

## **Moving from Intention to Implementation: Follow-up Initiatives for 'Governing for Results' Workshops**

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### **Action Planning Process in Training Workshops**

Training has moved beyond the traditional paradigm where it was merely a limited instrument to adapt employees' skills to job requirements. It has become an important tool of organisation development for communicating and involving employees in the change process.

When a wide cross section of organisational members from different levels and functions come together in a training workshop, an opportunity is created for taking the initial steps in the organisational change process. Such a workshop can serve several purposes:

- a) *Raise the consciousness of the participants:* It makes people aware of the gaps between reality and ideals. It tells them that things can be improved by paying conscious attention to what should be changed and how it can be changed.
- b) *Provide a common platform to articulate shared problems and difficulties:* Getting employees at different levels involved in a common workshop makes it possible to capture the insights that exist at multiple levels. Individuals at senior levels acquire a heightened understanding of the perspectives and concerns at junior levels and vice versa. Thus everyone can get a larger systemic perspective on the problem.
- c) *Generate ideas for change:* In a training workshop, individuals from different levels and functions are empowered to think out of box, challenge prevailing assumptions about the way "we have always done things", and come up with action plans for improving key processes. For example, they can think about how processes and procedures can be simplified, how greater citizen focus can be achieved in departmental working, how delegation can be improved, and how capacity can be built.
- d) *Build a certain degree of ownership and responsibility for making improvements happen:* Organisational change becomes possible only when individuals and groups take ownership of the problems and resolve to act in their own zones of influence. Training workshops can create not only superior understanding and analysis, but also enthusiasm and determination to act. After going through the training workshop, a participant may decide to move away from the stance of a 'spectator', and assume the position of an 'actor' with regard to the organisational challenges, and make a difference.

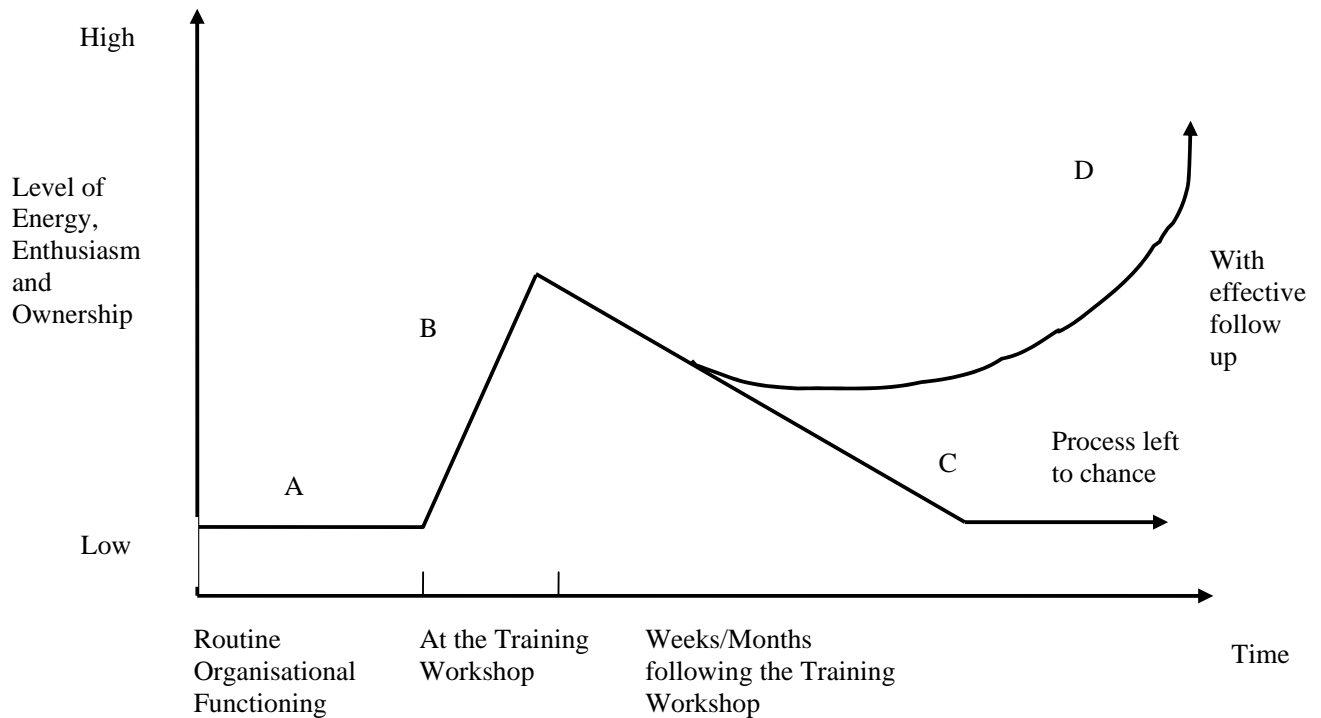
### **Why Action Plans may degenerate into Ritualistic Wish Lists**

