PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON DEVELOPMENT:

PERSONAL, LOCAL AND GLOBAL

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1. Development and Cultural Change

Change and Loss

All change, even when desirable and much wanted always involves a process of loss.   For example, moving to new house, a new job, going to live in a new country. All involve leaving something else behind. Emotional reactions to loss are even more acute when change has been forced on someone without their consent – for example having your house demolished to make way for new buildings, or being made redundant from work that you enjoyed. Thus change and loss are two sides of the same coin – one cannot occur without the other.

Cultures always evolve and change, but recent and present immense cultural upheavals are taking place far more rapidly compared with earlier periods of history.   Advanced communications technology now enables the images and cultural value systems from the dominant American/European global culture to be transmitted to every country in the world. The process of "development" is taking place at an ever greater rate than in the past.   Such fundamental cultural changes, even if considered desirable, also cannot take place without loss - personally, socially and nationally.

These processes of loss underlie all personal, local and global change, but because "development" is usually portrayed as "progress", they are often **felt** rather than clearly articulated. However, greater awareness of the psychological effects of change and loss can help managers to support their employees through these processes more effectively.

Attachment

Becoming attached to familiar people, places, customs, rituals, routines is essential to a sense of emotional security for all human beings.   Therefore any loss which robs someone of an attachment profoundly disrupts their ability to experience life in the same meaningful way as before.   This occurs no matter how "rational" or "beneficial" the changes may seem to another person who does not have the same intensity of attachment.

The severity of the experience of loss is directly dependent upon the person's **intensity** of emotional attachment to what has been lost, not on the actual object.   For example, people can experience grief regarding the loss of their old home, even when, in a material sense, the new house may be thought of by others as an "improvement"; people can experience grief of the loss of religious rituals or customs which they learned in their childhood, although to others without such attachments, they may have little meaning; some parents experience grief at the end of their own children's childhood as the meaning

of their own lives has to be renegotiated; grief can be experienced at the loss of the employment by which someone defined their identity.

Psychological adjustment to these loss/change entails re-organising the meanings by which a person orders his/her own life.

Grieving

Because reactions to change involve loss, the resulting psychological processes are extremely similar to the feelings experienced in reaction to personal bereavement.   Grieving for something/someone to whom a person has been intensely attached can be seen in all cultures. It is the normal human response to loss, and usually contains feelings of intense anxiety, despair and anger.

Making "sense" of life

The process of grief also involves an active psychological searching for **threads of continuity** which will help to restore a sense that what has been lost can still give meaning to the present. Somehow, the purpose and feeling of the attachment that has been lost has to be reformulated so as to make sense in the present and the future. Substitutes do not prevent the grieving process, as meaning has been inextricably bound up with the **specific** attachment that has been lost.

Making sense of new life situations means that new meanings have to be re-constituted through a process of "psychological reintegration".   This process also has to take place when language, customs or ways of living are altered by the social and cultural changes in "development".

Implications of cultural change/loss for development management

In helping employees adjust to loss and change in the context of "development", and managing change within their organisations, the following questions could be useful for managers to consider.   They can also highlight some of the ambiguities, contradictions and conflicts within the development process:

- Do the changes "make sense" to your employees?

- Do the changes have any meaning in light of the cultural meanings and attachments within which the person has grown up?

- What are the implications of the changes, particularly in relation to the balance of what is to be gained versus what is to be lost?

- How do the proposed changes affect local cultural values?

- What do people feel about the proposed changes? Do they feel more certain and secure, or do they experience anxiety and anger?

- Can local language be used and validated?

The greater the speed of change and the more change is imposed, rather than negotiated, the more acute the experiences of loss.

2. Psychological Factors in the Donor/Recipient relationship

"In the final analysis, power is the right to have your definition of reality prevail over other people's definition of reality"

Power

Power relations vary by person and context and we all dominate in some relationships and have to be subordinate in others. Human relationships can be seen as patterned by dominance and subordination. Dominance and subordination lead to the question, whose reality is more important?

Realities and perceptions

Perceptions of what constitutes "reality" – the world as perceived and interpreted by individuals – can be thought of as multiple, but with commonalities.

