

SELECTION AND ROLE
OF LONG-TERM ADVISORS

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WASH Technical Report No. 69

SELECTION AND ROLE OF LONG-TERM ADVISORS

Prepared for the Office of Health,
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by

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RELATED WASH REPORTS

Lessons Learned from the WASH Project: Ten Years of Water and Sanitation Experience in Developing Countries. 1990. WASH Staff.

Technical Report No. 49. *Managing Institutional Development Projects: Water and Sanitation Sector.* 1988. Daniel B. Edwards.

Technical Report No. 41. *Facilitator Guide for Conducting a Project Start-up Workshop.* 1988. Daniel B. Edwards and John J. Pettit.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study examines the role of the long-term advisor in order to identify the skills necessary for transferring technology to counterparts and, thereby, determine the criteria for recruitment and selection. These criteria are grouped into categories called *competencies*, which clearly describe what a typical long-term advisor in the water and sanitation sector is expected to do.

As a framework for establishing the importance of these competencies, the study describes many problems that currently limit success in the technology transfer area. These problems include inadequate project design, unrealistic or ill-formed long-term advisor roles, an insufficiently rigorous recruitment and selection process, little relevant training, counterparts who are absent for a number of reasons, and a series of organizational forces in development work situations that cause people to value technology transfer activities less than "hard" results.

These blockages to a long-term advisor's effectiveness are numerous and powerful, and they include environmental, institutional, and personal issues. It creates a situation in which we are actually surprised when somebody does succeed, as opposed to wondering why someone does not. Much needs to be done to help long-term advisors perform better.

This study lays out five competencies that can aid in selection and preparation of candidates who would be more effective long-term advisors. These competencies are based on interviews with project managers and former long-term advisors, relevant library research, and the author's own experience:

- Technical leadership
- Training and coaching
- Cultural sensitivity
- Commitment to development
- Building and maintaining collegial relationships

After delineating them, several important uses for the competencies are suggested, including project design, long-term advisor recruitment and selection, training, and monitoring and evaluating of advisor performance.

Because technology transfer is so important (it is a critical aspect of capacity building) and often so inadequately done in many technical assistance situations, the study also includes an in-depth, practical examination of actions that can be taken to enhance coaching and skill transfer efforts. These "how-to" suggestions are meant to serve as a practical guide for long-term advisors and project managers in technical assistance projects.

The competencies and coaching suggestions, if used as suggested, will make a positive impact on the individual skills of those directly involved in the technical assistance process—project managers, long-term advisors, and counterparts. Although the study was done within the context of the water and sanitation sector, it is certainly applicable to other sectors as well.

1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Many development assistance projects have long-term foreign advisors as part of the project. In the water and sanitation sector, these advisors often have engineering backgrounds but may also have other backgrounds such as finance, anthropology, or health education. Unfortunately, project funders, host government officials, and project managers frequently feel that these advisors have limited effectiveness regardless of technical background. Some advisors stay for the duration of their contracts but are quietly ineffective; others have to be replaced before their time is up, a visible sign of problems, if not failure. This lack of effectiveness stems from a number of causes, some of which are related to the competency and skills of the advisors themselves; many problems, however, are caused by systemic and environmental issues that the long-term advisors cannot easily "fix."

In particular, that part of the advisor's role which deals with technology transfer seems most problematic. For example, the authors of one study examining the effectiveness of technical assistance (TA) reached the following conclusion:

Looking at 900 man-years of assistance, we must conclude that the institutional framework that should lead to a transfer of knowledge was non-existent or crippled. In several positions, there was no need for foreign personnel...the impact does not stand in any favorable relation to the cost (Forss et al. 1988).

This study, which was funded by the Scandinavian aid agencies, focused on three countries in eastern Africa.

Looking at a different part of the world, Susan Scott-Stevens (1987) studied several projects in Indonesia and noted the following:

...many consultants...felt that they had learned more from their respective projects and from each other than they ever taught their counterparts. One consultant went so far as to say that he viewed overseas development projects as training programs for consultants far more than they were for local professionals....there was evidence that the bulk of the technical knowledge that was transferred on a day-to-day basis was more between consultant and consultant, than between consultant and counterparts.

According to George Honadle (1985), technical assistance can actually be counterproductive in development projects when "project strategies are ill-conceived or when TA personnel are pushed into performer roles."