Prof. Jeffrey Pfeffer, a noted management author, explores a particular form of inertia that tends to afflict organisations. He refers to it as *knowing-doing gap*. He argues that this rather strange organisational malady can often be traced to a basic human propensity: the tendency to let talk and presentations substitute for action. When

confronted with a problem, people act as though discussing it, formulating decisions, and working out plans of action are the same as acting and solving the problem. So an elegant PowerPoint presentation may be thrown at a real problem almost hoping that it would make the problem disappear!

But we all know that preparing analysis of problems and putting together action plan presentations are easier than implementing the action plans effectively. Organisational experiences indicate that unless the following *difficulties* are effectively dealt with, action plans would end up as vacuous wish lists.

- a) *Enforcing accountability*: When action plans do not have a clear time frame or a designated individual or group with clear responsibility for initiating actions or keeping the process on track, implementation may not occur. As an old anecdote goes, 'anybody could probably have done it, but everybody expected somebody to do it, but nobody did it'.
- b) *Translating goals and ideas into action with leadership guidance and support*: The initial action plans tend to be abstract statements of intent. There may be little clarity on how and when they are expected to be carried out, and by whom. Not much thought may also have gone into plans for tracking progress. These complex goals and ideas have to be 'deconstructed' so that people are clear about practical first steps, and therefore can approach change with greater confidence. In organisational change, we are not dealing with one problem, but with a bundle of problems. An ad hoc approach may solve one problem but aggravate another. As a result, with an ad hoc approach, an administrator may be caught in a reactive mode, responding to a host of signals from the organisational system, some of which may have emanated in the first place by the administrator's own actions or inactions. In such a situation, goals get degenerated, opportunities for the future are forgotten, and routine day to day crisis management becomes all-important. To avoid this trap and be proactive in dealing with change, it is important to carefully examine how goals can be translated into a cohesive, well-planned sequence of steps to change. Leadership supervision and active support during the process is critical for effective execution.
- c) *Sustaining energy through different stages of action planning and implementation*: The following diagram illustrates the different levels of team energy and enthusiasm at the action planning stage and the weeks/months following the initial planning process.



**Figure 1: Team Energy and Enthusiasm over Time**

During routine organisational functioning, generally there is not a great deal of energy and motivation for thinking out of box and making organisational improvements. This is represented by Part A of the graph above. As we have noted in the first section, training workshops present an opportunity to think afresh. Interest and excitement are created by the training environment, presence of top and senior administrators, discussions on future challenges and global trends. But experiences indicate that certain factors tend to act as dampeners on the energy and enthusiasm of the group. These factors include: doubts about training workshops and action planning exercises really yielding results, concerns about additional workload arising from improvement exercises, or questions about the opportunity or goal. So the extent of spurt in energy and enthusiasm can vary across different groups/departments. But generally, training workshops do tend to push up confidence, enthusiasm and ownership, as represented by Part B of the graph.

Organisational research indicates that within a couple of weeks after the training workshop, the energy levels wane as individuals perceive barriers to achieving the goals set during the action planning process. While some individuals may exhibit higher ownership of action plans and demonstrate greater willingness to invest time, energy and effort to implement plans, others may be less inclined to do so. This stage presents an important choice point in the change process.

