values and a pro-poor focus. In a critique, Cooke (2004), however, argues that, unlike Thomas, their devotion to participation is essentially managerialist, where participation is used as a co-opting practice for management effectiveness. In this he points to Brinkerhoff and Coston's (1999) explicit reference to 'organisation development' and 'process consultation'. These are specific management approaches to participation where the overt purpose is to improve organisational effectiveness on management terms.

Away from these generalised accounts, no aspect of development management has been more studied than that of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), or more specifically, Non-Governmental Development Organisations (NGDOs). There is a pervasive argument (Howell and Pearce, 2001) that many such NGOs are participating with the state in a 'mainstream' neo-liberal project, promoting a 'responsible capitalism' (*ibid.*, p.17). In this Howell and Pearce are aligned with Cooke, but they also set up a dichotomy between this mainstream role and its 'alternative' where non-government actors are the kernel of 'strong publics' who actively contest and reframe the neo-liberal project through their active agency.

For NGDOs, Edwards and Fowler (2002 p. 3–4) suggest that a distinctive development management might mean the 'typical mix of factors' that challenges managers, and how

these challenges might be different to those of managing other types of organisations. Their argument is that, whilst, like governments, NGOs are involved with issues in the public domain, unlike governments they have no public authority and continuously need to justify their voluntary or self-chosen presence and 'calling'. NGOs can draw neither on financial capital available to businesses, nor on the power of political enforcement that a state can exercise. They therefore have little choice but to build on the quality of their engagement with citizens to achieve organisational legitimacy and effectiveness.

Like Thomas, Edwards and Fowler argue that NGOs have wider organisational and development goals that are subject to forces outside their control. The types of organisational outputs that may be useful in business management thus do not act as a real guide to NGOs' achievements who in fact continually need to reconstruct performance measures taking into account views from a variety of stakeholders. NGO resources also do not come directly from taxpayers or customers. NGOs need to justify their existence by negotiating with resource providers,⁴ which in turn ties them directly into the world of fashion and procedures, policies and priorities of aid givers. With little or no purchasing power, NGOs work with the poorest strata of society, often seen as 'neutral' but at the same time posing a threat to (some) governments as 'allies of the poor'. Finally, NGOs are distinct in that they rely on self-motivation and value-based processes to organisational change rather than hierarchical or financial rewards offered by businesses. This suggests in turn that practitioners need to be led strongly by values and ethics, where, following Qizilbash (1996), ethical development combines prudential values concerning provision of basic necessities, positive freedoms and intellectual and physical capacities, with moral values such as altruism and kindness.⁵

These inter-related concerns are echoed in Thomas (2000), where he asks questions about the right of agencies to intervene on behalf of others—the legitimacy of their claimed trusteeship—and the means by which they keep aligned with those they are developing (i.e. their accountability). Thus, taking stock of these authors, we might conclude that Thomas and Edwards/Fowler are concerned with development managers as agents of change, whereas Cooke is primarily interested in development management as continuation of a historical process of subordination.

None of the authors cited, however, examines an actor perspective *per se*, which would enable comparison between the sense they make of development management with the sense that development managers themselves make. It is such an actor perspective that this paper seeks to capture, not to prove or disprove any of the authors above, but to nuance their analyses and try to bring them together. Note, however, that this is not a study of what development managers do (which would require observing them in their work, examining their diaries and so forth), but of their own reflections on what they do. In terms of the general management literature, it thus relates to retrospective 'sensemaking' (e.g. Weick, 1995, 2001) rather than Mintzberg's (1973) classic 'The nature of managerial work' (new edition Mintzberg, 1980).

⁴Who of course themselves may obtain their resources more directly from taxpayers.

