

# How; Trainees Learn : Its Implications fair Conducting Training in India

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*(The West Bengal State Co-operative Union is in the process of finalising its training calendar for 1985-86, In that context, this paper is presented to the trainers hoping that it will excite some re-thinking on the training methods we use in the Co-operative sector. Hopefully, the SOU might sponsor a pilot project for determining how our trainees learn. This would enable a thorough recasting of the entire training system in the field of Co-operation in West Bengal. This paper is limited in scope in so far as "it is based on the system, followed in the National Academy of Administration which trains the All India and Central Services Officers, It was submitted to the University of Manchester JJ. K. in connection with the postgraduate diploma course in Public Service Training 1982-83 )*

## Introduction

The way in which we train people seems to be determined significantly by our own beliefs about teaching. These beliefs, in turn, shape the natural training style of an individual trainer, and are themselves the result of the ways in which the trainer himself has learned; In this essay I propose to begin by taking a look at how I and some other trainers in the P. S. T. programme have learned, since it is our experience that our assumption and experiences regarding learning are apt to be extrapolated on to our trainees. Next I shall examine if there is any dissonance between these assumptions about how ray trainees learn and how they actually seem to learn as seen from the feedback we receive. From here, going on to the second part of the question, I shall attempt to find out the learning assumptions underlying the training system as it is being administered and conducted in my institute, the National Academy of Administration, India. If these assumptions

are found to differ materially from my findings regarding how our trainees actually learn, we will need to ask ourselves what the implications of this are.

## How some Trainers learn

It is useful to look at the significant learnings one has had by utilising a systemic table which breaks up the learning into components. In the course of a workshop held during the first term of the P. S, T. programme, the study fellows, comprising of trainers from India, Nepal, Thailand and Bangladesh numbering five in all, examined their significant learning experiences under four heads : the Event, the Effect (i. e. what was learned to the process (i. e what the learner was doing at that time) and the Feelings of the learner during that event. I am reproducing below the data generated by the five trainers, including myself. They are indicated by different alphabets :— (See P. IS)

What can we infer from this list of the significant learning experiences of five trainers from

different countries ? As far as sources of learning are concerned we can conclude that these are widely varied. More important they need not necessarily relate to the work situation. We can ignore the significance of the when we consider that the trainee giving these responses have been in government service from four to fifteen years. Unplanned life experiences, therefore, are seen to provide significant learning for trainers. These sources of learning feature as serials 4, 5 and 9 in the nine categories of learning source found by Burgoyne and Stuart, a result of their research into the important sources of manager's learning.<sup>8</sup> These nine categories are :—

1. Doing the Job : picking up skills as they go along.

2. Non-company education spending time in public, educational institutions.

3. In-company educational opportunities, training interventions.

4- Living : learning from the experiences of out-of-work activities.

5. Self: through reflection, introspection and self assessment.

6. Doing non-managerial prior to taking up a managerial role.

7. Media : newspapers, book professional journals, radio, TV" etc.

8. Parents ; home background: upbringing and guidance.

9. Innate learning : gained from the potential existing in an individual. usually genetically predetermined.

If this is "from what" trained; and trainees learn—in our case 11 trainees being managers in .

TRAINER	EVENT	EFFECT	PROCESS	FEELINGS
SELF	1. Joining college	Value of own choice of subjects	Filling in application form	Exhilaration
	2. Staging a play	Confidence in commanding audience attention	Speaking & moving on stage	Joy & satisfaction
	3. Birth of 1st child	Heavy responsibility of parenthood	Waiting	Anxiety
"p"	4. Reflecting on interview	Mistakes made	Walking to a temple and thinking	Sorrow
	5. Criticising others	Criticising is not good	Self-evaluating	Sad
	6. Success in examn.	Hardwork brings good results	Reading & writing	Happy
"J"	7. Cooking soup	Independence in doing things myself	Reading & experimenting	Happy
	8. Writing articles	Communicating systematically with others	Asking questions, thinking, gathering information	Satisfied
	9. Singing in public	How to make others happy	Imitating others	Excited
"S"	10 Getting first job	Duty to support family	Thinking	Anxiety
	1. Passing examn.	How to achieve goals	Studying & writing	Happy
	2. Taking first examn.	Knowledge & expertise are needed for good results	Studying & writing	Excited
	13 Parents' death	Reality of death as inevitable	Consulting doctors	Sad