At this stage, if matters are left to chance, effects of the training workshops and action planning exercises would be totally nullified over time, and the training intervention would end up as a mere 'flash in the pan', as shown by Part C of the graph. On the other hand, when there is *effective follow-up* to translate goals into actions, the energy tends to rise again. As people act, they would experience a sense of progress. They

would see their actions having impact and the early barriers being overcome. At the same time, they would also see new barriers emerging. But with persistence, there would be greater experience of success, and this would lead to higher levels of confidence for tackling newer challenges. This puts the group on a virtuous cycle of confidence and enthusiasm leading to success, which in turn leads to greater energy and ownership for making organisational improvements. This is shown by Part D of the graph.

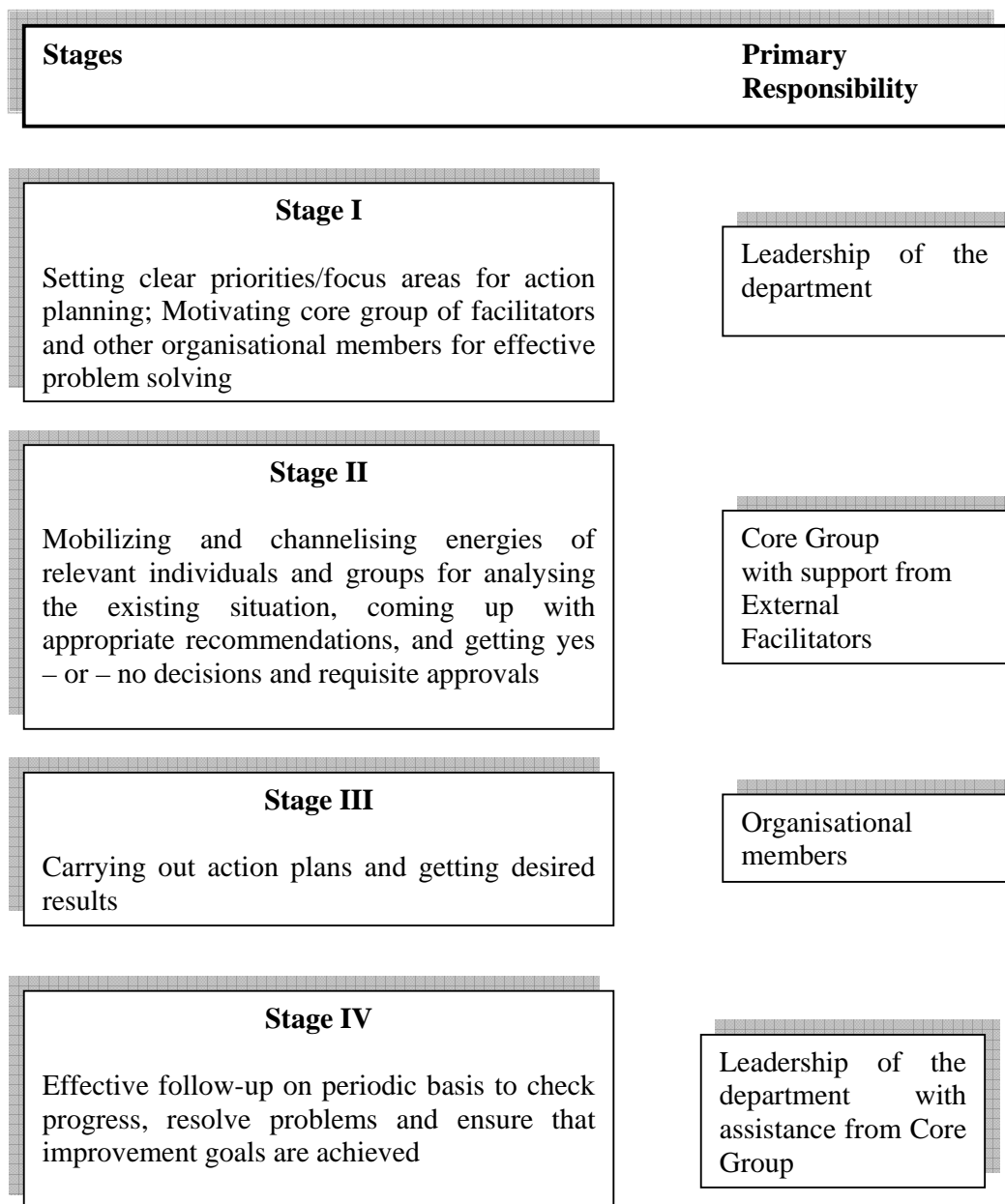
### **Gearing Up for Real Improvements: Case of GFR Programme**

A series of training workshops on 'Governing for Results' (GFR) were conducted by the Dr. MCR HRD IAP for various departments of the Government of Andhra Pradesh. Each of these workshops was attended by over a hundred officials of the concerned departments representing different levels, functions and locations. During the programme, the participants analysed the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the departments. They also prepared and presented action plans for improving citizen focus, simplifying processes and procedures, enhancing delegation, building capacity, and so on.