⁵Qizilbash (1996) argues that 'development' is much more than economic prosperity. It is also about the quality of human lives or human well-being consistent with the demands of social justice and freedom. However, he also argues that whilst development encompasses 'prudential values' of basic necessities, intellectual and physical capacities, positive and negative freedoms, enjoyment, participation in social life, capabilities and so on, it takes place within the 'backdrop' of societal norms and moral values (such as altruism, kindness, courage). How societies and individuals view these values influences how freedoms are exercised, and how individuals and agencies are obliged to protect those freedoms and allow development 'to happen'. 'Ethical development' therefore takes account of both 'prudential' and moral values.

We start in Section 3 below by describing our unusual methodology⁶—using student MSc dissertations on development management as a source of rich data. Section 4 then presents our findings and analysis. Section 5 provides a conclusion where we tentatively suggest a different conceptualisation of development management.

3 METHODOLOGY: USING MASTERS' DISSERTATIONS ON DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT AS DATA

In order to examine how development management is perceived by those who do the job, we examined 62 Masters' projects from students, who were overwhelmingly practitioners, on the taught part-time MSc Programme in Development Management at the UK Open University. The projects represented all those arising from alternate six-monthly presentations of the final compulsory project course since its inception in 1998 (see Footnote 1). Because the overall aim of this project is for students to reflect on (or an aspect of) their work as development managers, taken together, they provide a rich source of practitioner perspectives.

We do not, however, claim that the sample in the study comprises a representative spread of development managers. In fact, it could be argued that the sample is atypical in that it is derived from an 'avant-garde' who have chosen to study, alongside their heavy work and family commitments—and they pay fees to do this! There is then already a commitment and motivation to learn and reflect on learning. Moreover, their views cannot be assumed to be uninfluenced by academic development management discourses—they are after all learning about these in their studies. This is not necessarily a problem for this study in that the Development Management Programme explicitly requires students critically to compare espoused theory of development management with their own practices. No development manager, whether studying on a Development Management Programme or not, can be immune from these discourses, and part of their own sense of what they do arises from their interaction with them.

The sample is atypical in other ways. For example, 90 per cent of students either originated or had personal or work links with the 'north', with only 10 per cent having similar pointers for the 'south'. Although students were involved with development management in various capacities as project managers, project staff, volunteers, activists, most were associated with NGO work, with a minority in the public sector and an even smaller minority in the private sector. Some projects also linked to all three sectors. None of the students in our sample, however, were in senior policy positions at national level which is unsurprising given that such people would be unlikely to be at the stage of their career where they need a Masters qualification. Thus, in general, the sample represents an (albeit large) sub-set of development managers who are concerned with practice rather than policy.

⁶Unusual but arguably not unique, as the following examples that each bear some relation to development management illustrate: Case and Selvey^{Q3}'s (2003) use of students' work on a Master's in International Management as data; and the use of first person accounts in Perkins (2004) and Kothari^{Q4} (2005). (Perkins' is a personal account of his work as an 'economic hit man' while on the payroll of a US-based international consulting firm. Kothari uses as data reflections by British ex-colonial officers on the professionalisation of development since decolonisation.)

While overall the projects reflected an urban bias there was a good spread of development arenas that included education and training, health, agriculture and rural development, water, forestry, credit and finance, housing and squatter settlements, refugees and technical cooperation.

Despite the atypicality of our sample, we contend that the study is revelatory in that it suggests what development management across a range of development arenas can be made to be, given conscious motivation for reflection and learning. As the main aim of this study was to gain knowledge of their views as practitioners, we looked carefully at their critique of the development work they were involved in, their comments on 'development' as a whole, and where they saw themselves fitting into this.

In order to create a framework for analysis, an initial sample of 10 projects (selected randomly from the main sample) was analysed separately by the authors plus a fourth member of academic staff. The analytical categories were agreed through joint comparison of our initial analyses. The whole sample was then analysed according to these categories, there being a further interim meeting of the research team about halfway through the process to check that they were indeed relevant and that important aspects of the data were not being missed. This iterative process helped ensure that the data analysed below are representative of the sample and not simply selected to make a pre-determined case. The sub-headings and sub-sub-headings in Section 4 below represent the categories that were used in the final analysis.