Physical reality can be defined as that which exists outside of us, the world of physical things; personal reality we construct for ourselves – what we perceive, know and believe. A personal reality is the way in which a person construes experience, and is the framework with which s/he makes sense and coherence of the world. It includes perceptions of people, processes and relationships, and is always selective. Each person's personal reality is unique, complex, and dynamic, i.e. is not static but changing and evolving.

Impact of Early experiences

A person's childhood experiences can have a profound effect on their responses to differences in power relationships. If a person's experience of being taught in school is primarily didactic, and the family structure autocratic s/he is more likely to have been taught to obey, and to repeat the words of others to avoid penalties and to be approved of and rewarded for being a "good" girl or boy.

These experiences have profound implications in the world of work. Those who have been taught not to question, and to fear and follow authority figures can find it much more difficult to challenge those who hold power and authority over them in their work environment. They are also less likely to be able to assert their **own** perceptions of "reality" when confronted with the possibly very different "reality" of those who hold greater power.

All power deceives

Those who are perceived as most powerful have the most power to impose their own realities, and are most able to act: but because of holding power they are also vulnerable - to acquiescence, deference, flattery and placation. They are not easily contradicted or corrected, and it is therefore much more difficult for them to learn.

Much power is held by older men who are confident in their knowledge but who are often out of touch and out of date. Because they hold power they can reject feedback that does not match their own views, and their greater power allows them to impose their own "reality" on others.

Strategies for maintaining power (donors and professionals)

Interpersonal dominance, superiority and power are established, expressed and reinforced in the encounters between donor organisations and recipients - physically, socially and in behaviour. Donors can maintain power by the following:

- Speech – words can be chosen to impress and mystify. In the presence of local people outsiders can use language associated with power and superiority.   Dominance can be expressed by interrupting, monopolising conversations, not listening, lecturing, and many other forms of disparagement.

- Behaviour – non verbal ways of expressing superiority are many: wagging a finger, frowning, looking down on people, looking at one's watch.

- Accessories – authority can be expressed through dress (jacket and tie), dark glasses, shoes, uniforms, papers, vehicles etc

- Associates – superiority is sought and strengthened through choice of associates. Status of both is then mutually reinforced.

- Isolation and remoteness - many donors are cocooned in comfortable air conditioned offices. The more powerful, the further from the experience of real people, and therefore more vulnerable to delusion. Power, distance, isolation and ignorance correlate.

- Keeping at a distance – maintaining distance can be deliberate as it is a way to marginalize whatever is new and threatening.

- Avoidance - can prevent uncomfortable learning: places not visited, people not met, telephone calls not made.

- Denial – through rejection or re-framing.   New information that does not fit pre-conceived ideas can be rejected, or re-framed by applying professional labels and categories which distort people's real experience.

- Blaming those without power – donors usually prefer explanations which require others to change rather than themselves.

Strategies for responding to power (recipients)

Recipients have three main options for dealing with the power imbalance in the donor/recipient relationship:

- Conform and adopt the reality as portrayed by donors.

- Speak out, rebel and reject the "reality" being imposed upon them by donors.

- Exercise "diplomacy".

The following strategies are often used by recipients to exercise control in the donor/recipient relationship:

- Selective presentation – donors are only allowed to visit certain places, for example nationally renowned projects near capital cities

- Rural development tourism – local staff can have a special village to take staff of donor agencies to provide a "good impression"

- Diplomacy – can range from diplomatic discretion, mild changes in presentation to falsification of figures to bribery and corruption. Silence is kept on sensitive subjects, bad news is not reported.

- Flattery – national hosts are "nice" to the representatives of donor organisations.

- Threats/opportunities – responses of local people can depend on their assessment of advantages. What is then said will minimise penalties and maximise gains, rather than accurately portray the reality of the situation.

The power of self deception

Because of the power and patronage of money, the greatest difficulty in donor/recipient relationships can be mutual deception: both donors and recipients are often misled.

All human beings can tailor what they say to the context and come to believe it. Facts and figures can be redefined as they are repeated. Re-quoted information can be distorted or altered to suit the social context or the speaker's disposition.

As we all do this, mutual self deception can result in: those who deceive know that those they are deceiving know that they are being deceived but also that they are willing to be deceived in a ways that does not show that they know!

Making the marriage work: improving donor/recipient relationships

For a marriage to work, both parties have to be aware of, understand and learn from each other's realities for the mutual benefit of the relationship. In the donor/recipient relationship, is it possible for the two "realities" to be combined so that all gain?