Added to effectiveness problems is the issue of cost: it is increasingly expensive to maintain a long-term advisor overseas. Even though the financial burden is often borne by the donor, that cost is becoming a source of concern for governments and the development community, especially when weighed against the benefits. Among other implications, the cost factor further complicates an already difficult advisor-counterpart relationship. As one interviewee said, "We really have to justify ourselves with counterparts now. You have to visibly work hard...there is simply more pressure now because of the great cost of maintaining someone overseas" (former long-term advisor 1989).

Long-term TA personnel, then, carry a high cost and produce questionable results. Although there may be a number of causes for these, at least one relates to the inadequate processes often used to recruit and select people for the advisor's role.

1.2 Role of the Long-Term Advisor

Long-term advisors work closely with concerned government officials and with donor and lending agencies. These advisors, often expatriates, provide technical assistance for a year or more and may work individually or as part of a team; they may work directly for a water company, the government, a consulting company, or through another institutional arrangement.

The actual role the advisor is to carry out depends on the project. For example, advisors may fill a technology gap and do the engineering work, substitute for a national who is away on long-term training, assure quality control, provide training, work toward long-term technology transfer, assist in institution building—or do all of the above. These roles have been observed and described by a variety of field researchers. One study (Honadle et al. 1985) has labeled and defined the following roles:

- **Performer.** In this role, the TA personnel do the job themselves. They do the work directly, make decisions, achieve outputs, and hope that local officials will be able to imitate them later. This is essentially a production model, which encourages technicians to perform rather than to instruct. Honadle adds that a variety of pressures cause TA personnel to undertake the performer role and that "alternatives to this performer model are needed if the practice of TA is to be improved."

- **Substitute.** Long-term advisors who "fill positions until local talent is recruited and trained" are performing the "substitute" role.
- **Teacher.** This model is based on the "diffusion or transfer of skills and technologies...[and] success is defined as the transfer of skills to counterparts." The teacher role is frequently stated in project descriptions but is much less often achieved.
- **Mobilizer.** This role combines advisory and advocacy functions and is aimed at helping the people in the institution increase their capacity to influence other sectors.

In an earlier article, Silverman (1984) added two roles to these four. One is a *guest-catalyst*, "who expresses nonjudgmental surprise at local practices to create awareness of alternatives." Presumably, a person carrying out this role would add value to the process by stimulating colleagues to consider options they would not normally contemplate. Silverman also adds a *partner* role for the long-term advisor, in which the outside person and "local specialists with complementary skills work in partnership and share responsibility for outcomes."

Forss and his colleagues (1988) also gave some attention to describing the different roles that technical assistance personnel (TAP) undertook in the 58 projects they examined. Two of the three roles they depicted were similar to those previously described. One, labeled *gap filling*, is the same as the substitute role and was found to be an important element in all 58 cases, achieving startlingly good results in some areas. However, the authors noted that these results were not sustainable. Forss and colleagues concluded by advising that the value of short-term gap filling in management and organization not be underestimated. They also described a *training* role similar to the teacher, and stated that, although some element of this role was always there, it is a weaker element in many projects.

Forss and his colleagues then introduced a model rarely discussed—the *controller* function—which they argue is a role often overlooked. This role assures good use of funds, the application of appropriate procurement policies, and so on. The authors state that 20 percent of their cases had long-term advisors playing this role, which is legitimate, they assert, but needs to be identified as such, with provisions made for institutional development in this area. "Such TAP positions must be given correct labels, and the functions should be mentioned in project documents." The authors add that this role is appreciated to some extent by governments.

Clearly, there is a range of possibilities for the role long-term advisors play and for the administrative arrangements within which they work. Whatever the situation, during their

contracts effective long-term advisors should promote movement toward achieving long-term development objectives. Given that as a foundation, a long-term advisor must do three things to achieve an effective transfer of technology:

- Perform technical work competently (or better).
- Work toward the transfer of skills to local colleagues.
- Strive to create conditions that ensure sustained technological and institutional progress after the advisor's departure.

Any of these roles are insufficient by themselves to achieve effectiveness in the long-term advisor's role. It is not enough to be a "gap-filler" or "controller" or "performer"; rather, one must work toward technology transfer, sustainability, and institutional development. Certainly there are times when other roles are useful, and there are conditions which clearly limit what the advisor can do. But effective long-term advisors should be able to carry out these three stated functions regardless of actual job conditions.