It has been recognised that this training intervention would have to be effectively supported by certain other initiatives so that real improvements can take place in the field. For this purpose, each batch of participants chose a group of about 25 individuals to facilitate the change process in the department and try to make improvements a reality. Each of the 100 to 120 participants of the batch, representing a specific department, was asked to think and propose the names of a few individuals, who could be entrusted the responsibility of assisting the leaders of the department in the change management process. Participants were told that they should nominate such individuals, who were perceived to possess the following qualities: (a) they were energetic; (b) they were credible; (c) had a good track record of performance; (d) skilled in working with people; and (e) capable of effectively catalysing the change process. The nominations were forwarded to the workshop organisers by sending slips with four to six names anonymously.

On the basis of the nominations of colleagues, a Core Group was constituted for each department, which consists of 25 to 30 individuals. They are expected to support the leadership of the department in spearheading the change. A separate programme has been envisaged for the Core Group members to help them develop a sharper appreciation of their role, and tools and techniques that can make them effective in discharging their responsibility were provided.

It has been visualised that the change process in the department would include certain important stages, as outlined in Fig. 2 below. A Responsibility Assignment Matrix for slightly more elaborated stages of the change process has been outlined in Appendix 1. The roles of leadership and core group members are critical for effective change implementation. These have been discussed in the subsequent sections.



**Figure 2: Stages in Development and Effective Implementation of Action Plan**

**Set clear focus areas and keep the spotlight on those key priorities:**

**Leadership Responsibility**

Let us imagine that we take a convex lens out on a sunny day and focus the Sun's rays on a white sheet of paper. Within a short time, we would see the paper turning brown and then slowly starting to burn. On the other hand, if we keep moving the lens and don't keep the rays focused, nothing happens to the sheet of paper. In the same way, when leaders focus on certain key priorities, they are able to make a difference. But if no focus areas have been identified for improvement, nothing more than routine work is likely to be achieved by the department.

Many-a-times, action plans are presented as a long laundry list. A whole host of concerns are listed with no order of priority. When leaders do not make a clear choice, efforts remain scattered and implementation suffers. It is important to clearly communicate not only what issues to include in the priorities, but also what issues to exclude.

As a part of GFR follow-up, it is visualised that there would be first a formal session with key leaders of the department. This would be followed by separate workshops for members of the core group. During the interaction with the leaders of the department, they would be asked to review the action plans formulated by participants during the GFR training workshop and select priority areas to focus on. The following criteria would guide the choice of focus areas:

- Concern should be important, urgent and compelling;
- It should have high potential pay-off in terms of service quality to citizens/other stakeholders; and
- In the initial stages, it would be desirable to take some short-term pay-off projects so that there are visible improvements in 3 to 6 months. Visible results can generate positive feelings not only among citizens/stakeholders, but also among individuals and groups involved in the change effort.

Organisational research indicates that the leaders ought to do the following to translate plans into actions:

- a) Exhibit the characteristics of realistic attitude, simplicity, and clarity;
- b) Clearly articulate two or three priorities, and allocate attention to these aspects on a consistent basis; and
- c) Walk the talk – Set example/s of personal initiatives in the focus areas.

*Realistic Attitude, Simplicity and Clarity:* Leaders have to ensure that action plans are realistic. They should carefully consider the available resources, and make choices in terms of what can be held back to make something else happen. Simplicity and clarity go hand in hand. Beyond a certain level of complexity, it is difficult to translate the nuances of a plan throughout the department. There should be clarity on what needs to be done by various individuals. The concerned individuals should receive clear communication about their role.

