



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



Impact of proper training for organizational changes among public servant in Bangladesh. A Case Study of MATT2 project in Bangladesh

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Abstract

In recent times, governments, NGOs, development partners, and international donor agencies have implemented training as a tool to reinvigorate the organizational change (OC) process. In this regard, training for reform and OC was successfully completed in Bangladesh to create a critical mass of civil servants who would be the drivers of the future reform vehicle. However, prior to OC, analysis of context, content, and culture of institution was immensely crucial for the successful implantation of change strategy. This is followed by a case study on MATT2 in Bangladesh that explores the effectiveness of the training program. A conclusion is drawn by acknowledging some limitations and welcoming future studies in this regard.

Keywords: Organizational Change; Matt2 Project; Training; Public Servant

1. Introduction

From the 1980s onward, there was a dramatic transformation in both public and private organizations, and this brought about a serious reorganization of structures, procedures, and administrative techniques (Idris and Eldridge, 1998). This transformation can be likened to organizational change (OC). OC can be seen as a theoretical pragmatism intrinsically focused on the ability to adapt in a dynamic process. But unfortunately, during the reform and OC, little attention is paid to training. However, training can play a protagonist role in the OC process through reform (McCourt and Sola, 1999). In recent times, governments, NGOs, development partners and international donor agencies have implemented training as a tool to reinvigorate the OC process. Donor institutions, particularly, have conducted training programs to complement administrative reforms in the civil service with the aim of targeting the pro-poor as well as initiating a reform-minded and development-focused civil service. A contemporary example is the Department of International Development (DFID)-funded Managing At The Top2 (MATT2) program in Bangladesh. Participants in the MATT2 training program were expected to promote their own performance improvement projects (PIPs) with the commitment to implement these PIPs after completing the training program. The ostensible results indicated that senior civil servants who participated in the training program seems to be the key successive factor for the successful implantation of PIPs in the OC process within their respective organizations. This paper is based on primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained by designing a small and concise interview questionnaire from some selected MATT2 alumni, while secondary data relied on content analysis of documented materials. The rest of the paper is structured as follows. The next section reviews the literature on OC and training that is based on the critical underpinnings of the relevant theories and their pros and cons. This is followed by a case study on MATT2 in Bangladesh that explores the effectiveness of the training program. Finally, a conclusion is drawn by acknowledging some limitations and welcoming future studies in this regard.

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2. Organizational Change and Training: Theoretical Underpinnings

2.1. Organizational Change

An organization can be seen as a 'world' where its people inevitably share common interest explicitly or implicitly, and sometimes inadvertently or deliberately (Sheldon, 1980). Organizational change can be defined as intentional and organized redesign of structure, methods of operation, technology, and techniques by dissipating obsolete pattern (Lines, 2005). It could also be viewed as a fundamental strategy to ensure that an organisation remains relevant in a changing environment (Victorian Public Sector Commission, 2016). For instance, persistently altering functions towards the attainment of organizational goals (Dawson, 1994; Van et al. 2021). Many scholars have contributed to enriching the key categorization and theoretical framework of organizational change. For instance, Lewin's (1958) 3 step change model consisting of unfreeze, change, and freeze, Isabella's (1990) 4 stage change model (anticipation, confirmation, culmination and aftermath) and Ferrara-Love's (1997) three strategy model (power, empirical, and normative) are eminent. Given the background, mentionable theories are grounded and a positive theory. Organizations embark on organizational change for various reasons which include overcoming crisis, improving upon performance gaps, adopting new technology, capitalizing on opportunities, reaction to internal and external pressure, as well as challenging the status quo (Haveman, Russo, & Meyer, 2001).

2.2. Training

Resistance, a precious resource (Ford and Ford, 2010), to organizational change breeds persistent examination of believing and behavior (Henry, 1997) and is the key building block of successful organizational change. Nevertheless, predominant interventions are required to overcome the stumbling block of adopting with reform (Lippitt, 1958; Kanter, 1983). In this context, training, as a nostrum, may be potent as the key tool for unblocking the process of OC (Lewin, 1958). Herein, this method of change seems beguilingly neologisms, but comprehensive training is required (Goodstein and Burke, 1991). More recently, demand for cascade training has emerged to make the employee competent to carry out OC. The tension and the big challenge is how to bring about change? In response, Bell and Kozlowski (2008) sardonically pointed few pathways, for example, personal improvement, active involvement, and learning from advanced course design. Traditionally, the cognition essentially heeds to fulfil the organizational objectives successfully (Felix, 1998).