public sector—the next area to look at is "how" they learn, i.e. the processes. From table 1 it will be apparent from the third column that the ways of learning are nearly as varied as the sources themselves : doing things, storing information introspecting, etc. It is significant that both active and passive roles are involved in the learning process. It is, therefore, important not to discard the passive learning model hastily when planning training courses. These learning processes are seen

to fit into the seven categories identified by Burgoyne<sup>8</sup> of how learning associated with managerial competence comes about :—

1. Modelling : copying or imitating a "respected other".

2. Vicarious discovery : observing the actions and behaviour of others, the consequences of that behaviour and acting accordingly in similar situations.

3. Unplanned Discovery : experiences at work, trial & error learning.

4. Planned Discovery: going

into situations with the deliberate aim of learning from experience.

5. Being "Taught", told or shown an approach or idea etc.

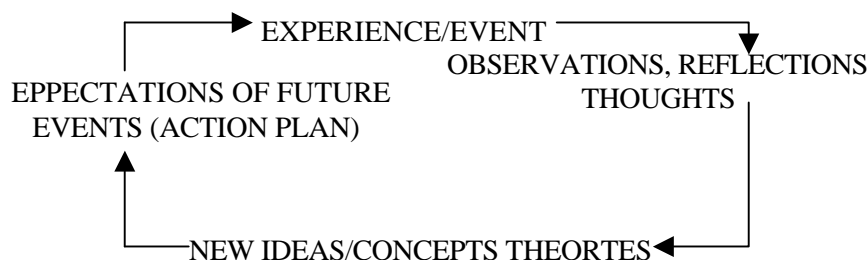
6. Discussions : the sharing of information, ideas, feelings and experiences.

7. Storing of information : remembering data, facts during course of events. There are, however, two more types of learning processes, which Temporal<sup>4</sup> has rightly highlighted : Coaching and Organisational Climate.

What are the implications of

the learning processes outlined in table 1 ? In the first place, we find that a considerable amount of learning takes place in an unplanned or "noa-contrived" manner. In the second place, the feelings associated with these processes, as listed in column 4 of table 1, suggest that learning can take place through pleaseit as well as unpleasant, exhilarating as also painful, processes, As trainers, I find that we tend lo assume that a trainee learns best only if the feelings associated with the process are pleasant, and if the process involves an active role for him. On the other hand, the data available in table 1 brings out that this is not the whole truth. Hence it becomes necessary for us to keep in mind consciously, while planning training courses, that like ourselves, the trainees are likely to learn from passive and unpleasant experiences too. Thus, the range of training interventions available to us becomes wider and greater flexibility is obtainable.

Let us now attempt to summarise what we have found so far about how our trainees might learn, based upon our findings of how some trainers learn. The four-stage experiential learning model of Kolb 'has been modified by Boydell\* and further altered by Temporal<sup>6</sup> while keeping to the basic four-stage structure. This is Temporal's model which I find most suitable to what has been presented so far :



This Learning Cycle can be entered at any of the four stages and can be deviated from at any point into a non-developmental path. Learning can take place at any of the four stages. It is possibly internalised the most if the cycle is completed. As Confucius said :—

"I hear and I forget.. I see and I remember. I do and I understand."

In modern terminology, this has been called "learner retrospective Jearniag" by. Thomas end Harri-Augstein, as opposed to "teacher original teaching ":

#### How the Trainees Learn

In discussing how our trainees learn, the scope will not be restricted to the learning merely within the training courses, for such courses<sup>7</sup> occupy a very small proportion indeed of the trainee's working career. I shall take the learning to include his professional experience. This does not mean that I am discounting the importance of the purely personal life-experiences such as those which have been mentioned surlier in table 1, page 18- However, keeping in view the constraints of space for this particular essay, it seems advisable not to include them in the discussion.