*Attention to Articulated Priorities:* Attention is a scarce resource in organisations. If we all had unlimited time and unlimited attention, we may decide to do all that we are capable of doing. But when there are multiple pressures, people tend to take up only those issues that they feel comfortable with. That is why there is a great deal of

enthusiasm at the diagnosis and action planning stage, but levels of interest and energy dip when people get to implementation stage and hit some road blocks. When individuals lose interest, they succumb to competing distractions. This is one of the key reasons why all change efforts are subject to lull periods. To ensure that a lull period does not lead to slow death of the change process, the departmental leadership has to keep the spotlight on the change process till improvement goals are achieved fully.

*Walking the talk:* When employees observe that the priorities are reflected in the leaders' actions, not just their words, they take those priorities seriously. Outstanding leaders create enthusiasm and determination among people for change goals by setting personal examples.

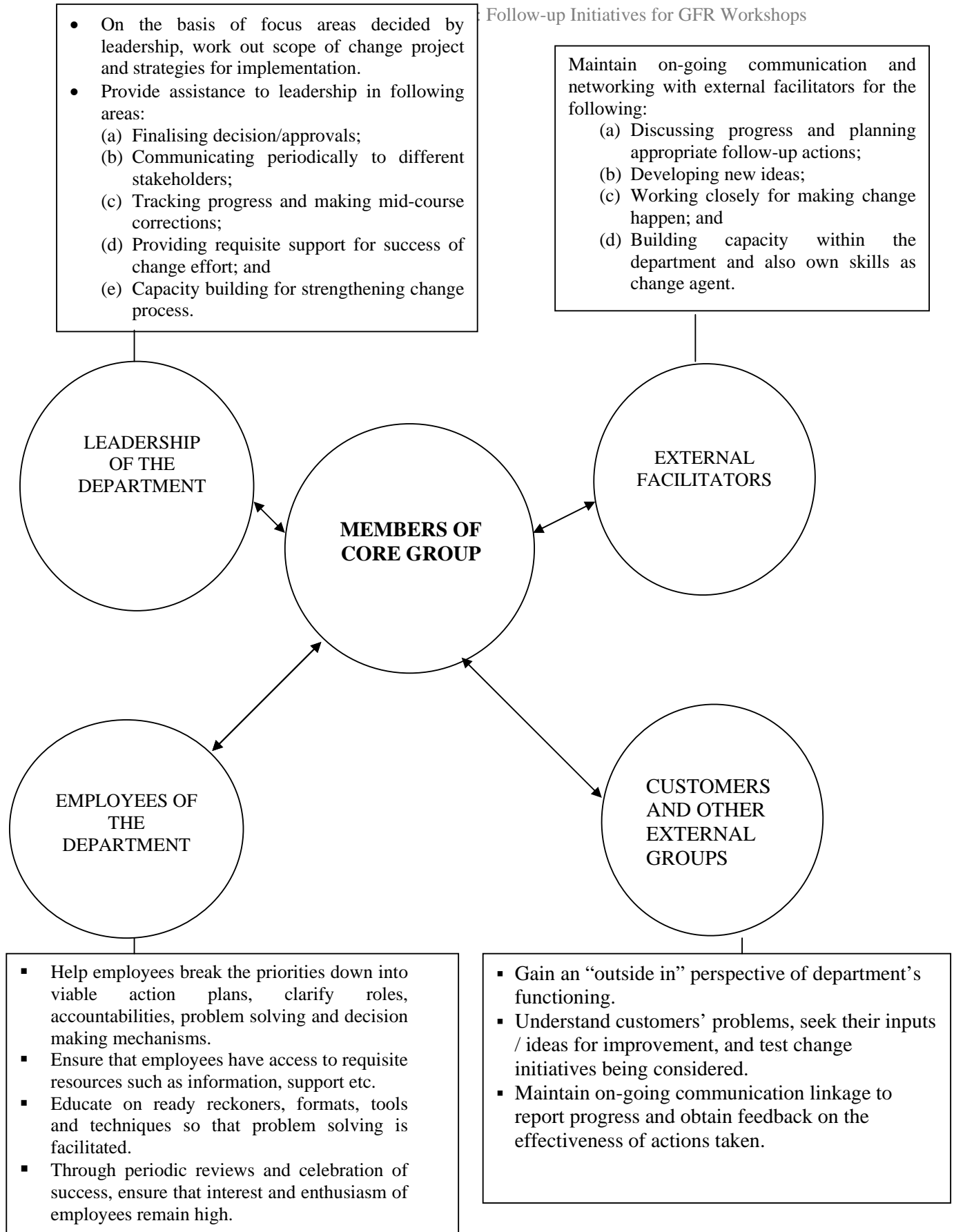
Noted author Prof. Jim Collins states that leaders with clear goals are less tempted to undertake other activities. Such leaders have a clear agenda of what they want to accomplish. They commit to two or three priorities and devote complete attention to the projects that they believe in. This helps them avoid the traps of reactive orientation and getting sidetracked by distractions. A strong and consistent set of priorities at the top focuses energies of organisational members, and goes a long way in ensuring the success of the process of making improvements.

