

EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES VALUE MANAGEMENT IN SKILLS DELIVERY - A SOUTH AFRICAN EXPERIENCE

C. Malcolm Hall
MIVMA, MHKIVM
Scott & Schou cc
South Africa

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the use of Value Management Methodology in the empowering of communities through the delivery of skills in South Africa. The important point of departure is defining the community to be "empowered".

In the South African context it is widely accepted that the term "empowering communities" refers to the enabling of the community who were previously prejudiced or disadvantaged by Apartheid through the development of their practical skills and education.

In terms of this understanding and together with the effects of Affirmative Action one finds "previously disadvantaged" people at all levels of society, not only in the poor community.

This paper is in two parts. Part one examines a case study in which the Value Management methodology was used to "empower" first year students at the University of Natal. Value Management principles were used to identify the functional requirements of a project and, through creative thinking, allow the student to expand the boundaries of traditional construction methods.

Part two takes the final product and looks at ways that Value Management

could be used to "empower" the community for whom the project is intended. In order to optimise the empowering of these communities it is important to establish the needs of the individual communities as opposed to imposing a general strategy of empowerment on all projects of a similar nature. Opportunities for the use of Value Management in the achieving of this are examined in this section.

Introduction

The Ninth Edition of the Concise Oxford Dictionary offers the following definitions:

Empower: "Give power to, Make able";

Community: "All the people in a specific locality; a body of people having a religion, profession, etc., in common."

From these definitions the broad meaning of the term "Empowering Communities" is the enabling of a body of people who are associated by a common circumstance or goal. One clearly needs to identify who the body of people are, how they are connected (i.e. what is their common

circumstance or goal) and what they require to be "enabled".

In the South African social and political context the word "empowerment" is widely accepted to mean the uplifting of the skills levels of the portion of the population who were disadvantaged due to the policy of Apartheid. This community is commonly termed "previously marginalised" and, although Apartheid did not only adversely affect the Black population of South Africa, the term sublimely refers to the Black population.

Since the election of the African National Congress (ANC) dominated Government of National Unity in April 1994 a policy of Affirmative Action together with the removal of trade barriers against Black people has seen the rapid elevation of Black people into all walks of life. It is no longer a case of the "previously marginalised" population being the poor Blacks although the poor Blacks were all "previously marginalised".

In South Africa empowering communities is primarily about the delivery of basic skills to the majority of the population. These basic skills are the skills required by the people to allow them to provide their basic needs and rights, such as housing and employment.

However, due to the rapid integration of the "previously marginalised" community into the mainstream economy, this community exists in all levels of society. Quite obviously those people who have managed to uplift

themselves from the ranks of the poor still have needs of "empowerment" but these needs are vastly different from the basic needs of the poor "previously marginalised" community.

This paper examines the empowerment of two levels of the South African population. Firstly, the education of 1st year University students and secondly, the skills delivery to the poorly educated and skilled labour force in the low cost housing market

PART ONE

Facilitated Learning: University of Natal, Durban, South Africa

Introduction

First Year students undertaking a course in Construction & Services, under the guidance of Senior Lecturer Rui Martins, are regularly exposed to Problem Based learning. In August 1997 they were given a project which would be tackled individually in accordance with the Problem Based learning technique.

As an attempt to improve on the rigour of this education technique the students were facilitated through two Value Management sessions. During these sessions they were exposed to the requirements of the course, the goals of the project, the principles behind the project and the lateral possibilities which the project offered.

The Value Management methodology, as prescribed in the Australian/New Zealand Standard AS/NZS 4183 : 1994, was used as the framework of the facilitated sessions. The 5 phase Miles Job Plan was strictly adhered to but the Development Phase formed the actual Problem Based learning experience and was therefore the responsibility of the individual students. They had approximately 1 month to conclude this phase.

The Project

The project which the students were given was a real situation. Their client was an employer who was seeking the most cost effective way of providing the basic housing needs of her domestic worker. The domestic worker was a previously marginalised wife and mother of three who had been awarded a housing grant terms of the Government housing scheme. The Government grant was for approximately R17500.00 and after purchasing the land there was a residual of R7344.00 for the construction of the home.

