

Lessons learned from training and consultancy projects for governmental and administrative reforms in Central and Eastern European Countries assisted by cooperation projects with Western European partner organisations

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Question 1: What are the most important reasons, that led you or your organisation to the decision, to take part in the mentioned support efforts?

1. The most important reasons which led our organisation to take part in support efforts for Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC) can be summarised as follows.

Specialising in organisational reform and institutional development, our Centre provides assistance to governments to help them strengthen the capacity of their public administrations and public sector enterprise through the use of inter-disciplinary, socio-economic joint learning and development projects.

We have followed developments in CEECs since 1968 through personal contacts, field visits, participation in international conferences, advising ministries in CEEC countries and through training of diplomats and government officials at United Nations in New York (UNITAR) and WTO/GATT in Geneva. Most of our longterm projects consist of a synergy of professional and cultural interest in the respective partner countries.

Can you describe an example, which illustrates concretely, what has been done by your organization?

For example, the first author attended the IIAS round table in Madrid in 1989 on European Integration. At the conference, he met Professor Gorazd Trpin of the university of Ljubljana. Slovenia at that time was still part of the former Yugoslavia. Since Dr Saner just completed a radio feature focusing on historical, social and economic reasons which led to the implosion of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire², he was interested to hear whether reforms of the national government and state administration were possible to prevent disintegration of Yugoslavia. The exchanges between Prof. Trpin and Dr Saner continued past the declaration of independence of Slovenia and led to a cooperation project in support of the modernisation of Slovenia's new central government administration.

The Slovene-Swiss bilateral project helped create two new offices at the level of Slovenia's central government, namely an Academy of Administration in charge of training of Slovenia's senior civil servants and a Organisation and Method unit in charge of effectiveness and efficiency studies of administrative units and agencies of the central government. The development of these two institutions required the reaching of approval of the concept by the coalition government (approval of concept, providing budget and integrating the two new administrative units into existing organisational structure) and the development of related competencies of 37 civil servants in order to ensure the successful functioning of these new governmental units. (For more information, see by Saner & Yiu, 1997)

Question 2: How do you organize the needs analysis? Is there a necessity to improve needs analysis?

² "Logik des Zerfalls" (Logic of decomposition), Radio DRS, Basle, 20 February 1989

Needs analysis for administrative reform projects demands time in OECD and CEEC countries alike. The willingness by the Western European Country (WEC) expert to forego simple replication of ready made solutions developed elsewhere³ is of paramount importance. No situation is fully comparable to another CEEC country even though they previously shared a similar political system. It is equally important to understand that solutions have to be invented together, that is between WEC and CEEC partner institutions and experts. The process of fact finding at the politically sensitive level of central government requires tactfulness on the part of WEC expert and willingness to inform and explain by the CEEC partner. It is of paramount importance that WEC experts remember that our CEEC partners remain in their respective countries after the conclusion of co-operation projects. Risk taking is higher on the CEEC partner side since they have to live with the results of the projects, be they successful or a failure. The WEC experts return to their countries and do not necessarily have to justify the project in front of their own government or parliament for the remaining part of their career span.

Taking as an example of the Swiss-Slovenian project, the analysis and preparation phase lasted three years and consisted of several steps of progressively deeper understanding of the situation by both partner institutions. This lengthy lead time was necessary in order to harmonise both sides' philosophy and theory of public administration and administrative reform. In addition, it was also important to broaden the knowledge base on both sides in regard to understanding each country's administrative complexities and to get sufficient support from ministers, high ranking government officials, academics and representatives of the media (Saner & Yiu 1996). This process of "Getting to know each other" was built around several conferences on matters pertaining to comparative administrative practices, study visits in Slovenia and Switzerland (Saner & Yiu, 1997) and exchanges of views by Swiss, Slovenian and other Western European experts and academics. The goal of these exchanges was to create a common language and mutual understanding in regard to the needs of the partner country and in regard to the support that the donor country could offer in terms of know-how and financial and logistical support.

Question 3: Are there concrete positive (or negative) results of these support programmes? Has the work been worthwhile for the supported institution and/or for your own institution?

The bilateral project has been evaluated by a joint review Swiss-Slovene team in April 1997. The concrete results of this bilateral project consisted of the following findings: a) two new government units have been established and are fully functioning (Academy of Administration and Organisation and Method Unit), b) 21 civil servants have been trained and certified as Organisation & Methods experts and 16 civil servants have been trained and certified as management trainers, c) . Six Organisation and Method studies have been completed of various ministries, agencies and administrative units, d) Eight management training modules have been developed in Slovene language and e) a Master training plan has been established for the whole of the Slovenian government.

The project was worthwhile for both partner institutions. Our Centre was able to develop a generic design for similar public governance and reform project called MASTER (Managing Administrative Systems through Training, Education and Research) and to

³ For an example of ineffective transfer of training technology, please refer to Saner, Yiu 1994.

further hone the application of Action Research and Action Learning principles essential for the guarantee of sustainability of such large system reform projects. (Saner & Yiu, April 1998). Our Slovene partners are fully involved in further deepening the administrative reform process and in helping Slovenia prepare its administration for the coming EU membership. Some of our Slovene partners continue their reform work by holding influential positions in the government within the domain of state administration, others have further strengthened their role as university professors and consultants offering their services to Slovene, CEEC and EU client organisations.