### **Mobilise energies of relevant groups and make changes happen:**

#### **Core Group Responsibility**

In the words of Lord Keynes, “*A large proportion of our positive activities depend on spontaneous optimism rather than on mathematical expectation... if animal spirits are dimmed and the spontaneous optimism falters, leaving us to depend on nothing but mathematical expectation, enterprise will fade and die.*” A change process makes a great beginning when leaders of the department articulate clear priorities and keep the spotlight on the change by devoting their time and attention to communicate the importance and urgency of change. They need to be backed by the committed efforts of energetic and optimistic individuals, who translate the leadership vision into thoughtful actions. Members of the Core Group are visualised as those credible individuals who would back up the goals set by leaders with their energetic efforts and make changes happen.

The Core Group would have four important interfaces to manage, as shown in Figure 3 below. Appendix 2 presents a more detailed profile of the roles of Core Group members.



**Figure 3- Key Interfaces for Core Group Members**



As indicated in Figure 2, Core Group members would take the priorities set by the leadership of the department, and would work out detailed action plans in terms of who would do what, how and by when. They would assist the leadership in communicating periodically to different stakeholders, and in tracking progress. They would also develop an inventory of skills available within the department for effective change implementation, and initiate efforts for greater capacity building.

The core group members would also remain closely associated with external facilitators for new ideas and skill building. They would also initiate efforts to get the external facilitators involved in a consulting capacity, where such association can help the department in speeding up the reform process.

The role of core group members at the interface with other employees of the department is a very important one. It is at this interface that the efforts for change would actually be made. A number of ready reckoners, tools, techniques have been put together for aiding analysis/problem solving. Illustrations of tools and formats that can be used for aiding group problem solving have been presented in Box 1 below.

**Some illustrative formats for sharpening analysis for problem solving**

**Brainstorming Ideas of what could be improved**

1. The group members can answer the following questions individually and then get involved in discussion of:
  - What work practices consume time and effort but don't seem to add any real value?
  - How many people are involved in this work practice across the department? and
  - How much total time is spent on this work practice?

|                  | Self | Department | Group | Company | External |
|------------------|------|------------|-------|---------|----------|
| <b>Reports</b>   |      |            |       |         |          |
| <b>Approvals</b> |      |            |       |         |          |
| <b>Meetings</b>  |      |            |       |         |          |
| <b>Measures</b>  |      |            |       |         |          |
| <b>Policies</b>  |      |            |       |         |          |
| <b>Practices</b> |      |            |       |         |          |
|                  |      |            |       |         |          |

Could it/they be

1. eliminated?
2. partially eliminated?
3. delegated downward?
4. done less often?
5. done in a less complicated or time consuming manner?
6. done with fewer people involved?
7. done using a more productive technology?
8. improved/enhanced in any other manner?

### **Format for Action Planning**

Recommendation:

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Action(s) (what)

Responsibilities (who)

Dates (when)

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Plans for Tracking Progress (what to track and how often):

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Team Leader:

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### **Questions to Strengthen Action Plan**

What is the probability of success? Are there ways to increase it?

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Are the dates realistic, given other commitments and priorities?

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Have you considered key risks and weak spots? Can you build steps into the plan to address these?

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Who do you need to share the plan with? How will you communicate what you may do to those affected? Are there people who should become part of an “extended team” – that is asked to help with some parts of your project?

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How can you generate greater enthusiasm among team members involved in the effort?