Who are these trainees? In the National Academy of Administration, India, they fall into two broad categories : the fresh inductees into the higher civil services

and the in-service officers ranging from those with six years to those with twenty years of service in government, This means an average of about 700 trainees in different courses every year. To keep the discussion within manageable limits, we will restrict our investigations to one of these two categories : the fresh inductees into the Indian Administrative Service (I. A. S.), numbering about 125 annually.

"One way of finding out how the I.A.S. trainees learn is to look at the formal feedback we collect - from them by administering an end-of-the-course evaluation questionnaire. As part of this, they are asked to mention what they feel have been the strong points of the six to eight week course. In the August 1982 evaluation, the following were mentioned as the strong points !—

1. District Experiences Presentations by trainees.
2. Seminar on "How to be an effective Sub-divisional Officer".
- 3- Exercises in Criminal and Civil Law.
4. More discussion orient; small group sessions.
5. Management games(Pri-soners' Dilemma, NASA, Bco; making etc. )
6. .Administrative Responses Exercises, In-basket exercise.
7. Tutorials & discussions OB Civil Liberties.
8. Case Study method.
9. Lectures of Joint Director on office administration.
10. Inputs on rural develop.. ment administration.
11. Films like "Bara," "Than-neer" etc.
12. Camaraderie and cordiality.

These sessions seem to fall into three categories :—

(a) those relating immediately to the job the trainee would take up at the end of the course viz. sis. 2, 3, 9 & 10 ;

(b) those involving active participation on the trainees' part, viz. sis. 1, 4, 5, 6 & 8 ;

(c) those which neither relate immediately to the job, nor call for active participation necessarily, but touch highly emotive socio-economic and cultural issues, viz. sis. 7, 12 and 11 (films on exploitation, of tribals etc.)

What are the implications of This data in terms of the second part of the question we are answering ? I propose that these seem to imply the following :

(a) the trainees seem to value learning what they perceive to be immediate relevance by way of professional knowledge and skills for the job they will be taking up. This appears to be a strong motivating factor for learning even where a trainer-centred method like lecturing is adopted, as in the case of sis. 8, 9, 10 of the list above, and the trainee's is a relatively passive role.

(b) Even where the relevance may not be so immediately relevant, learning by doing seems to be valued, as with sis. 3, 5, 6.

(c) Sessions which call for active participation by the trainees are valued, e.g. sis. 1, 2, 4, 8.

(d) Where the topic arouses strong feelings, or the media used provides a "total" experience (as in films), the trainees get strongly involved even if the feelings are unpleasant as in sessions on police brutality, bureaucratic callousness etc.). and a vicarious learning appears to take place, which is valued by them on account of the strength of the feelings aroused.

If we look at these implications in terms of the learning-cycle model on page 19, we can place (a) above at stage 3, i.e. Ideas, concepts, theories. From this cognitive input the trainee sees what he can expect when he takes up the job and he may formulate an action plan, thereby going on to stage 4 of the cycle, and subsequently perhaps complete the full cycle. The second implication, (b) above, is at stage 1 of the cycle, viz, experience/event. As trainers we attempt to follow this up with sessions in which the trainees are encouraged to proceed to stages 2 and 3. Some of them even come up with stage 4 (action plans) and thus complete the learning cycle. The third implication, (c) above, is also an experience, though of a less intense variety than (b) perhaps emphasising more stages 2 and 3, i.e. exchanging observations, thoughts coming up with new solutions of problems. The last one, (d) above, can be either at stage 1 as when watching a strongly emotive film (which becomes a vicarious experience) or at stage 2 when a discussion follows such a film to tease out its implications.