4 DATA ANALYSIS: STUDENT REFLECTIONS ON DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT

Unsurprisingly the titles and substance of the projects mostly concerned [practice^{Q5}](#).⁷ For instance, they reflected on the limitations and merits of management tools and techniques for dealing with the complexity of their operations, the best ways of practising in differing sectors and arenas of work, the best ways of working within and around broad institutional contexts, and the best ways to bring about organisational change. Students were also concerned with deeper issues of the relationship between development projects and their 'clients', and the relationship with other actors. In turn, these reflections raised uncomfortable questions about legitimacy, ethics and entitlement to practice and intervene. All of these areas are elaborated upon below.

Q5

4.1 Development Intervention as Working within Global, Local and Historical Contexts

There was an overwhelming recognition that context and its history, from local to global scales, is a major influence on what is and can be done in terms of development

⁷The Open University is obliged to guard the confidentiality of these projects. Thus we cannot name any specific projects here as examples. Nor can we identify specific students. All words in double quotes and italics (e.g. "italics") are, however, taken directly from various projects in the sample and are attributed to students and not the authors of this paper.

management. Fundamentally this recognition represented a concern with the extent to which current structures, and processes that have led to these structures, define development management, thus echoing Cooke's analysis reported in Section 2.

Hence, there appeared to be a general (even if implicit) recognition that development projects are located within an overall context of global capitalism. Twenty-four per cent of projects specifically reflected on the meaning of this. Poverty, particularly gendered and class poverty, was thus discussed in relation to political and economic relations of global (and local) capitalism. Equally the subordinate position of refugees and their unequal participation in paid work was placed within questions of class and global capitalist labour market organisation.

Several students explicitly discussed the constraints of, to quote one, "*working within capitalism*" as "*a fact of life*", and offered a critique of the state's role in differing ways. For example, there was a critique of statism within capitalist development, or the role of the state as a mediator of markets in relation to equity. Also, working "*within capitalism*", they argued, often requires doing development alongside or with the help (e.g. financial help) of large enterprises such as Trans National Corporations (TNCs). Whilst both TNC as well as any other agency (such as an NGO) intervention may be regarded by the state as enhancing development, their diverse motives and interests are not recognised or monitored by the state. This in turn generates tension between various development agencies and the state.

Whilst recognising the global, the local context where intervention is carried out was even more immediately important to students. Thus 50 per cent reflected on (although not always explicitly) the local processes involved in development practice, 52 per cent showed a general awareness of local context (e.g. cultural values), whilst 24 per cent considered local debates (as with local feelings voiced on "*immigrants*") as a way to progress.

Some students considered structural challenges within historical contexts of specific countries. Examples included a consideration of emigration to Ireland in exploring recent migration, or an exploration of Zimbabwe's political and economic history in discussing the root causes of poverty. In the latter example, distrust between NGOs and governments was thus placed within historical colonial and post-colonial suspicions.

Finally and related to all the above, intervention was also understood through the history of specific discourses and institutional development, for example, the coming of Bretton Woods, and the evolution of the environmental or partnership discourses, and that of development management and its tools and techniques.

4.2 Development Management Practice: Doing the Right Thing and Doing it Right

The previous subsection suggests that development managers generally accept that the global is necessarily important, but that their immediate concern is with the local where they carry out the practice, and where they can possibly make an impact if they "*do it right*". For the majority (60 per cent), "*doing it right*" involved the recognition that development management provides an opportunity to intervene at various stages in order to bring about change. In turn, this generated many personal challenges and self-introspection.

Enmeshed with “*doing it right*”, however, most students also discussed explicitly their underlying goals, which can be characterised as ‘doing the right thing’, and it is this aspect we examine first in this subsection.