2.3. Reconnection of OC and Training Theories

Training is an important ingredient in OC as it plays a pivotal role in the OC process. For instance, training increases the success rate of OC, it also helps to maintain visibility and encourage belonging, thereby promoting employee engagement. The existing literature has suggested a pragmatic correlation between OC and training. For example, Switzer and Kleiner (1996) found a cogent positive link between training and OC. More specifically, training employees accelerates organizational change. Syncorously, Jahr (1998) pointed out that offering employees post-OC training helped them to perform excellently in challenging circumstances. In contrast, relationships can become paradoxical when training is unsuccessful and problematic. Succinctly, a lack of participation and diversity of culture culminates in unsuccessful training and eventually produces bizarre OC (Schultz, 2003; Spitzmueller, 2024).

Regarding cross-cultural boundaries, Yang (2010: 37) found that training has a 'positive effect on the job'. Paradoxically, most of the training programs in America seem squandered despite the country spending 200 billion dollars per year on training (Bunch, 2007). Similarly, Eldridge (1996a:26) has noted within the Romanian context that '*little locally relevant case study material was in use in IROMA*'. In this circumstance, management needed to identify actual training needs based on the nature of the trainers and the available resources (Eldridge, 1992). More importantly, the proactive role of top executives as internal consultants (Eldridge, 2003b), as well as consistent and visible participation (Clement, 1994) in designing training, is pivotal for OC (Diker, *et. als*, 2012). More recently, by analyzing data from 414 government officials in Slovenia, Vukovic *et al.* (2008) emphasized methodological training for OC.

From the foregoing, the emerging challenge of 'outcome' depends on sustainability, adaptability, and performance in post-training periods (Heuvel *et al.*, 2010). Consequently, evaluation appeared as a means of justification of ostensible effectiveness. The objectives of the evaluation are 'proving, improving, learning and controlling' (Goss, 1994: 32), popular evaluation approaches include TKM (Kirkpatrick, 1976) and stakeholder (Nickols, 2005).

2.4. Critical Examination of Theories Thesis of Incisive Bottleneck

In the later part of the 1980s, serious economic hardships witnessed by developing nations intensified the pressure to reform the civil service as the civil service was deemed inefficient and ineffective. This coincided with the ideas of New Public Management (NPM), Total Quality Management (TQM), downsizing, rightsizing, privatizing, customer-oriented service, and contracting out ostensibly to transform the civil service (Hood, 1991; Osborne and Gaebler, 1992; Reichers). In order to release more national resources into productive ventures, the demand for retrenchment in the public sector became very crucial. This necessitated the need for organizational change, which was seen as a hatchway for citizens and civil societies to effectively dialogue with the government (Bird, 2008). In the midst of these, very few studies elucidated the need for training as a form of reform in the civil service (Aragon, Jimenez, and Valle, 2014).

In the dilemma of change, international development agencies attempted to reconnect theories and reconcile training as the nucleus for reform and OC in developing countries. However, the ubiquitous involvement of donors in designing and implementing training programs and its impact, provides a paradoxical anecdote. As Boydell and Leary (1996: 21) succinctly pointed out, *'it should be assumed that all forms of training are necessarily reasonable'*. In the same light, Yanguas and Hulme (2015) noted that the ultimate aim of donor training is to reform and accelerate the OC of public bureaucracy. However, from an intercultural standpoint, the effectiveness of the external donor-aided funds in administrative capacity in Lithuania underwent serious reproach. When analyzing the concealed reason, Ogundimu (1997) pointed out that the prevailing ultimate authority in the donor's hand, in terms of money supply, was the responsibility for this state of affairs and this adversely affected the implementation of the training program in Zambia. Therefore, Lindermeier and Newell (1976) opined that the *'wrong motif'* can overturn the hull and diverge the aim overwhelmingly. Unorthodoxly, DFID funding on governance, poverty reduction, reform, capacity building and community services have had obvious positive impacts (Burnett, 2006). For example, the Federal Public Administration Reform Program (FEPAR) in Nigeria, City Community Challenge (C3) in Uganda, and MATT2 in Bangladesh resulted in better governance, reduced corruption of city administration and introduced reform-orientated civil servants accordingly (Magbadelo, 2016; Jacobs, 2009).