The Client, by means of a competition amongst the 1st year Quantity Surveying and Construction Management students, sought to optimise the value of the project through the provision, by lateral or conventional means, of the housing needs of her employee at the lowest cost.

The students were required to identify the spiritual, occupational and cultural functions that the house was to provide and then to design an innovative abode which would offer value for money. Submissions were to include the sketch design, detail design, estimate of costs and all details that would be required for submission and approval of the drawings.

The Workshop

The workshop was held over two extended afternoon sessions on 02/03 September 1997 following a typical Value Management agenda. Although the workshop was fairly well planned the situation was a new experience for the facilitators and it was anticipated that unexpected situations would frequently be encountered. As a result there was a lot of freedom allowed within the four facilitated phases of the Five Phase Job Plan (Information, Analysis, Creativity, and Judgement).

Information Phase

The Information Phase commenced prior to the actual workshop. As part of the Background Document each student was given a topic to research so that all the relevant information would be on hand should clarification of various issues have been required. In addition, a student within the faculty who was of Zulu

decent was invited to address the workshop on the cultural and spiritual requirements of a Zulu home.

Information was generated and examined under three headings: The System Givens, the Problem Situation and the Assumptions which were being made. Having examined this information additional key issues or concerns were discussed. Those which were relevant to the project were noted by the facilitation team for further discussion during the workshop phases.

Throughout the Information Phase, and in fact the entire workshop, the participants were encouraged to maintain their own Action Plans. Questions or concerns which could not be adequately answered at the time of asking were to be recorded on the Action Plan. The students could then research their answers outside the workshop. In addition any ideas which the students felt could give them the competitive edge in the project were also to be recorded in the Action Plan.

It was hoped that, due to the competitive nature of the assignment, the students would be proactive in the upkeep of their Action Plans but this was not the case. The facilitation team, having noticed an inclination to neglect the recording of actions for later resolution, actively monitored the upkeep of this document.

Analysis Phase

The Analysis Phase formed a major part of the learning process. The session was actively driven by the facilitation team. Initially the system functions were identified and a hierarchy constructed. This function diagram represented the role of the project in the education process.

The criteria against which the project was to be judged were also identified and prioritised.

The second stage of the Analysis Phase involved the Function Analysis of the elements of a low cost house. Function diagrams were constructed for each element. These were used to highlight the systemic roles of each element of the unit. In order to ensure that all functions had been identified creative sessions were held during the Analysis Phase. Expansive scenarios were presented to the students and the functions which the elements would perform in the hypothesised circumstances were generated. These were then tested for relevance within the project. Functions of low cost housing units identified during these creative bursts were then added into the hierarchy.

Where performance criteria were required to fully understanding the functions, such criteria were established, if known, or Action Planned for identification in consultation with the client or other authority, if unknown.

Creative Phase

During the creative phase the students were asked to identify ways of performing the functions which had been analysed during the Analysis phase. The session was facilitated with the entire group of 30 students. Each element of the house was considered separately and lateral thinking sessions were held immediately that the flow of ideas began to slow. This served to keep the students focused and the group's energy levels high.

The willingness of the facilitator to record all ideas and comments which were generated during this session enabled the student to rapidly move to and beyond the boundaries of their current experience.

Although all the data was to be made available to all the students afterward the workshop, the students were encouraged to record ideas which they felt could lead them to the "innovation" which would win them the competition on their Action Plans. This was to keep the ideas fresh in their minds and to prevent such ideas from being lost in the magnitude of creative input which was being generated.

Judgement Phase

The facilitation team drove the Judgement Phase aggressively in order to avoid losing the students participation. The ideas were ranked

in terms of the possibility of the idea being performed. The ranking was kept broad and the ideas were categorised as follows:

- Realistically Possible
- Remotely Possible
- Not Possible

Ideas which, through active debate by the students, could not be clearly ranked in terms of these categories were allocated to the category of highest ranking mooted during the discussion.

It was envisaged that the student would consider the ideas that were ranked as realistically and remotely possible and develop an innovative proposal for the provision of a low cost house which would optimally meet the prioritised project adjudication criteria.

