



# Case Study 18

## HR/OD Intervention Focus: Restructuring the Organisation

### Human Resource Rationalisation and Maximum Productivity

The Australian Government-funded Provincial Road Management Facility (PRMF) aims to develop good governance in relation to road projects, so it closely collaborates with the Provincial Engineering Office (PEO) of the Province of Guimaras, for which Australia Awards Scholarships (AAS) recipient Ramil Villasis works. As acting provincial engineer of the

Guimaras, his main concern is infrastructure. "If you look at the carriers of the Province of Guimaras, infrastructure cuts across everything: the economy, health, environment, land. There is always infrastructure support." More specifically, he is in charge of PEO's management development. This includes personnel, construction supervision, project implementation, road safety, etc. "The challenge for me is how to organise the people," he stresses.

Villasis' original Re-Entry Action Plan (REAP), a way to ensure that he utilises his learnings from the scholarship to address PEO's organisational gaps, focused on the use of computer-aided design (CAD) in the application of engineering and operations techniques. However, he changed his mind while pursuing his Masters in Engineering Management at the University of Newcastle in Australia. He muses, "I believe computer-aided skills can be obtained at home. We have training for that. We can buy books for that."

What actually led to his change of heart was the organisational diagnosis conducted through the PRMF which revealed that there was an excess of non-technical personnel in the PEO. This glaring human resource imbalance in his office could not be ignored. "That idea triggered me to change my REAP from computer-aided design to organisational design," he says.

The first thing he did upon his return was to submit a proposal for structural reorganisation to address the imbalanced staffing in the PEO. His revised REAP, which included plans to reorganise the PEO structure and provide a manual of work flow for the office, received prompt support from the Provincial Government of Guimaras.

To achieve the objectives and promote a sense of ownership, he has tried to involve his colleagues in implementing his REAP because he believes their collective efforts would create

more impact. "I told them, 'This is our situation now. We just don't realise that we are spending much, but we are not getting the output needed for our office.' By telling them what is happening and what we should be doing, we can make a change that is not only mine, but ours. We will be doing good and it will be our legacy to this office," he shares.

### **Overcoming the obstacles**

While the organisational restructuring plans have been approved, implementation may stretch to more than a year according to Villasis since it will require the staggered reassignment of personnel. His REAP, though ready to get off the ground, cannot be fully realised as it is dependent on certain parameters. "We have to wait for some people to retire or be accommodated elsewhere. To tell you frankly, my REAP is not yet fully implemented because people tend to refuse if you try and bring them outside their comfort zone. And organisational restructuring will affect many persons." The main challenge lies in the fact that only 24 of PEO's 71 personnel are technical staff. Only 11 of these are engineers, and there is a notable oversupply of drivers who chauffeur personnel to other offices.

Then, there are budgetary and human resource issues that also need to be addressed. Reorganisation means increasing the number of technical staff while decreasing the number of non-technical staff. Understandably, there is apprehension on the part of some personnel who may be affected. "But I told them that they are part of the change, and I also let them feel ownership of the change," he quips.

### **Superhero status**

Coming home, he was received well by some members of the Provincial Government. "They looked at me or treated me like a superhero, like I know everything [because I was] a scholar from Australia." He was given a lot of responsibilities, and he even remembers coming home from a week-long seminar only to do his laundry and then head off to another seminar. "I told them it may not be very effective for me to do so many things. Eventually they realised that I am not a superhero," he shares. After some time, the extra work load was delegated to others.

### **Support as key**

Despite the difficulties, Villasis is thankful for the support he has been receiving. While trying to identify positions required, he has managed to get some ideas from colleagues on how they can deliver services more effectively and efficiently. He also talks about receiving support from other provincial government personnel, "It was a very good experience coordinating with them. You can feel how important what you are doing is. Nakakataba ng puso. (It's heartwarming.)"

He also discloses that his biggest hurdle was the change in leadership that welcomed him upon his return. Aside from contending with internal issues within his office regarding his REAP, he was also faced with the bigger challenge of getting the new administration to approve his plans, as his REAP which has received the nod of a previous administration may not necessarily earn the support of the next one.

Fortunately, he managed to get the governor's consent to proceed with his REAP. What he did was show his proposed organisational structure and financial analysis to the new governor and explain to him how his plans align with the mandate of the PEO. "It's good that he (the governor) understood and gave me the go signal. That was really a fulfilling moment," he proudly says.

### **Becoming more proactive**

While Villasis's REAP is still waiting to bear fruit, he has not remained idle as he currently concerns himself with the implementation of good management practices. He believes that even though his key result areas remain essentially the same, his efforts have already led to the notable transformation in his office. Making it a point to share his project management learnings from his studies abroad to colleagues, he says that PEO has now become proactive and transparent. He explains, "Before, we were reactive in doing things. We waited for problems to come up, then we took on the responsibility of addressing them. But we are shifting to becoming proactive, anticipating what should be done so that we can avoid problems in the future."

He says that taking the extra step to involve the community during project planning enables them to own the project, too. He gets them onboard by explaining to them their role and expected project outputs, and this results in a community that knows what to expect. "In doing project implementation, we are more transparent. They know about the project and they feel ownership of the project. That is management," expounds Villasis.

Likewise, his willingness to share with his personnel his learnings on project management – including the engineering tools that he has acquired while studying abroad – has increased the competency of his people. As testament to this, two of them have been asked to move to and help other offices. "They are doing very well. I am glad about that," he proudly says. Believing in the abilities of many more in his organisation, he continues, "I know that some of the personnel now are being capacitated. I just need to put them in their proper places in order for them to give maximum output to the Provincial Government of Guimaras."

### **Developing competencies**

With all of the positive changes going on, Villasis cannot help but recall what their local chief executive once said in relation to the Philippines Australia Human Resource and Organisational Development Facility (PAHRODF): "In order for us to develop in Guimaras, we have to strengthen our human resource and the answer is PAHRODF."

PAHRODF has left a good impression on Villasis, who describes the people running the Facility as supportive and accommodating. He also thinks that the University of Newcastle provided him with what he calls the "additional armour of knowledge" which he needs to address gaps in his organisation.

Feeling grateful for what he has gained through the AAS, Villasis can only wish the same experience upon others. "I would like for them to gain the competencies that are being obtained through the scholarship; to experience mingling with other cultures; to widen their perspective in life." Because of his colleagues' failure in the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), however, his office has not been able to send other deserving

employees after his stint. "It's really unfortunate that we missed the six slots," he laments. For him, sending more people on scholarships would improve the collective capabilities of his office. Rationalising manpower is one thing, but he ultimately believes that there is no better way to maximise productivity than to have more people undergo the scholarship and share similar competencies.

*Ramil Villasis finished his Masters in Engineering Management at the University of Newcastle in Australia in 2011. His REAP focused on the enhancement of PEO organisational structure, systems and processes*