Using Bangladesh as an example, the DFID criticized the civil service on the grounds of corruption, inefficiency, and lack of reform (DFID, 2004). Similarly, Ministry of Establishment (1989) also documented five constraints notably; diluted accountability, over-centralization, complex operating procedures, weak support system, and inadequate human resource. In the same line, Public Administration Reform Commission (2000) also identified the character of Bangladesh civil service as rigorous, inefficient, backdated, and having a top-down structure. Unfortunately, this *'top-down'* system *'eroded employee capability links between the improvement and work outcomes'* (Eldridge and Nisar, 2006:922; Shahzad et al., 2024). This led the Government of Bangladesh to conclude that *"without improving the quality of people working for the government, no amount of other reform will succeed"* (GoB, 1996:27).

However, the *'big'* tension is evaluating efficiency and effectiveness as well as exploring success and failures. Occasionally, *'a sense of euphoria'* (Eldridge and McCourt, 2003c: 260) amplifies the tension where there is unwillingness to criticize trainers and the training process. This occurrence was described by Ogundeji (1987: 24) as *'hesitation to criticize trainers'*. In the next section of this article, a case study (MATT2) is explored to examine the impact of training as an OC process of the Bangladeshi civil service. ATT2 Project in Bangladesh: Collaboration or Coercion in the OC Process

2.5. Background of MATT2 Project

MATT2 in Bangladesh commenced in 2006 and ended in 2013. It was an administrative reform and a training program funded extensively by the DFID. The training targeted senior civil servants with the embedded matrix of organizational change (Norad, 2011). Before MATT2, the precursor termed *'MATT1'*. It started in 1999 and lasted three years. During this period, 100 senior civil servants for 6 weeks to orient them to be people-centered. As part of the training, participants traveled to the UK to acquire first hand learning from the University of Birmingham and the Civil Service College, UK. Unfortunately, upon their return, the evaluation of the impact of MATT1 was woefully disappointing because they could not transform the civil service as they *"...returned to work roles and work environment that were totally unchanged"* (Majeed, 2011:5). Eventually, the discontented result of MATT1 reinvigorated the foundation stone for MATT2.

2.6. Aims, Strategy, and Targeting of MATT2

The MATT2 training program was specially designed to build the capacity of the civil servants by creating a critical mass and reform-minded civil servants in Bangladesh (Jacobs, 2009). The capacity building as a *'catch phrase'* was *'...conceived of being part of the world of change'* (Eldridge, 2002: 6). In this regard, approximately 1800 senior civil

servants were targeted for training at home and abroad (TOR, 2012). The ultimate aims of MATT2 were pro-poor reform and to create a constellation of civil servants who would be able to demand, design, develop, and implement civil service reform through their crucial position within the service. In this regard, the pioneering training institution in Bangladesh, the Bangladesh Public Administration Training Center (BPATC), was mandated to train MATT2 trainees. Therefore, the structure, capacity, methodology, and course content of BPATC were rigorously reorganized. The program director of MATT2, Conlasin (2016) expressed that, unlike traditional training and reform, MATT2 accentuated encouraging, stimulating, and revitalizing training program in order to put their mind in a synergistic environment. Surprisingly, MATT2 targeted senior bureaucrats who presumed their role to be as 'facilitator' or 'deliberately blocker' in reform initiatives (Jacobs, 2009). This notion further supported the ideas of targeting 'top officials' increased bargaining power with politicians (Bourgault and Drope, 2013; Hermawan et al., 2024).

2.7. Impact of MATT 2

Setting a benchmark to observe the impact of training on trainees' own country is crucial (Hulme, 1990). Pragmatically, it is too difficult to measure the 'impact'. In this sense, longitudinal studies may come up with a representative result. At the outset, the designer believed that the selected civil servants would overcome service constraints and policy weakness (Majeed, 2011). However, in practice very few anecdotes can be mentioned as success stories. A sustained success was documented by NORAD (2011) mentioning that more than 52% of the then secretaries of the government and became alumni of MATT2 were in a better position and well understood to execute the reform agenda (DFID, 2009). Similarly, Haque (2011) pointed out that the delivery of a passport took only one day instead of 6.83 days earlier. Similarly, the University of Wolverhampton (2012) reported that an influx of influential bureaucrats at the University helped to learn better management of spoiled fruits, city waste and health services for rural people. In return, Dhaka City's Corporation's 'cleaning' program was partially implemented as a result of the experience gained from the UK visit. These disclosure examples can be regarded as 'marginalized', where every civil servant makes Performance Improvement Projects (PIPs) and Individual Action Plans (IAPs) in the areas of reform. Some of the PIPs are mentioned below;