Development Phase

The Development Phase was the actual student project. Given all of the information generated during the Information, Analysis, Creative and Judgement phases the students were required to develop a proposal. This was to be presented, complete with relevant documentation, approximately one month after the Value Management sessions.

Student Feedback on the Inclusion of Value Management Methodology in Problem Based Learning

Prior to the closing of the workshop the students were canvassed for their opinions as to the merits of the inclusion of such Value Management sessions as a supplement to Problem Based Learning.

26 out of the 30 students were of the opinion that the workshop had exposed them to more information and ideas than they would have expected to have been exposed to in one month of classroom lecturing. They also felt that they were better prepared than they would have been had they completed the project without such an exercise.

The remaining 4 students felt that they had had little benefit from the workshops but were of the opinion that the requirements of the project were now clear to them. As such, they felt that this had been a good way to begin a project.

The workshops were attended by 5 tutors. These tutors were 4th year students at the University of Natal who undertook the same Construction and Services course in their first year. They did not, however, undertake the same project during their course. These tutors were unanimously of the opinion that the inclusion of Value Management in Problem Based Learning had exposed the current 1st year students to far more information than they had

experienced during their 1st year course.

Although the facilitation team were not entirely satisfied with the results the above mentioned opinions do suggest that the process was successful.

Senior Lecturer Rui Martins felt that the level of exposure to factual data which he had hoped would be achieved had not, in fact, occurred. However, the Action Plans the students had compiled would compensate for this. Mr Martins was of the opinion that future agenda's for workshops of this nature should be adjusted to improve the level of exposure of the students to the required factual data.

Part Two

Imparting Skills

Introduction

The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) of South Africa sites "Building the Nation" as one of its six basic principles. The specific aim of this Principle is the provision of basic rights to all South Africans. The vast majority of South Africans were denied basic rights such as: jobs, homes, health care, education and the vote.

The introduction of empowerment policies into Government projects was aimed at using a Capital Works Programme providing housing, schools, clinics and other community facilities, to

impart construction skills to the communities in which the projects were to be constructed. In essence housing projects would bring the "classroom" to the community.

Affirmative Action policies have also been introduced in order to ensure the imparting of higher level management skills to emerging contractors. In accordance with Affirmative Action policies contractors and consultants wishing to be appointed on Government projects have been required to adjust the equity and skills content of their companies to include previously marginalised people.

During the implementation of the projects contractors have been compelled to employ unskilled and semi-skilled labour from the communities in which they are building. Emphasis has also been placed on the integration of women into the construction Industry labour market. In addition the contractors have been encouraged to conduct training programmes for the unskilled labour throughout the contract.

Training programmes have traditionally been in areas such as setting out of buildings, earthworks, brick and block making and laying, etc. In some instances contractors have established block making plants, which have employed local labour, very often women, to manufacture the blocks for the project. The labour utilised in the running the plant have been given management skills training and on completion of the contract the plant

has been transfer to local emerging businessmen.

One of the flaws of the current process has, however, been the perception of contractors of the community needs when establishing an Affirmative Action proposal required for appointment to Government projects. Contractors have tended to assume the need for basic and technical skills in the previously disadvantaged communities and overlooked the need for management skills and quality control.

Value Management in the pre-tender stages of a project will enhance the project team's ability to identify and target the skills requirements of the community and provide a means to seek creative methods of delivering these requirements within the given scope of works.

Methodology

It is not envisaged that a separate workshop be held for the identification of the skills requirements of communities. It would suffice to include "Empowering the Community" as a standard objective of Value Management workshops on all RDP projects. Ideally community representatives make up a large proportion of the workshop participants. However, an Empowerment Value Management workshop at the planning stages of major low cost urban developments and squatter camp upgrades would provide numerous opportunities which would maximise the effects of the empowerment policies.

While exploring the Problem Situation within the Information Phase the facilitation team must take care to pursue the problems currently experienced by the community due to the lack of skills. The current skills level of the community can be determined during the process of identification of the System Givens and the validation of the project Assumptions.