4.2.1 *Doing the right thing: poverty reduction, sustainable development, empowerment and capacity building*

Poverty reduction was regarded as the main underlying goal of most development intervention, and at least 52 per cent of projects overtly stated this. Whilst some thought was given to immediate local action (such as tackling river pollution to improve livelihoods or relief aid action), many considered sustainable development as the way forward for the future. Self-reliance was seen as important, particularly in view of state cutbacks on public expenditure and empowerment as the key to poverty reduction. Thus, whilst empowerment/disempowerment appeared to be a general undercurrent in most of the projects, 58 per cent discussed it explicitly, and a few at some length.

Empowerment for these students not only referred to the bettering of material situations and enabling people to challenge their circumstances, but also as gaining individual, internal strength through engendering religious and moral beliefs (as with church-led projects or through organisations such as the World Scout Movement). To quote two more students, “*bringing on board the disadvantaged*” and “*instilling greater confidence*”, was seen as an ultimate goal and an important process of legitimising development intervention and of “*being there*”. And, in line with Thomas’ notion of management *for* development (Section 2), this could only happen if managers managed correctly and appropriately, remaining constantly sensitive to local situations. Incorrectly planned, researched, delivered intervention⁸ could disempower and possibly lead to bigger problems for local situations that would remain once a given development project had come to an end. Interestingly, though, the discussion on empowerment did not generate any suggestions for major structural challenges. Rather the way to empowerment is sought within existing structures.

Capacity building (where 55 per cent of students made overt comment) as a process towards organisational sustainability was a strong concern. It was argued that capacity building requires creative management and organisational skills. It cannot be imposed from the outside, but is better done from the inside through training and education as well as an ability to negotiate, communicate and develop alliances so that “*civil society can advocate alongside donors*”. Skill-sharing and improved use of resources and infrastructure can help generate change if managers are inspired enough. Good development intervention therefore requires good development management.

4.2.2 *Doing it right: enhancing performance, learning, ethics and tools*

Enhancing performance was seen as closely related to empowerment and capacity building. This requires self-evaluation and learning through reflection of one’s own successes and mistakes. Formalised evaluation was perceived, however, as often being difficult because of a (sometimes) lack of clear, published guidelines and of needing to move from a “*piecemeal to a more holistic approach*” so that evaluation is carried out continuously and consistently rather than on certain selective processes of the development

⁸As discussed further on, some development management tools are considered to be disempowering for both practitioners and others involved in development projects.

project. Students also reflected on accountability and transparency as a way towards improving and generating organisational change, as was evident in 11 per cent of project titles.

Learning itself was often articulated as the key to effective management, with 58 per cent making explicit reference. Learning was also seen as essential in bringing about organisational change. Students made a variety of arguments on how to tap into learning, ranging from those looking to seek out indigenous knowledge, to innovatory and institution-led learning.

A concern with ethics in relation to equity and social justice played a major part in analysing the practice of development management, explicitly so for 53 per cent of projects. One student wrote that “*ethical stance*” comprises “*challenging existing practices, leading to empowerment*”. Another project argued that “*ethics should be the primary aim (of development management)*”. As with Qizilbash (1996), quoted in Section 2, it would appear that these students as practitioners also view development as shaped generally by central moral values and concerns.

However, it is interesting that whilst the projects were struggling to find ways of dealing with ethical issues involved in various processes of development management (e.g., with “*moral values*” of using development management tools and techniques, participation with indigenous partners, internal ethics of organisations), only two focused on placing these in an overall context of global and local relations of poverty.⁹ In particular, all but these two students shied away from discussing their ethics in relation to capitalism (possibly feeling ill-equipped to deal with the complexity of the relation). Instead they grappled with everyday ethical issues within their immediate context, attempting to deal with issues such as how to listen to clients, how to interpret correctly local cultural norms and values and ask questions regarding their roles and the legitimacy of working as a northern NGO in poor countries. So whilst ethics of intervention and management were seen as one project suggested as “*central to the capacities and sustainability of an NGO and its impact on social development*”, the challenge remains localised. The emphasis on ethics is thus very much at a local scale, where it is often tied to (respect for) local context as discussed in Subsection 4.1.