Table 1 Trainees and Their Reform Projects

| Trainee No. | Administrative Position | Existing System | Performance Improvement Projects (PIPs) |
|-------------|----------------------------------|--|---|
| BPATC- 4058 | Secretary | Annual Confidential Report (ACR) | Performance Based Evaluation System (PBES) |
| BPATC- 4169 | Secretary | Manual Management System (MMS) | Personal Management Information System (PMIS) |
| BPATC- 4183 | Additional Secretary (AS) | Clerical File Tracking (CFT) | E-File Tracking (EFT) |
| BPATC- 5047 | Additional Secretary (AS) | Bill Payment at Bank | One Stop Bill Payment |
| BPATC- 5342 | Joint Secretary (JS) | Traditional Pension System (TPS) | Simplified Pension System (SPS) |
| BPATC- 5417 | Joint Secretary (JS) | Annual Performance Assessment (APS) | Monthly Performance Assessment (MPS) |
| BPATC- 5440 | Senior Assistant Secretary (SAS) | Central Family Planning Service (CFPS) | Door-to-door family planning (D2FP) |
| BPATC- 5443 | Senior Assistant Secretary (SAS) | Accountability to Authority Mechanism | Accountability to Citizens Mechanism |

(Adapted from Islam, 2012)

The PIPs were self-identified metamorphosed innovations. No doubt about the virtuoso ideas, but twofold obfuscation occurs concerning the non- implementation. In this study, the degree of implementation is evaluated by using Kirkpatrick's (1976) four stages of evaluation of the aforementioned eight MATT2 alumni. The skeleton of the questionnaire is presented in Table 2 below;

Table 2 Evaluation by KTP Model

| Kirkpatrick's Four Levels | | Questions were asked to MATT2 Alumni |
|---------------------------|-----------|--|
| 1. | Reactions | How did you like and enjoy MATT2 training? |
| 2. | Learning | How are you 'reform minded' now than you were earlier? |
| 3. | Behaviour | Did you apply your PIPs at work? |
| 4. | Results | How successful were your PIPs? |

(Adapted from Kirkpatrick, 1976)

2.8. Findings and analysis of Interviews

2.8.1. Reactions in the Course

Most of the senior civil servants found the training program an interesting experience because of the splendid materials, advanced course design, sumptuous residency, extravagant financial allocations, opulent overseas training, amazing traveling, and most importantly, having relaxed time for slacken time management.

2.8.2. Learning in the course

Pre- and post-training assessments were required for better evaluation. However, among eight, a satisfactory number (seven) of bureaucrats replied that it was their endeavor to be reform minded through the course content, context and pedagogy.

2.8.3. Behavior

Two secretaries applied their PIPs in their respective ministries and they were implemented successfully. In the case of AS, both of them attempted to apply, however, only one partially succeeded. Surprisingly, the other four did not even take the initiative to implement their PIPs, this was due to the lack of authority in their organizations.

2.8.4. Results

This is shown in the bar chart below

Table 3 Status of PIP

| Result | Analysis | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-----------|-----|----|----|-----|-----|----|-----|-----|-----|---|-----|--|
| <table border="1"> <caption>Data for PIP Status by Position</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Position</th> <th>Implemented PIPs (%)</th> <th>Not Implemented PIPs (%)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Secretary</td> <td>~95</td> <td>~5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>AS</td> <td>~45</td> <td>~55</td> </tr> <tr> <td>JS</td> <td>~25</td> <td>~75</td> </tr> <tr> <td>SAC</td> <td>0</td> <td>100</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> | Position | Implemented PIPs (%) | Not Implemented PIPs (%) | Secretary | ~95 | ~5 | AS | ~45 | ~55 | JS | ~25 | ~75 | SAC | 0 | 100 | <p>Successful implementation of PIPs is heavily dependent on the variable of the official position. The top positions were more likely to succeed, while lower officials failed to demonstrate the expected result. The results further supported the idea that top officials were mere facilitators (Peters, 2005).</p> |
| Position | Implemented PIPs (%) | Not Implemented PIPs (%) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Secretary | ~95 | ~5 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| AS | ~45 | ~55 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| JS | ~25 | ~75 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SAC | 0 | 100 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