It is also evident that these findings regarding how the trainees learn fit into the categories of learning processes enumerated earlier see pp. 18-19,.) "Modelling takes place when the trainee adopts the problem-solving style of a trainer for his own situations. "Vicarious discovery" is often seen to form part of the exchange of experiences which takes place in the district experiences presentations and the seminar on how to be an effective SDO. "Unplanned discovery" takes place in the course

of the management games they are taken through. "Planned discovery" is part of the case study method, as the trainees know in advance the text and what is expected from them during the session. Direct pedagogic "teaching is there in lectures and tutorials. "Discussions", as on civil liberties and as a 'follow-up of all the management games and exercises", are yet another learning process. 'Storing of information' naturally takes place during all these sessions and is tested in the final examination. 'Coaching' forms an important learning process as well, as every trainee has a particular trainer assigned to him as Counsellor, to assist him in personal and professional problem-solving. Finally, there is the "organisational climate" of the institute which seeks to practise the principle of reflexivity, i.e. to practise what it preaches in administrative ethics and efficiency.

But are these the only inferences we can draw about how our trainees learn ? As part of the 1982 evaluation already referred to for our examination so far, the trainees had been asked to list what they thought they had gained from the course. Here are the common points mentioned by them :

1. Growth through interaction with trainees, faculty and panelists on seminars The variety of responses to situations in District Experiences Presentations and the SDO Seminar led to a broadening of vision and availability of numerous options for decision.

2. Problems were indicated, different styles of handling them were shown and solutions were rightly left to trainees to decide.

3. Old friendships were strengthened and new ones made. Fond memories of the Academy and of the people there.

4. Clarity regarding our role as bureaucrats.

5. Individual experiences were moderated in the light of those of others. An all-India awareness was achieved.

6. Broke the cynicism accumulated in district training, boosted morale by clearing doubts and showing possible solutions to problems.

7. Culmination of a process of developing values which began in the foundational Course.

8. Theoretical perceptions of earlier training became clearer.

9. The campus life.

10. Confidence to hold charge of & sub-division.

11. Valuable practical tips on tackling corruption! tackling pressures, management of records and of subordinates.

12. An opportunity to reflect on the values of service.

Interestingly enough, nearly all the "gains" mentioned relate to the affective domain, the feelings area. The emphasis is consistently on the "process" aspect, rather than the cognitive. This is a finding which recurs in the evaluations of the

1979, 1980 and 1981 courses as well, while the rating of the cognitive inputs fluctuate widely from course to course.

What is the implication of this in terms of the second part of the question we are answering? This list of "gains" from the course appears to validate what Candy writes about teaching in terms of Kelly's Theory of Personal Constructs:

"Teaching is not so much the

passing on of established Truth" as offering ideas and experiences to be accepted or rejected by the individual learner according to his/her hypotheses and expectations....."<sup>8</sup> Indeed, serials 1, 2 and 6 above virtually say the same thing as Candy has written. An important inference from this is that this process by which the trainees learn, and what they value in the learning, must be understood for formulating an effective training programme: "Training, therefore" continues Candy, "has as its primary focus, an attempt to understand the construction systems of learners-.....". If the trainer neglects to do this, he may very well find that the trainees' personal constructs have become barriers to learning, for the trainer would have proceeded purely on the basis of the paradigm of his own belief-and-behaviour model without taking into account that of the trainees.

Another critical factor in administering and conducting a training programme is the barriers to learning, one of which could be the learner's personal construct as mentioned above. These blocks to learning have been split into six categories by Temporal<sup>10</sup> namely:

1. Perceptual, where the trainee is unable to perceive the problem. For instance the IAS trainee might not perceive caste distinctions as a problem. In terms of Transactional Analysis (T. A) this is known as a first degree Discount: <sup>11</sup> If the trainee cannot see the problem, he cannot solve it.

2. Cultural, where the trainee will not use a range of behaviours because of his cultural norms. For example, the IAS trainee may not

oppose an illegal order passed by his superior because of the bureaucratic culture of hierarchy and the annual confidential report.