Question 4: Are there proposals to improve these support programmes in the future and how could this be done?

4. Several proposals could be entertained in order to improve effectiveness and efficiency of future administrative reform projects through the means of technical co-operation projects.

a) The knowledge base for administrative reform projects in Central and Eastern European Countries needs to be elevated to professional levels. The best way to do this is by sharing experiences and by participating in theory building. There exists no neutral forum yet⁴ which can bring together government officials of WEC and CEEC country representatives in charge of public administrative reforms, programme officers of intergovernmental and national donor agencies in charge of technical co-operation in public administration and academics and experts with proven expertise in the fields of public administration and international relations. The closest to a non-partisan role is the IIAS. May this meeting be the first one of many to follow.

b) Evaluation reports of similar projects undertaken by Phare, Tacis, Sigma-OECD, World Bank and national governments should be made public in order to help CEEC and WEC governments and experts learn from each other's difficulties and successes. Good governance applies to Western donor organisations as well, they are transparency, accountability, access to information and services and non-discrimination of contractors.

c) Donor institutions should better co-ordinate their efforts with each other in order to avoid duplication of effort and in order to avoid costly and confusing competition for scarce resources in Central and Eastern European countries, for instance poaching of local staff should be outruled in the interest of all parties concerned.

d) Intergovernmental agencies and development agencies of WEC governments should limit the damages caused by institutional and personal rivalries. Nobody gains by the practice of deliberate omission of contributions made by perceived rival institutions and nobody benefits from attempts of supremacy be it for ideological, institutional, financial or personal power. Good professional practice includes the acknowledgement of contributions made by other institutions and the ruling out of plagiarism be this of concepts or work methods.

e) Government reform is a complicated and complex undertaking in every country. Donor and recipient countries would fair well if they could agree on a clear responsibility

⁴ Neutral meaning without financial dependency relationship e.g. in regard to donor versus recipient organisation or personnel.

structure for such technical co-operation project for both sides, donor and recipient alike. The EU (Phare/Tacis) preferred consortium approach is too costly, too complex, too slow and too confusing. It is already problematic enough not to have an agreement among EU member countries as to final form of the EU governance structure and administration why add more complication by having unequal EU country institutions try to co-ordinate a reform project in a third country when neither of them can offer EU-wide validity in terms of administrative norms and standards, coherent administrative theory nor consistent reform practice? It would be better to have one EU country institution be clearly responsible and the other EU consortium members take supportive secondary roles and the EU commission, that is Phare or Tacis, be clearly accountable.

f) Technical co-operation involves a lot of money which in turn can attract rent seeking behaviour by all parties concerned. In light of the premise of good governance, it would be useful if the main donor countries and institutions would apply the WTO rules regarding public procurement contracts. These rules have been signed by the EU and forty other countries, but the implementation is still hampered by bureaucratic obstruction and hidden political agendas. Our Centre being domiciled in Switzerland for instance is not eligible for EU projects while EU based institutions can apply for Swiss financed projects.

Question 5: What do you think about organising similar activities in other parts of the world for other countries, which have comparable problems, caused by fundamental change in their society?

Our Centre has organised similar large system change projects in the field of public administrative reform outside of Europe. We have concluded an institution building project in China which lasted from 1994-1996. The bilateral project in China focused on supporting the Chinese government's decision to modernise its public administration. CSEND helped create a bilateral project jointly financed by Switzerland and China which focused on improving the training capacity (curriculum, training methods, training management competence) of 27 central and provincial training institutions. (For more details see Yiu & Saner, 1998). The project also involved a long preparation phase lasting four years including a preliminary train-of-trainers project financed by UNDP. The Sino-Swiss project has also been evaluated by a joint Swiss-Chinese team of reviewers who confirmed the positive results of the bilateral project. The projects in China and Slovenia involved each time the participation of 42 experts (academics and government officials) from Western Europe, North America, Australia who delivered teaching and consulting inputs in CEER countries and China. Both bilateral projects were jointly financed by Switzerland and the respective partner country. The Swiss total budget for each project amounted to ca 3 Million CHF all costs included.

CSEND is deepening its understanding of large system change theory and practice and is currently not undertaking reform projects similar in scope to the Slovenia or China project but instead focuses on research and theory building. For example, a comparative research project was recently published which is adding to the knowledge base of public administrative reform. The publication's title is "The use of in-service training as a vehicle of change within public administration" (Saner, Strehl, Yiu, 1997). Thirteen different governments were compared in regard to their effectiveness and efficiency in the use of training for administrative change. The data contained in this comparative research publication will be of benchmark utility for future administrative reform projects.

In order to further improve standards of in-service training, CSEND has also started a new interest group focusing on quality measures of in-service training in public administration. The first meeting of this interest group occurred during the 1998 conference of IASIA in Paris. In a related matter, CSEND has also presented examples of the use of Action Research and Action Learning methods for administrative reform projects. These presentations were given during the IIAS conference as part of the sub-topic 2 titled "The citizen and the provision of public services."

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