Self critical awareness

To change and learn requires the capacity for self critical awareness – to be able to examine and reflect on what one learns. If donors and recipients could recognise that realities are multiple, and that others' realities differ from their own and from each other, it could then become a way forward, and a means of learning.

The personal psychology of the players in the donor/recipient relationship is perhaps the most neglected area of development. How we relate to one another is so universally significant that its neglect is bizarre. Personal behaviour is rarely a topic in development courses at university, or for donor agencies personnel or for local people or NGOs, but unless personal behaviour is addressed directly it is unlikely that change can occur. Dominant and superior behaviour is the most widespread error, but confronting behaviour and attitudes is much harder than teaching methods or facts.

In all relationships, it's the kind of people we are that counts. Both parties in the donor/recipient relationship need to take responsibility for individual judgment, choices and actions.

Other principles which could positively influence the donor/recipient relationship include:

- Maximise all opportunities for participation rather than didactic presentations to maximise the likelihood that people can speak

- Focus on the reality of people's experience in their daily lives

- Learn through **empowering** those with least power and allowing their voices to be heard

- Focus on the personal and interpersonal – discuss with your staff how they behave, help them to examine their attitudes.

- Value diversity, creativity and dissent, and accept the selective nature of others' "realities".

3. Psychological Effects of Development

The role of culture

Culture can be defined as ***"the framework out of which we were (are) socialised and developed, and through which we look out on the world.   This framework influences our behaviour, thoughts and emotions. Culture provides the guidelines for how we negotiate our existence with others."***

Culture is essential to our sense of identity, our ability to live purposefully, and the meaningfulness of our existence. Culture is an essential mediator between ourselves and the world – without such a framework we would flounder. Everyone is a product of their own culture, but cultural frameworks can be either beneficial or damaging to individual psychological well being.

The evolution of Western culture during the last three centuries has led to an ideology which minimises the role of religion, nature, extended family networks and social cultural structures, and emphasises science, technology, consumerism, materialism and individuality. (Notions which are very foreign and strange to many other cultural traditions.)

Because of the historical assumption in Western culture that science and technology were beneficial to society and would provide solutions to societal problems, it is only relatively recently that the adverse psychological and social consequences of Western culture are being fully recognised. Because of the processes of globalisation and "development", these negative social and psychological consequences are also increasingly being found in any country where industrialisation and urbanisation have taken place.

Symptoms of cultural breakdown

Researchers have studied the emotional reactions of tribal people who have been forcibly removed from their natural home, for example Aboriginal tribes in Australia, and American Indians. Psychological problems included disorientation, rootlessness, alienation, loneliness, depression and despair. These same psychological reactions are found amongst refugees and other displaced people, but it is increasingly being recognised that these **same** psychological symptoms of cultural breakdown are also increasingly found in Western culture.

However, there are significant differences. In Western cultures the loss of cultural frameworks has taken place over time, rather than abruptly or acutely. The situation in "developing" countries is different.   The pace of change and cultural breakdown has been exceptionally rapid.   Populations are therefore having to adapt to change at a far faster rate than in Western

countries, so the incidence of psychological problems is likely to be more acute.

Psychological effects of individualism

Even though there are difficulties in comparing psychological symptoms across different cultures and languages, there is no doubt that those living in cities are consistently more predisposed to develop schizophrenia, depression, anxiety, phobias, and other psychological problems. Anxiety symptoms are far less prevalent in tribal cultures which are still untouched by Western culture, and the incidence and course of schizophrenia is far less in non industrialised cultures or tribes.

Western culture's focus on the individualism of the self has been a major factor in the loss of close inter-connections with societal, religious, community and family structures, and the natural world. This separation has contributed to increasing feelings of isolation, insecurity, doubt about the meaning of life and growing feelings of powerless and insignificance. Without appropriate cultural structures we cannot feel connected with others or the world. Technology such as TV, computers, the internet and other forms of technological communications do not serve the same purpose. As these are solitary activities individuals can become further alienated from society, rather than connected.

Psychological resilience

Most low income countries, inspite of industrialisation and development, still maintain significant social and cultural structures which actively contribute to psychological well being. These traditional structures enable individuals to be connected and inter-related to each other, extended kinship networks, their own society. and the natural world. Such structures enable meaning and connection to others in ways which have been all but lost within Western cultures, and are envied by many thoughtful people in supposedly more "developed" countries.