(Source: Interview Result)

Exploring the Unexplored Truth: Overlooking Factors of MATT2 Bangladesh civil service is firmly, deliberately, and persistently controlled, directed, and administered by the government. Moreover, over the last 200 years, the civil service of Bangladesh has developed through authoritative, rigid hierarchy, red-tapeism, and procedural delayed culture (Khan, 2013). Furthermore, patchy government cooperation shut down most of the reform initiatives. From a diagnostic standpoint, Pettigrew (1990) pointed out that OC should follow the process, content, and context.

Furthermore, the rigid political hierarchy is ubiquitous within the service where a minister holds the 'key position' for every decision. This phenomenon was also noted by Burke and Litwin (1992) as influenced by national culture and by Kondra and Hinings (1998) as organizational diversity in the OC process. However, from 40,000 civil servants, targeting only 1800 was scant. In addition, some interviewees found that the selection procedure was not flawless, and therefore was affected by '*buggins turn syndrome*' (Cracknell, 1991: 601). Furthermore, Schiffrin and Behrman (2011: 340) have indicated that the '*kinds of support given depend on the goals of the donors*' and do not inculcate capacity building on the training. In the same vein, Professor Wood also indicated the exogenous notion that MATT2 alumni would share the same interest as the UK government in future projects. Consequently, the notion of failed 'good practice' "*refers to the ability of each of the organizations to identify measures appropriate to its own needs and circumstances and not imposed*" (Eldridge and Goulden, 2005:13) was likely to be in play. Thus, Iqbal Mahmood, then Cabinet Secretary of Bangladesh, acknowledged this fact. That MATT2 failed to create reform minded civil servants and capacity building in the Bangladesh civil service (Majeed, 2011).

Organizational change is inevitably a continuous and ongoing process, regardless of countries and culture. However, prior to OC, analysis of context, content, and culture of institution was immensely crucial for the successful implantation of change strategy. In reviewing 'Monitoring and Evaluating Social Programs in Developing Countries', Eldridge (1996: 110) has pointed out that institutional analysis is an essential aspect of securing organizational change. Within the context of donor-supported MATT2, training for reform and OC was successfully completed in Bangladesh to create a critical mass of civil servants who would be the drivers of the future reform vehicle. However, the success rate heavily depended on the parameter of the hierarchical position within the service. Eventually, selected employees were less likely to be effective; this is called the 'spectrum impact' of training (Stickland, 1992). However, interviews and information seem similar, yet on the basis of sudden snapshot assessment and online reply, a reliable verdict is almost impossible. Moreover, the small sampling size failed to give fair, reliable, and representative information. Furthermore, Bates (2004) criticized the TKM evaluation methods on the ground of incompleteness. In this context, close observation and longitudinal studies are warranted to evaluate the impact of training in the change process. However, claiming radical OC by designing one training program funded by donors is not desirable or acceptable. Importantly, it can be avowed that if MATT2 is regarded liminal instead of a last resort, it would be worthwhile in this regard. For effective organizational change, the paradigm 'training results in change' should be replaced by 'training for change', which means it should be uninterrupted and integrated (Jackson and Thompson, 1972: 146).

3. Conclusion

The study portrayed that while the MATT2 project successfully enabled a critical mass of reform-minded civil servants using structured training, however its overall impact was uneven and heavily dependent on hierarchical position and institutional context. Analysis of collected data suggest that senior officials were more inclined to implement reforms, whereas lower-level officers faced systemic barriers of all sorts. This insight highlights that training on public service alone cannot guarantee organizational change, nevertheless if the training is continuous, context-sensitive, and integrated with institutional reforms then positive outcome is possible. The findings of this study reveals the importance of coordinating training with aspects such as organizational culture, authority structures, as well as long-term reform strategies, it is worth noting that the result was evident despite the limitations like small sample sizes and insufficient evaluation techniques. This study will benefit society by offering insights into how capacity-building programs can be designed to strengthen governance, reduce inefficiency, and support pro-poor reforms in Bangladesh and beyond.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest.

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