As tools and techniques are explored in various guises throughout the taught programme, it can only be expected that a large proportion of students (77 per cent) reflected on the practice and effectiveness of these for their own work. The reflections included tools and techniques that are borrowed from conventional management approaches (e.g. log frames, decision-making frameworks, systems techniques, negotiating skills, modelling, mapping and evaluation). The project titles suggested, however, that management approaches that have evolved from a developmental discourse (e.g. participatory development, community involvement, rights-based approaches, action-research) are favoured more.

In fact, those students who have drawn on conventional management approaches appeared fairly critical of tools and techniques in that these are something they are “*obliged to do*”, and as “*what practitioners do*” or something that practitioners “*should do*”, to take three comments. They were seen as useful, but only if approached critically. Good practice was seen as one student put it, as “*very much a matter of getting intervention right with good management style*”, which requires more than conventional management tools and techniques.

⁹One stated that ‘*Mind-set changes tend to be targeted at the disadvantaged, not the oppressors*’.

4.3 Managing Development on Behalf of Others

A significant number (50 per cent) of students took a step back and reflected critically on their role in ‘doing’ development on behalf of others—or their right to attempt to bring about change. It was argued that development management requires *some* acting on behalf of others, but it has to be done carefully and selectively, with a balance between a paternalistic approach and the ‘do-nothing’ view that development will happen ‘naturally’.

Managing development on behalf of others also leads to the question of the relationship between managers and those “*being done to*”. The projects suggested that the students, as practitioners, are involved in a variety of complex and strategic interventions related to poverty situations. Examples included relief and humanitarian intervention in conflict devastated economies, institutional and agency reforms in politically sensitive countries, poverty-alleviation strategies of social enterprise and commercialisation, and micro-credit lending and intervention in housing, health and education services. Whereas profit motivated management styles may view poor people as clients with lesser spending power or as cheap labour, the projects suggested that development managers view poor people as ‘clients’ in another sense. Thus whilst both types of managers may want to find out about their ‘clients’, development managers want to go much further than ‘customer fact finding’. They want their clients to take joint ownership, be part of designing solutions, to be inside, not outside. It is only in this way that effective interventions, accountability and legitimacy can be realised. Unlike firm–customer interaction, there is no easy exit for development ‘clients’. This deep concern with ‘clients’ was reflected directly by 26 per cent of project titles alone, and implicitly in the content of many others.

Thus only 13 per cent of projects thought that their management style was about “*control*” as some students expressed it. However, effort was made to clarify that this “*control*” was really about “*sometimes not meaning to control*”, that is that management required some leadership, economic checks and budget control but needed to be delivered via reflexive practices with respect to clients. More students favoured enabling (31 per cent) and reflexive (36 per cent) management styles which they felt, to quote one, requires “*concern with participation and listening*” and an ability to empower. Therefore, as another student argued, development management is about “*day-to-day [management]) but based on the inter-relation of dynamic skills and political environment*”.

4.4 Beyond the Clients: Relationships with Other Actors

A majority (71 per cent) of students were involved with multi-agency development intervention. In terms of partnership types, 63 per cent of projects (of the 71 per cent) concerned North/South, 16 per cent North/North, 21 per cent South/South and none concerned South/North.¹⁰ Although still a minority, there was, therefore, a significant percentage that focused on North/North and South/South partnerships, recognising that the

¹⁰Here the first category is the lead financial and imitative provider, and the second where projects are located. For example, in North/South partnership, the lead funding and imitative is coming from northern countries for projects based in southern countries. Southern partnerships are at a local level. Whereas South/North should be read as lead finance and imitative coming from the South for projects based in the North.

geography of development no longer concerns solely the South or what the North does to/for the South.¹¹ Analysis, such as that of Cooke in Section 2, that focuses on development management as management of the Third World needs therefore to be qualified.