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## Communication Plan

Instructions: Within each cell, note the key message for that audience and the primary modes for conveying it.

| Stakeholders/<br>Audience                              | Month 1 | Month 2 | Month 3 | Month 4 |
|--|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Senior Management                                      |         |         |         |         |
| Middle Management                                      |         |         |         |         |
| Supervisors and<br>Employees                           |         |         |         |         |
| Customers/Suppliers/<br>Other external<br>stakeholders |         |         |         |         |

The following questions need to be considered in laying out a communication plan?

- What messages should be communicated?
- Who should receive it?
- What is the appropriate time frame?
- How should the message be communicated?

Effective role performance would require Core Group members to function in a catalytic mode to assist individuals and groups to achieve results. They should be able to help people collaborate, share accountability, work productively together, enforce positive work norms, and improve performance. This would require Core Group members to build skills in active listening, questioning, probing, picking up signals, managing conflicts constructively, and communicating in a manner that creates shared interest and understanding. They would receive developmental inputs to help them acquire skills of change agents. A special effort would be made to identify the important skills and competencies that the Core Group members would need. For example, this would include skills of being an internal consultant/change agent, problem solving abilities, etc. Core Group members would receive special training to hone their skills in these areas. As they represent the cutting edge of the proposed change initiative, it is recognised that their skills have to be sharpened.

### Conclusion

Are action-plans formulated in training workshops ritualistic wish lists, or are they powerful road maps? This is a rhetorical question. Obviously, action plans should not be allowed to degenerate into ritualistic wish lists. They must become powerful road maps to take the departments forward on the improvement path. And this requires thoughtful follow-up actions by committed individuals based on a clear understanding of what is required to make change happen.

Change is a process that unfolds over a period of time. First, there is awareness of the need for change. There should be acknowledgement that status quo is no longer viable, and there is need to move away from the past practices. Then the organisation creates and adopts a new direction. It sets clear priorities, from which it develops

viable action plans. Then it gets organised for implementation. This requires clarifying roles and responsibilities, and building appropriate vertical and lateral linkages to foster information flow, problem solving, and achievement of desired results. When actions follow, results are achieved.

There is a simple formula that captures the dynamics of change:  $C = (ABD) > R$ . In this formula, C is change, A is the level of dissatisfaction with the status quo, B is the clear desired goal, D refers to the actionable first steps, and R is resistance to change. C occurs when the products of A, B, and D exceeds R. In other words, for change to take place there must be: (a) dissatisfaction with status quo (A); (b) a clear direction or goal (B); and awareness of practical first steps (D). Since we have a multiplicative relationship here, even if A and B have high values but D is zero, the product (ABD) becomes zero. Thus, successful change occurs only when all three are present. Otherwise things do not happen as assumed.

Carl von Clausewitz, the author of a seminal work on the conduct of war, states: *'In war, everything is simple, but it is simple things that are difficult.'* Change programmes often fail because managers have not taken into account all the irksome little conditions or frictions that have to be dealt with for the plan to succeed. Successful achievement of intended results requires that all the aspects of change are anticipated and dealt with quickly and effectively.

This paper attempts to outline the important role that the leaders of the department and the members of the core group have to play for the success of the change effort. Based on the roles and change model described in this paper, a series of workshops have been planned to sensitise the relevant individuals to the demands of their new roles, and equip them with requisite skills and support. The objective of these follow-up plans is to ensure that the action plans worked out at the end of the GFR workshops become powerful road maps to guide the departments to the goal of enhanced effectiveness.

## Annexure 1

### Responsibility Assignment Matrix

|   | HRD<br>Institute/<br>CGG | Leaders<br>of the<br>Dept. | Core<br>Group<br>Members | Employees<br>of the Dept. |
|---|--------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Developing and conducting workshops for Leaders and Core Group members to follow up GFR initiative.   | A                        | C                          | C                        | -                         |
| Deciding on focus areas/change priorities for the department.   | C                        | A                          | C                        | -                         |
| On the basis of the focus areas, decide on the scope of the project. This would include: (a) breaking larger goals into manageable change projects that can be tracked; and (b) change implementation strategy (for example, where the change project would be initiated first, and who would be involved with the project, when, and how). | C                        | B                          | A                        | C                         |
| Getting organised for implementation – clarifying roles and accountabilities, providing resources, etc.   | C                        | B                          | A                        | C                         |
| Preparing tools, techniques, frameworks, formats, and checklists as ready reckoners to assist analysis and problem solving.   | A                        | C                          | -                        | -                         |
| Mobilise energies of individuals, guide their efforts, and help employees implement action plans.   | -                        | B                          | A                        | C                         |
| Communicate in a manner that energises employees. Keep every one updated on plans and progress.   | -                        | A                          | B                        | C                         |
| Track progress against plans, make mid-course corrections, and ensure that results are achieved.  | C                        | A                          | B                        | C                         |
| Spread change by building greater capacity.   | C                        | B                          | A                        | -                         |