Western science and technology **can** benefit low income countries in many ways, but adoption of Western culture can also result in adverse psychological and social consequences.

Managers and leaders can play a significant role in helping their employees and colleagues:

- discuss the psychological and social effects of development openly

- highlight the role of local cultural structures in maintaining individual psychological well being.

- identify ways in which local cultural structures can be maintained and strengthened.

4. Psychologically Aware Development Management

Managing change

Continuing globalisation of American/European culture means that ongoing cultural change will further affect all nations and people. This continuing cultural change requires leaders and managers who are able to straddle enormous cultural divides.

Change may occur in two fundamentally different ways: through gradual influence and interactions with others, or through changes being imposed.   If the changes in the process of "development" is to be positive in its outcome it is imperative that leaders and managers actively recognise and support the particular "genius" of their own countries, organisations and the individuals whom they manage.   Every nation, tribe or cultural group has their own ways of acting, thinking, and communicating. Successful change requires the valuing of this "genius" as much as possible.

Managers often want their staff to behave differently, and sometimes to make fundamental changes to their day to day work to meet the demands of the organisation. **How** staff are managed can either enhance or damage staff motivation and morale.

Decision making

Sometimes decisions may have to be imposed, rather than negotiated, but it is always more productive, no matter how seemingly time consuming, to **facilitate** decision making.   Facilitation means **listening,** rather than instructing, so that staff feel that their expert knowledge and experience is valued.   Staff themselves will have ideas about the intended changes and may have some creative solutions.

If the generation of suggestions**/**solutions/ideas from staff is actively acknowledged and facilitated, it will have a radical effect on how change can be implemented.   Open discussion is likely to **enhance** morale, and help employees feel less powerless in term of the inevitable loss that any change involves.   (Please read this section in conjunction with handout 1.)

The following suggestions could help managers and leaders be more "psychologically aware" and therefore more effective in managing change within their organisations.

"Psychologically aware" development management: some guiding principles

- All human beings have a profound need to maintain consistency and to sustain familiar attachments and understandings which make life meaningful.

- Too many changes in too short a time break down emotional resilience. In terms of the rapidity of the cultural changes associated with "development", it is imperative that the human need for continuity between past and present is recognised.

- Some socio-cultural changes, at individual, organisational and societal levels, involve the irretrievable loss of important attachments, thus the processes of grief will occur.

- It is essential to make clear what crucial purposes and attachments seem threatened by changes, i.e. what may to be lost, and then explore how these can be retrieved and reformulated in different contexts.

- What is familiar needs to be retained, made to serve a purpose and attempts made to rehabilitate familiar forms when possible before decisions are made as to what to destroy.

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- The process of change must always expect and even encourage conflict. Whenever people are confronted with change they need the opportunity to react, to articulate their own ambivalent feelings and work out their own sense of it.

- Change requires time and patience.

- In conflict it is essential to accept that individuals and groups will react to change differently, and that every group needs to find its own sense of continuity.

- It must be acknowledged that all individuals love particular places, people, language, rituals, kinds of work, and cannot readily substitute for them by any generalised calculation of well being.

- If adaptation to change does not explicitly acknowledge the need for these enduring attachments, a satisfying meaning to the changes will not be achieved and there will be nagging doubts and feelings of insecurity.

- If changes are disruptive and frequent people lose confidence that their own lives have a meaningful continuity of purpose.

- If people cannot make sense of changes in terms of their own experience, they will become aimless or cynical even when changes may be intelligent and necessary.

How can managers use these principles within their own organisations?

Individual mentoring for senior staff

This could include helping a member of staff reflect on the culture of their own childhood, subsequent education and experience, and identifying their own internal strategies for dealing with the cultural changes which are part of the "development" process.

S/he could develop increased confidence through this personal knowledge, be able to articulate and share their understandings with others, and be able to devise ways in which the impact of change could be managed within the organisation.

Participative workshops

Workshops with staff could review the processes of "development" and cultural change in relation to their own tribe, nation and organisation. Participants could develop greater clarity regarding the impact of "development" on their own cultural traditions and language, and articulate more clearly what needs to be treasured.