A wide variety of views were expressed on who the key agents of change are, depending on the particulars of the development intervention being discussed. Key agents included institutions and their management personnel, professionals, private firms and their directors, consultants, donors, local authorities, local communities, grassroots organisations, individuals and student practitioners themselves. Similarly, projects (66 per cent) considered who the key stakeholders are. Again, a whole variety was on offer, but in the main unsurprisingly these were seen “*ultimately those being done to*”, “*active and passive stakeholders. . . those affecting and those affected by decisions*”. How to practise with/around these actors and stakeholders was an important concern.

A significant number of projects (39 per cent) showed a concern (even if implied) over the relationship of the communities with whom they were working and the state. Often this relationship was seen as tense, and questions were asked particularly about state commitment, state capacity and the power it holds over communities.¹² Most expressed the wish to see better relations between states and communities, and that the state should (to quote one project) attempt to “*reduce the space between national governments and communities*” through collaboration and policy changes. Two projects did, however, see the state as benevolent, and its work with communities as undervalued.

The nature of the relationship between donor and recipient was another important area of concern, directly so for 63 per cent of projects. Whilst there was some indication that the relationship may be “*fair*” and workable, it was argued that it has to be understood within an overall context of unequal power between donors and recipients that leads to operational problems within the latter. Nevertheless, this can be challenged and changed through better representation in operational processes of accountability, transparency and organisational adjustments.

Power was a strong theme when discussing relationships, explicitly referred to in 36 per cent of projects. Power was seen as skewed in favour of “*purse string holders*” in relation to everybody else. More specifically power was variously used to describe the relationship between multi-national/international and national organisations, the state/state apparatus (such as the military) and civil society, men and women, and knowledge guardians and society in general. In fact, the whole process of development management was regarded by a few students as generating skewed power relationships. While recognising the obvious realities of power relations, many reflected on the possibilities for more horizontal relationships with the full range of stakeholders.

4.5 End Result Expectations

In spite of the many challenges that development interventions bring, the students in this study overwhelmingly (89 per cent) wanted to achieve their goals even though sometimes they appeared to be asking too much of themselves. Like most managers they want to see results! Towards this end, students hoped to bring change to internal and external

¹¹See for instance McGrew (2000) p. 351–352.

¹²This is particularly the concern of development projects involved with political struggle, such as issues of human rights, asylum seekers and slum dwellers.

organisational practices, enable and empower marginalized groups and communities and facilitate long-term sustainable development. Specific examples of student expectations included: “*making systems to assess organisational legitimacy—a tool for thinking*”, “*defining strategies for (management) boards*”, instigating practical change (e.g. field-testing prototype power-generating technology), empowering disadvantaged groups to accomplish better employment opportunities and enabling communities to become controllers of processes for achieving larger goals of sustainability

5 CONCLUSIONS

The data suggest that these students (as practising development managers) face an enormous challenge in making things happen in line with deep personal and organisational values of equity and social justice while being buffeted by much wider forces.

In one way or another their work is guided by foreign agendas and trends on what development ought to be, including the small percentage of students who worked with private firms. This is reflected at many stages throughout the development intervention process: from the onset when practitioners put in funding applications, to the end when they have to evaluate outcomes of development projects. Their struggle is firstly with foreign assistance agendas that are forever changing. For instance, from demands to incorporate gender awareness or environmental sustainability at one time, the current emphasis is on socio-political trends such as democratisation, social cohesion, civil society participation and advocacy. Development practitioners are often able to reel off the trend or what one student called the “*flavour of the month*”, but this lack of clearly defined or constant agendas means that in practice, the end expectations are very high and sometimes unrealistic.

Practitioners are thus constantly searching for the best ways to practise in demanding (local through to global) contexts, critically adapting tools and seeking horizontal engagement with a diverse array of other stakeholders. As such they might be described as engaging in a continual process of sensemaking (Weick, 1995), retrospectively structuring their lived experience (ibid., p24) as a route to better decisions (ibid. p185).