- A - Responsibility for Initiating Actions, Coordinating Efforts, and Keeping Process on Track**
- B - Responsibility for Making Significant Contributions (such as reviewing progress, providing clearances/approvals, etc., for making change happen)**
- C - Responsibility for Consultation and Providing Inputs when asked**

## **Annexure 2**

### **Key Responsibilities of the Core Group Members**

#### *Tasks/Responsibilities at the Interface with Leadership of the Department*

- Discuss with leaders and understand the priorities/focus areas;
- Work out scope of the change project in terms of the following:
  - (a) Locations/work groups where the change would be introduced first;
  - (b) Time frames;
  - (c) Key individuals/groups to be involved;
  - (d) Strategies for creating enthusiasm and dealing with possible resistance;
  - (e) Monitoring mechanisms;
- Verify if the scope is in line with the focus areas decided by leaders;
- Break the larger goals/priorities into smaller change projects that can be tracked/monitored;
- Get requisite decisions, approvals and resources for initiating change;
- Set review criteria, review periods and assist leaders in tracking progress and making mid-course corrections;
- Help leaders communicate right information periodically to right quarters to keep up the momentum of change;
- Give frank feedback to leaders on progress achieved, hurdles faced and support required;
- Prepare and discuss plans to spread the change through additional capacity building.

#### *Tasks/Responsibilities at the Interface with External Facilitators*

- Identify where external facilitators can help your department make faster progress on change projects, and initiate arrangements for getting them involved;
- In consultation with external facilitators, establish clear processes for periodic communication/review of progress in change project;
- Draw on resources of external facilitators as and when required;
- Remain in touch with them for new ideas. Find out how change is being implemented in other departments, and what can be learnt from others' experiences;

- When external facilitators get actively involved as consultants, work as members of internal task force and be closely associated with diagnosis, action planning and implementation stages;
- Build strategic relationships to update oneself on latest knowledge/developments in relevant fields;
- Make an inventory of existing skills/motivation for effective implementation of change, identify gaps and prepare plans for bridging the gap by building requisite skills and energy;

Tasks/Responsibilities at the Interface with other Employees of the Department

- For organising the work, take priorities/focus areas and work with relevant individuals/groups in organising these into viable steps. Ensure that the following aspects are clarified:
  - (a) Roles and accountabilities for different individuals;
  - (b) Mechanisms/Processes for making appropriate decisions;
  - (c) When and how the different individuals/groups are involved;
- Ensure that systems/processes are in place for employees to access the requisite resources for effective change implementation. These resources would include: information on key aspects, support from influential people, understanding of why the given change project is important and urgent, support/guidance when individuals run into difficulties, exposure to new knowledge/skills, etc.;
- Educate employee groups on the use of ready reckoners, formats, tools and techniques for effective problem solving, so that there are clear guidelines in terms of who, what, when and how at different stages of change project. These tools help align everyone's thinking and action. Ready reckoners also help employees anticipate possible fail points and be prepared to avoid those traps;
- Find out ways to create interest and enthusiasm among people through periodic communication on progress and celebration of achievement of important milestones or special individual/group accomplishments;
- Review/monitor progress with employees to sustain interest and keep the spotlight on the change programme;

Tasks/Responsibilities at the Interface with Customers and other External Groups

- Constantly seek feedback from customers and other relevant external groups to gain an "outside in" perspective of the department's functioning;
- Maintain on-going communication with the customers to ensure the following:

- a) Understand the problems faced by customers;
  - b) Seek customers' inputs, and pick up new ideas from them for improvement; and
  - c) Test the change ideas being considered by the department;
- Verify if the scope of the change project is in line with the customers' requirements/needs;
  - Prepare a communication plan to inform all customers about the progress of the change initiative at regular intervals, and gain their feedback on its effectiveness;

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