During the Analysis Phase of the Value Management workshop the facilitation team can establish the skills which are required for the efficient implementation of the project. The skills needed by the community can then be aligned with the skills which will be utilised during the project.

The Analysis phase should be used to create paradigm shifts in both the Community and the Consulting Team. The Community, for example may be moved from a position of demanding excessive training to a position which provides their primary needs without causing unacceptable cost increases. On the other hand the Consulting Team, through a process of empathic listening, should be moved to better understanding of the needs of the community and the long run value of empowerment policies.

During the Creative Phase of the workshop the members of the sub-groups can synergistically interact in order to generate lateral and innovative ways of imparting the required skills to the appropriate members of the community, while maintaining cost efficiency for the project.

Judgement of these ideas so generated will take place in broad terms. The workshop participants will rank the ideas into the following categories:

- Realistically Possible,
- Remotely Possible and

- Not Possible.

The ranking process should confirm and cement the paradigm shifts which take place during the Analysis Phase.

The Development Phase of the workshop will see the sub-groups formulate the actual empowerment strategies which will set the project on the road to reaching the intended skills delivery goals.

Benefits

There are several benefits which the inclusion of "Empowering Communities" as a standard objective of Value Management workshops within RDP projects would offer:

1. Community Buy-in

Developing empowerment strategies in an environment of constructive overlap and community participation can lead to the accurate assessment and understanding of that communities specific needs. The community will also achieve an understanding of what skills can be learnt within the scope of works of the project. Synergistic development of the empowerment strategy should therefore result in the buy-in of the community.

2. Cost Efficiency

In the short run Affirmative Action and Empowerment policies tend to be expensive exercises. It is the perceived systemic long run benefits which the Government is targeting through the implementation of such policies. During the Analysis Phase of the workshop costs of implementation can be allocated to

the function of “empowering communities”. The cost of empowerment can then be kept in line with the value it is offering within the scope of the project.

During the Development Phase of the workshop ideas can be generated to minimise the negative short run cost implications of the empowerment strategy which is being proposed.

3. Accurate Alignment of the Skills on Offer With the People Who Can Best Utilise Them

Through the accurate identification of the skills needs of the community, the skills training on offer can be delivered directly at the members of the community best able to receive and utilise the knowledge. This will prevent semi-skilled but unemployed people enduring training programmes which are below their current skill level.

The result of this will be that the skills training on offer will have more likelihood of reaching the market place.

4. Audit of the Empowerment Policy of the Project and Government

As with most Government policies success should imply re-election. The introduction of Value Management, and specifically the inclusion of “Empowering Communities” as an objective of the Value Management workshops conducted on RDP type projects, will have the effect of providing a record of the steps which the Government has taken to provide basic skills training to the majority of previously marginalised people in South Africa.

5. Ongoing Upgrading of the Level of Skills Training Offered

It is a fairly common occurrence for people to continually offer the same service which has “worked” in the past. The first flaw with this attitude is that the strategy that “worked” previously was often aimed at “getting around” the Government’s empowerment clauses within the tender documentation. The development of such strategies often paid little attention to the real levels of performance which would be achieved.

Secondly, communities could be exposed to the same training repeatedly. The inclusion of the proposed Empowerment objective as part of Value Management methodology on RDP projects would ensure a continual improving and updating of the training being offer. Essentially the policy would be changed from a reactive strategy to a proactive strategy.

Conclusion

Many differing opinions regarding the merits and demerits of Affirmative Action have been expressed around the world. Generally it is more difficult to find plausible arguments detracting from the goals of “Empowering Communities”. This social role of Government, especially the South African Government, tends to be more acceptable to the public at large than direct Affirmative Action. However, the development of reactive strategies, as opposed to proactive strategies, to Empowerment and Affirmative Action clauses in Government projects are extremely

unlikely to delivery the desired skills levels to acceptable numbers of people.

Proactive policy has a far better chance of delivering the performance criteria of Empowerment and Affirmative Action policies. Value Management approaches the development of win-win proposals for the delivery of these policies in a proactive synergistic atmosphere thereby providing an ideal methodology for optimising skills delivery through these Government policies.

References

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