They are also dealing with difficulties of managing small projects within agendas that are perhaps meant for larger organisations. This is equally the case with tools and techniques of management that they are encouraged/expected to use. For instance, they struggle with performance assessment and other evaluation techniques. Maybe this is because principles of evaluation often still largely revolve around the “*true*” “*objective*” “*formal (technical, bureaucratic) rationality*” linked to indicators of “*effectiveness*” and “*efficiency*”. Development evaluation, however, needs to draw on, as Dale (1998, p. 33–38) suggests, ‘substantive (value) rationality’ which includes assessment of the worthiness, value and end objectives of development.

Management tools and techniques are therefore used often begrudgingly, but with a realisation among the managers that they must do their best to develop good practice otherwise development intervention will be ineffective, with possible negative results for the poor. It is interesting that they are drawn more positively towards tools and techniques that involve stakeholder participation and are thus closely associated with development studies. These are management tools and techniques, nevertheless, in that they are an integral part of getting the job done. Development management is thus distinctive partly because the job is distinctive.

Nor is the job easy. This quote from Crawford *et al.* (1999) well illustrates the problems:

“Clearly, even on the most ‘operational’ of days, these development managers are grappling with significant, and at times apparently overwhelming, questions. As one manager pointed out, mostly these diaries reveal the endless stream of ‘problems’ which bombard you in your daily work: ‘problems’ which you have to filter and resolve in some way. Thus most days of the development manager are about managing feeling about the bigger picture, in the face of one’s own limitations, at the same time as dealing with the day-to-day nitty-gritty (p 170).

On days like this (and there are so many), I am left thinking, how it is possible to suit or meet community needs, and to be acceptable to them, at the same time as trying to retain reputation from outsiders such as donors? Or are we just using such communities for our own learning...while poor villagers are left off helpless...with lots of semantic and sweeping statements.The list of catch-phrases includes participation, democratic process, working partnership, decentralisation. But does it end up with grassroots people with access to decision-making machinery...or...are they still dictated to by the facilitators? On a day like this you are faced with people’s immediate problems but have to conduct a PRA. You talk about flexibility but have to worry because your year’s schedule must be modified because the roads are inaccessible (p 173).”¹³

Multiple ownership also creates tension because of the value base of development intervention and the personal and ethical stance of the practitioner that might be in conflict with that of other stakeholders. Practitioners aim towards best ways of achieving empowerment, capacity building and long-term sustainability of development projects. They make a great effort to find best ways of enhancing learning, knowledge and skill-sharing by reflecting carefully on local culture, local histories, local discourses and socio-political contexts. A concern with ethics and values contributes in a major way to the distinctiveness of development management, not least of which is the propensity to reflect.

It is evident from these projects that the students thought hard about the broader contexts in which they work, the legitimacy of that work and the ways in which they operationalise it. Overall they took the opportunity to shift from what Giddens (1984) calls a ‘practical consciousness’ of routinised day-to-day activity to ‘discursive consciousness’ where they can engage in critical analysis of their task.

What is most significant for us, however, is that these project reports were in the end the work of individuals, showing a remarkable ability to reflect, but showing less confidence on how to move forward apart from highlighting specific instances of success. Yet their underlying concern with relationships and the fact that 58 per cent were explicitly concerned with learning/knowledge suggest such a process of moving forward through embedding their evident individual capability for reflective thinking into their everyday practice with others; or as Weick (1995, p 39) puts it, recognising that

¹³See also Ahmad (2002) who highlights the personal problems of job insecurity, financial hardships, accommodation difficulties, family relationships and professional problems in external relationships of those he calls ‘front-line southern fieldworkers’ based on his study of four rural NGOs in Bangladesh. Bergman (2003) offers insights into another type of front-line fieldworker, that is those involved with humanitarian aid for disasters, emergencies, conflict-affected zones and peace keeping. As is evident from their stories, many of these fieldworkers experience enormous personal problems including post-traumatic disorders in a similar way to soldiers who have witnessed brutality and devastation (*ibid*, p 15).