3. Emotional, where the trainee feels insecure and therefore is reluctant to act on his ideas\* For instance, the IAS trainee may believe that all men are equal, but would not like to stay in an untouchable's hut or share his meal because of an emotional repugnance at the lack of cleanliness-I have known cases where the trainee has been reluctant even to visit an untouchable colony for apprehension that he may be offered some refreshment there, and he is unsure how he would respond in such a situation- This is a 2nd degree discount is T, A. terms: He knows what to do but is afraid of doing it.

4. Intellectual, where the trainee lacks the mental competence to resolve the situation, Paulo Freire calls this the "Semi-intransitivity of consciousness" in his **Pedagogy of the Oppressed** We notice this among some trainees, who have been educated only in their regional languages and are totally at sea in classes on Management, as there are no vernacular equivalents for the management terminology as yet. To them management becomes a mysterious thing, not to be used as a problem-solving tool, except by calling in the management expert who, to them, is like a magician using inexplicable abracadabra to produce results.

5. Expressive, where the trainee possesses poor skills of communication. For instance, the trainee does not ask for explanations of what he has not followed

**because** he feels he is **unable** to express his needs adequately.

6. Environmental, where the organisational climate inhibits exploring new learning opportunities. For example, the entire bureaucratic environment itself is geared not towards management of change and of conflict, but towards preservation of *status quo ante*. Trainees naturally are chary of trying out any novel ideas in such an environment.

The implications of these barriers to learning appear to be that the trainee must be helped to overcome these, as much as the trainers themselves need to conquer these so that they can go on learning too. The first step in this is to get them to identify and "own" their learning blocks, and design activities to overcome them. This can be helped to a considerable extent by bringing them to learn *how* to learn. An example of this can be seen on pages 17 and 18 of this essay in the data gathered on how five trainers have learned **significantly**. The important thing to keep in mind from that data is that **learning** is an activity originating from a wide variety of **sources** and taking place through multifarious processes involving a broad spectrum of feelings.

The question which arises now is : does the training we impart in the National Academy of Administration recognise these barriers to learning ? What are the assumptions it makes about the way in which the IAS trainees learn? These are questions directly related to the second part of the essay-question.

In the first place, I do not find any attempt to carry out a formal training needs identification for the trainees. What happens is that a syllabus is available and it is taught. The teaching method at its worst, can be wholly trainer-orientated, as in lectures, and at best it moves occasionally towards learning-by-doing., with some participative methods thrown-in in between. What is the feedback we receive by way of complaints from our trainees ? These are about poorly prepared, boringly delivered lectures, the impersonality of large classes, adherence to the letter of the law, irrelevant and outmoded syllabi, emphasis on traditional examinations which test only formal rote learning, and stress on teaching instead of learning. Interestingly enough, these are, almost verbatim, the complaints about teaching in universities today listed by Norman Mackenzie.<sup>18</sup> It seems, therefore, that our training of civil servants is proceeding along lines of pedagogic teaching in universities and not andragogical learning of adult managers. As a matter of fact, Mackenzie's statements about the assumptions underlying the recruitment of academic staff can be paraphrased to apply to the inductees to the Indian Administrative Service ( I have placed my modifications of the original in brackets ): —

"It is generally assumed that outstanding academic performance, as an undergraduate, coupled with a period of supervised ( attachments ), is necessarily correlated with the skills, or even the personality (actors, required of administrators'. The result is the recruitment of (trainees) who are

somehow expected to acquire by experience a wide range of competencies..... The remarkable feature of [his system ..] is not that it is done well, but that it is done at all."<sup>13</sup>

What we find from this is that the assumption underlying the existing training system in my institute is pedagogic, whereas our findings earlier on in this essay about how the trainees learn, indicates that an andragogic approach is also called for. Lynton and Pareek in 1967 had described these differing approaches as "the prevailing concept of training" and "the new concept"<sup>14</sup>. It is worthwhile to give details of these concepts:—

### The prevailing concept

1. The acquisition of subject matter knowledge by a trainee leads to action.
2. The trainee learns what the trainer teaches. Learning is a simple function of the capacity of the trainee to learn and the ability of the trainer to teach,
3. Individual action leads to improvement on the job.
4. Training is the responsibility of the training institution. It begins and ends with the course.

