



Case Study 26

HR/OD Intervention Focus: Institutional Interventions

Support from the Top

Interventions and scholarships are mainstays at the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (PHIVOLCS). In the past 3 years, PHIVOLCS has relied on the assistance of the

PAHRODF to effect changes in the organisation. For Dr. Renato Solidum, Jr., PHIVOLCS Director, the agency's partnership with the Government of Australia through PAHRODF has proven to be highly beneficial "They are professional people; they think of you as a real partner. It is not simply a job that you just move on and after the activity is finished, you are done," he says.

For Director Solidum, engaging in all the activities with PAHRODF is vital. He believes that the activities not only improve performance, but more importantly, help motivate staff to take ownership of PHIVOLCS' vision. Ultimately, these efforts are what help sustain the organisation's actions and plans. "If you are the boss of many scientists and engineers, you will find out that it is not easy to manage highly intelligent people. The intervention of PAHRODF was very important because it allowed staff to be part of the process. I could have just dictated what I wanted for the office. What came out of the strategic planning process was almost the same with the things that I wanted to implement but it was different because the staff participated in the process, so now they feel that they own the plan," he explains.

Director Solidum shares that he has tried to introduce certain things prior to the strategic planning intervention and he had a difficult time convincing staff since they did not fully appreciate what he was proposing. As he further elaborates, "The success of every organisation is really anchored on its human resource. It is not the leader that is important, but all the people under the leader. And the leader would make the organisation better with the proper guidance and with the same vision that we would have, with the same objectives that everyone owns up to." This seems to be the guiding principle that has driven Director Solidum's management of PHIVOLCS.

Rather than taking a top-down approach, he prefers to involve his people as much as possible so that they become active participants and appreciate their roles even more. Sharing one anecdote, he says, “Some staff had directly told me that now they appreciate what they are doing even if their role is not high-level or scientific. Now they can see where they are involved. They can now see their role; they can now see how important they are and that is an important thing for any organization. Otherwise, people will just do things like robots.”

Director Solidum shares that even before the PAHRODF assistance, PHIVOLCS already had a good strategic plan and performance evaluation system in place. He still insisted on the PAHRODF-supported activities and saw these as vehicles to involve the entire organisation. “The first question that was asked of me by the facilitators was, you already have a good strategic plan, so why do you need this? I told them you will find out why during the course of the intervention.”

He explains that though they could have easily crafted a science-based strategic plan, he wanted everyone involved. In many organisations, the strategic plan typically emanates from the top but in the case of PHIVOLCS, Director Solidum got to involve entire organisation. “So that they will realize that they are a big part of whatever PHIVOLCS does and dreams of achieving. So that they will recognize that they are a big part of the solution to problems we want to solve here in our country,” he reasons.

He is happy that the Learning Service Providers (LSPs) were able to extract the desired results through facilitation. Aside from the participants’ input, the contributions of the LSPs cannot be diminished. “Essentially we know what to do but in the strategic planning process, the LSP had a way of facilitating our discussions to bring out what we had in mind. And in most cases, the

activities would be fun but of course there would be times wherein you really have to be serious, think hard, and write on what you’re supposed to do.”

Though his general perception of the LSPs is that they are excellent partners, Director Solidum offers advice in two areas to maintain the quality of engagement and the satisfaction of the clients, if not improve them. The first is in matching the LSP with the profile of participants, and the second is in ensuring that facilitators are also technically equipped. He explains, “There should be a good match between the group that is being assisted with the LSP. For technical/scientific organisations like PHIVOLCS, the facilitators must have a good appreciation of technical fields so that they can grasp and better present the things that we want to say.”

Cascading plans

The REAP of PHIVOLCS in relation to the Strategic Planning intervention was to communicate the Strategic Plan to employees who were not present and involved in the original intervention. He stresses that it was necessary to do this in an exceptional and timely manner so people would be clear on what it is and learn to appreciate it. In fact, he is delighted to share that it was an all-PHIVOLCS team that cascaded the plan to the field operations staff. With regard to the performance evaluation intervention, Director Solidum shares, “I think we did it well and we are proud to say that all the staff will have their individual performance contracts or evaluations.”

Director Solidum happily notes that because PHIVOLCS had an existing strategic plan and an evaluation system in existence even before the PAHRODF interventions, resistance to change among the employees was minimal. “We are proud to say that we are more advanced than

most public sector organisations. We have a strategic plan in place. Our results-based performance management system was conceptualised even before the current (Aquino) administration mandated providing performance-based incentives," he shares. They are yet to see, though, how the enhanced performance management system will fare as implementation is yet to start.

Making interventions work

Director Solidum has identified important lessons from the series of institutional interventions that they have undertaken with PAHRODF.

First is the importance of management/leadership support to sustain these activities. In other organisations, he relates, it is usually the human resource, finance or administrative department heads that usually push for these activities and obtain approval from top management. In PHIVOLCS, it is different as he himself initiated the reforms.

He also mentions the role of the middle managers and importance of their buy-in for a plan to be implemented. "Middle managers should also be convinced that a reform is important and will make the organisation better. There may be people who would not want to support it. So we, as top management, have to convince them, clarify their role, and convey to them the importance of the reform to the organisation."

Director Solidum sees organisational development as an iterative process. Using the PHIVOLCS Strategic Plan as an example, he shares that they need to evaluate programs and activities each year to ensure that these remain responsive to needs and are aligned with what they

want to do as a scientific organisation. "It does not mean that once you have completed an intervention, you can stop," he adds.

He also recommends being patient. Since Director Solidum believes in the value of participation, he takes time to explain things and make people understand. He is also convinced of the importance of supervisors as teachers and coaches to their staff.

Director Solidum is convinced that the PAHRODF interventions have been helpful. Recalling his own career path and how he has not been provided with formal training on management and organizational development, he is now committed to offering these to his staff. "I do not want my staff to experience the same thing that I experienced. I rose from the ranks to being a manager without having formal training on leadership, human resource management or organisational development. For me, these are important preparatory courses for future leaders and managers."

Although confident that he can actually facilitate some of the programs for PHIVOLCS, he feels that he is better off taking a back seat to encourage spontaneity and participation from participants more. "I prefer to be a participant so that people will not have the perception that I am dictating things. If I stay in the background, the staff will be more participative and cooperative and they will feel that they own whatever results from the intervention," he relates.

With Director Solidum at the helm, human resource and organisational development will remain a priority of the agency. He believes that what the public gets from PHIVOLCS is a

reflection of how they are as an organisation – not just an externally good science and technology organisation but one with efficient and effective internal systems.

Director Solidum has big plans for the agency. He puts it succinctly, “I want the PhiVolcs to be a global leader in using science and technology to develop safer and more resilient communities.

For us to do that, we need to develop not only good scientists but also good leaders that are also scientists.”

Dr. Renato Solidum, Jr., PHIVOLCS Director and change sponsor in various HR/OD interventions implemented in PHIVOLCS in partnership with PAHRODF.