‘sensemaking is a social process. . . [where] . . . Conduct is contingent on the conduct of others’.

In other words, the process involves moving from individual reflection in a Masters’ course, beneficial as that may be, to collective reflection and construction of knowledge through their relationships. Such a shift, moreover, is at a different level from a formal concern with monitoring and evaluation in order to learn about a particular intervention performance, although it may draw from this activity. Rather, potentially it turns the fact of multi-agent relationships into a resource for a synergistic deeper learning about the purpose and practice of development management.

Some previous arguments, for example, Brinkerhoff and Coston (1999, p 13), whilst acknowledging the value of self-introspection, conclude that ‘development specialists have a history of disillusionment and self-criticism, and consequently, development management has suffered a chronic identity crisis’. Rather than leading to a chronic identity crisis, we would suggest that this self criticism and reflection, and the very fact that it occurs, has allowed the discipline to develop a distinct identity that embraces the absolute need to reflect on and deconstruct deeper meanings of values, ethics, power, culture.

The data indicate that the development managers of our study connect their reflection or sensemaking to better practice. They are active agents, going beyond interpretation of the past to using that interpretation to shape the future. Within this process their recurring concern with relationships supports the Thomas thesis that development management is a multi-actor field, although their parallel concern with the way context shapes what it can and cannot be also reflects Cooke’s more structural analysis.

Our analysis suggests, however, that Thomas’ pervasive metaphor (and that of Edwards and Fowler) that this is a field that demands careful *steering*, strategically and ultimately in relation to power dynamics between the actors, is limiting. In these circumstances development management as steering becomes synonymous with the management of these relations (Robinson *et al.*, 2000), and especially of the power differential, where negotiation and brokering is the most important skill a manager can possess. But power is one—albeit an important—aspect of relationships and of difference. Difference can mean other things and can, in particular, be a source of learning from and with each other,¹⁴ which in turn can be the ‘engine of practice’ (Wenger, 1998; Wenger *et al.*, 2000). In other words it is possible to conceptualise the field of development management actors as also a community—a community of practice (*ibid*). As with all communities, relationships in a community of practice and the flow of power have to be managed, where negotiation and brokering remains an important skill. By imagining it as a source of joint learning and knowledge construction, however, we can go much further where such a community can embody a ‘power with’ (Rowlands, 1995) each other, a collective *driver* for change.

Finally, conceptualising in this way builds on the normative notion of development management as management for development, a ‘particular kind of orientation, an orientation towards progressive change’ rather than just deliberate intervention tasks (Thomas, 1999). For us the ‘particular kind of orientation’ concerns learning and knowledge-building across organisations. Such a conceptualisation also provides an addendum to the study of effective learning through four Development Policy and Management Masters’ Degree Programmes (including the Open University Programme of our study) carried out by Johnson and Thomas (2004). A major focus of this study was the

¹⁴The idea that difference is a source of collective learning in relationships is developed by Johnson and Wilson (2006) in the context of relationships that are formally constituted as ‘partnerships’.

interaction of individual student learning through their studies with the learning of the organisations for which they work. This led the authors to speculate at the end of their paper about the potential of the inter-organisational: that 'communities of practice or learning communities that transcend organisations may lead to even more creative applications of learning and transformation'.

This is also our conclusion, but we would add that the major contribution of certainly the Open University Programme (we did not study the others) has been to make reflective practice *explicit*, and to some extent codified, among students who, prior to study, may well have been already tacit reflective practitioners. This, rather than fulfilling any specific learning outcomes of the Programme, we contend is the most important factor in enhancing the capacity of these student-practitioners to establish communities of practice across organisations, and to move from simply applying their knowledge gained as students to an encompassing learning and practice experience.

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