The New concept:

1. Motivation and skills lead to action. Skills are acquired through practice.
2. Learning is a complex function of the motivation and capacity of the individual trainee, the norms of the training group, the training methods, the behaviour of the trainers and the general climate of the institution. The trainees' motivation is influenced

by the climate of the work organization.

3. Improvement on the job is a complex function of individual learning, the norms of the working group and the general climate of the organisation. Individual learning, unused, leads to frustration.

4. Training is the responsibility of the trainee's organization, the trainee and the training institution. The pre-training and post-training phases are of key importance to the success of training

In our discussion we have found that it is the new concept which appears to apply more to our trainees, as seen from their feedback. This fits into the Theory of Andragogy propounded by Malcolm Knowles. He specifically pinpoints how the assumptions behind pedagogy and andragogy differ, as also how the designing of the programmes will differ : —<sup>T5</sup>

This model seems to oppose the two concepts much in the same manner as Paulo Freire does with his criticism of the 'banking system' of education which creates a "mnssifkd society" the centres of whose economic and political decisions are outside it, as opposed to the problem-posing system of education which he calls "conscientization" which results in *praxis*, whereby the learner becomes the subject of his environment instead of remaining a passive object<sup>16</sup>

However, what we have noticed in our discussion of how our trainees learn is that they value both the passive as well as the active learning roles (see page 20 top). What I propose, therefore, is that it is not much a dichotomy from pedagogy to andragogy, a development from "massification" to "critical consciousness", from "activism" to "praxis". The

implication of *ibis* for our training programme is that depending on the nature of the topic, it may very well be a viable and relevant method to take recourse to the standard pedagogic system. Often this makes for the most economical use of very scarce time available, so that the rest of the time can be devoted to using experiential learning and andragogical training methods. In other words, as we had concluded or, page 19, this provides us with a wider range of training interventions and greater flexibility for adjusting to the environments demands, than if we rejected one concept and chose merely the other.

To sum up, we have found, therefore, that a dissonance does seem to exist between the way the trainees actually learn and the

#### ASSUMPTIONS

	Pedagogy	Andragogy
Self-concept	Dependancy of little worth	Increasing self-direction. Learners are a rich source or learning
Experience		
Readiness	Biological development social pressure	Development tasks of social roles
Time perspective	Postponed application	Immediacy of application
Orientation to Learning	Subject centred	Problem centred

#### DESIGN ELEMENTS

Climate	Authority oriented, formal competitive	Mutuality, respectful collaborative, informal
Planning	By teacher	Mechanism for mutual planning
Diagnosis of needs	By teacher	Mutual self-diagnosis Mutual
Formulation of objectives	By teacher	negotiation
-		
Design	Logic of subject-matter; content units Transmittal techniques By teacher	Sequenced in terms of readiness ; problem units
Activities		Experiential techniques ;
Evaluation		Mutual rediagnosis of needs mutual measurement of programme.

pedagogic assumptions on which much of the training is based. The fact that the trainees' feedback indicates they valued certain cognitive inputs delivered pedagogically, may indicate that in some cases the trainer-orientated approach may be effective. From their feedback we have also found that they highly value the affective part and the experiential learning portions of the training, and have described these as their "gains" from the course.

From this it might be rather simplistic to jump to a solution like what Rousseau proposes in his *Emile*: "Teach by doing whenever you can and only fall back on words when doing is out of the question." I would suggest that the answer might lie in keeping as many options open as possible, in looking at the range of training interventions available as a continuum moving from the trainer-orientated to the learner-orientated as is happening in the National Academy of Administration in India today. The dilemma we seem to face as trainers of civil servants is perhaps best **exemplified** in the words of R. D. Laing<sup>17</sup>:

"He does not **think** there is

anything the matter with him because

One of the things that is the matter with him is that he does not think that there is anything the matter with him

therefore

we have to help him realize that, the fact that he does not think there is anything the matter with him is one of the things that is the matter with him"



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