



## Case Study 19

### HR/OD Intervention Focus: Competency-Based Leadership Program

#### Linking Competencies in Capacity Building

An organisational assessment of the Department of Social Welfare and Development Services (DSWD) conducted in 2010 revealed the potential leadership vacuum looming over the department. According to Leah Mejias, assistant director of the Capacity Building Bureau (CBB),

most of the directors from the Central and Regional Offices were on their way to forced retirement in the next two years. Thus, future leaders had to be capacitated. “Because of the organisational assessment, we really looked into how to get our people ready,” she explains.

Apart from this, they also discovered that although they had a lot of policies in place, they were not being properly implemented. In light of many concurrent projects particularly on poverty alleviation such as the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps), the agency did not seem ready and equipped to handle the magnitude of the work that lay before it.

Mejias feels that the Government of Australia, through the Philippines Australia Human Resource and Organisational Development Facility (PAHRODF), offered timely help when it conducted The Competency Based Leadership Program (CBLP) for DSWD in February 2012. Seven of the participants came from the CBB: Mejias, the director, two division chiefs and three technical staff members. “They saw that we really needed to look into how leaders should be supported with different strategies, mechanisms,” she opines.

A second intervention, the Institutional Development Capacity Program for the Department, followed the year after. It was attended by the same participants, plus four more technical staff members. “Because of the emerging needs and trends, and of course the deliverables required at any given period of time, we needed to look at how the organisation was supporting the existing programs and services of the Department,” she explains.

As then division chief of CBB, Mejias says she accomplished two goals by participating in the interventions: becoming a part-owner of the process and being given the chance to develop her leadership skills. “I took the opportunity for growth and development as well as, of course, the opportunity to support the entire program since it will support the entire organisation.”

Interestingly, she shares that in her 25 years with the agency, it was her first time to deal with the various offices of DSWD and interact with personnel from all levels. The usual practice has been to confine workshops to those occupying higher-level positions, but she has found that involving technical staff results in a more enriching experience. “We engaged some of the technical staff. They participated in the process and it’s a good experience because we learned a lot from doing it,” she shares.

### **Dealing with the Facility and LSP**

She remembers that working with PAHRODF has always been a good experience. “They are very good listeners. They don’t close the doors when we need to expand the conversation on how DSWD is currently operating. We had many consultations just so they could capture the context of the organisation,” she says. Mejias also welcomed the opportunity given to them by the Facility to join the different technical assessment processes, allowing them to look at how other organisations are taking the lead.

She admits that it was her first time to deal with a Learning Service Provider(LSP) during the CBLP, and she appreciates how their accommodating and understanding LSP adjusted to their time schedule and gave them the flexibility to complete the intervention program. What’s more, their LSP also gave them the opportunity to conduct the program on their own. “We wanted to do it without the presence of any service provider. They did it through a series of coaching sessions with the core team, and [it also took] a lot of patience for us to understand as we were first timers in terms of the competency-based leadership,” she explains.

Mejias proudly shares that after a series of coaching sessions, consultations, and workshops with the LSP, they immediately sensed an improvement in the delivery of their capacity building programs. “All of our learnings, including the processes, were integrated into our current interventions for our intermediaries.” As proof of this improvement, she cites the very good feedback CBB received for the executive management course in which they have incorporated what they have learned from the CBLP. “I think that’s one good indicator that we’re successful in terms of the learning process and the learning opportunity that we got from PAHRODF, from the learning service provider,” she says.

She goes on to say that ‘learning by doing’ proved to be the best way for her and her division to handle and imbibe the program, as she now usually integrates her own learnings in CBB’s own learning interventions.

### **Cascading the CBLP**

Mejias narrates that her REAP involved cascading the outcome of the CBLP to the technical and administrative support staff within the CBB. As only seven of them attended the intervention, they had to understand and replicate the program in a three-day orientation. The next step was to then cascade it to their counterparts nationwide, the Institutional Development department chiefs of the different field offices.

In addition, they had also had to look at leadership success profiles so that they too can develop a new intervention which already includes leadership and management competencies up to the director level. The intention has been to mentor one more person every year.

In implementing the REAP, Mejias shares that she and her colleagues have had to overcome a few challenges, foremost of which was ensuring sustainability particularly because the new program came on the heels of an aborted executive management course for interns in 2008-2009. Thus, the CBLP may just be viewed as 'ningas-cogon' or a temporary measure that would wane after some time. "The same might happen to the CBLP and I think that's the realisation of the core team. We really needed to look at how we will sustain what we initiate."

The financial aspect was also a concern. "How do we ensure that this is included in our proposed budget every year? We need to have very good data showing the current situation of DSWD in terms of leaders. How do we now develop and supply leaders in the next two years, in the next five years?" Since Mejias is currently the most senior personnel in the CBB, she feels accountable and wants to ensure that the CBLP moves forward. To make it sustainable, they have actually already integrated this into the work flow and financial plan for the proposed budget of their department each year.

DSWD has also formed a technical working group headed by an undersecretary and assistant secretary to ensure that the program they have introduced will be sustained. By integrating CBLP with other major initiatives of the department such as the formulation of its leadership brand, Mejias's team can rest assured that their legacy will live on.

As a side note, Ms. Mejias shares that prior to the intervention, there was also no specific leadership brand for the agency. After a series of consultations and workshops that were also supported by PAHRODF, the tagline "Matapat, Mahusay, Magaling (Trustworthy, Competent, Good)" was born, This branding even got the nod from the agency's higher ups and now, all are united in embodying this leadership brand as they achieve the agency's goals.

Whereas the agency used to focus only on capacity building before the intervention, they have now started to factor in competency even in their regular programs. She admits that aside from enabling them, the intervention has also changed their perspective and the way they do things even in their field offices. "One good thing is that even our institutional development division in the other field offices, they are also looking into the competency in terms of combining and conducting competency building."

Providing a good example of how they have adopted and integrated their learnings from CBLP into their core processes, she cites the competency-based assessment of Local Social Welfare Development Officers (LSWDO) which the agency ran in different provinces, cities and municipalities of 16 regions last year. From the baseline results, they are now conducting learning and development interventions for, with Module 1 focusing on getting the competency requirements of the LSWDOs. "We tried to replicate what we started with the CBTP, how we developed the competency areas for DSWD, and are now developing the competency base for the LSWDOs," she says.

A lot of work still needs to be done, but because DSWD has deemed it necessary to take the right steps to address the agency's leadership and organisational development challenges, DSWD is well on its way to having not only suitable and competent leaders but also a fully capable workforce. With PAHRODF's presence, the CBB can be assured that they will always have an ally. For Mejias, this is surely a comforting thought.

*Leah Mejias, Assistant Director of the Capacity Building Bureau (CBB) - DSWD, was one of the participants for the Competency-based Leadership Development Program in DSWD*