1.3 Study Purpose

By examining the role of the long-term advisor, this study determines the skills needed for technology transfer and lays out criteria for advisor recruitment and selection. The criteria are grouped into categories called *competencies*, each of which includes an operational definition and clearly defined set of performance indicators.

The study is based on two assumptions: that better recruitment and selection of long-term advisors will increase the chances that they will produce better results, and that more-accurate selection criteria will improve the recruitment and selection process. Scott-Stevens (1987) noted a critical need for a set of criteria by which people are selected for work overseas, although she does go on to add that this need is "never comprehensively stated in the literature."

This study addresses that gap in the literature and spells out what these more-accurate selection criteria might look like. The selection criteria, or competencies, are performance-based descriptions clearly characterizing what constitutes effectiveness on the part of long-term advisors. Having a clearer, performance-based picture of effectiveness will allow those who are involved in the recruitment and selection process to more accurately compare candidate competencies with those required of a successful long-term advisor.

1.4 Study Uses

The study suggests a variety of uses for those who are involved in the technical assistance process—government, donors, consulting companies, project designers, project managers, and long-term advisors. (Uses are spelled out in more detail in Chapter Four.) In general, the competencies will make technology transfer more effective by providing a clearer basis for:

- Project design
- Long-term advisor recruitment, selection, and training
- Management and evaluation of advisor performance

The context of the study is the water and sanitation sector; many of the individuals interviewed work in that sector. Moreover, the basic technical assistance premises which serve as a foundation for the competencies in this study can best be characterized by two of the primary principles from a monograph published by the Water and Sanitation for Health Project, *Lessons Learned from the WASH Project* (1990):

- "Technical assistance is most successful when it helps people learn to do things for themselves."
- Development must aim for sustainability—"the ability to perform effectively and indefinitely after donor assistance has been terminated."

Just as the WASH "lessons learned" are applicable to other sectors in the world of development, so too is this study. Many sources of data were used as a basis for identifying the competencies, and the results have broad implications for long-term technical assistance.

1.5 Methodology

To develop these competencies, data were gathered from four sources: a literature search that focused particularly on documents addressing skills or attributes the authors believed were required for effective performance; interviews with professionals who had themselves been long-term advisors (mostly in the water and sanitation sector), many of whom are still involved in development work as long-term advisors, short-term consultants, or development project managers; interviews with employers of long-term advisors such as consulting firms, A.I.D., and the World Bank; and the author's own observations based on a 25-year career in the development field.

One limitation of the study is that the TA receivers' perspective—government and counterpart—is largely missing in the literature. This is, in itself, a manifestation of the existing gap between TA providers and receivers.

2

FACTORS AFFECTING LONG-TERM TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

2.1 Background

This work initially looked at the specific skills a long-term advisor would use to transfer technology to counterparts in the water and sanitation sector. It was anticipated that the act of transferring skills in and of itself would be difficult. Experience indicates that most advisors are hired for their technical skills and background, not for their ability to transfer skills. Long-term advisors tend to be primarily technical experts with little training, coaching, or instructional expertise. Their discipline in the past was generally oriented toward technical substance and not toward the ability to work well with people. These individual and professional factors by themselves are enough to make it difficult to be an effective long-term advisor who is able to transfer skills.

In addition, since most advisor-counterpart situations involve people from two different cultures working together, it is clear that there would also be linguistic and cultural differences that would affect skill transfer.

Most people, however technically inclined, will readily admit that they understand how linguistic differences cause problems. After all, if two people do not speak the same language, they will have a difficult time discussing the fine points of their work, and training will become a laborious chore. Usually, however, the language difficulties are more subtle—two individuals working together may be somewhat proficient in each other's languages, but it remains a struggle to communicate.

Cultural differences cause even more subtle difficulties, often unnoticed. An engineer working in an advisor's role might assume something like, "Well, despite the fact that we are from different cultures, we are both engineers. He even spent some time in training abroad at the Madison Water and Sewer Department. Given our educational backgrounds and our common technical discipline, cultural differences can't really matter that much." Or they may focus on external evidence of culture shock, such as different foods or an unfamiliar approach to plumbing. However, on a day-to-day work basis, the intellectual dissimilarities caused by different cultures can affect the work in far more profound ways than people realize. It is what Hall defines as "deep culture" and what Scott-Stevens calls the "internal context" of culture shock. Some of this goes unnoticed since the forms of work look familiar:

[the consultant] sees what look like familiar bureaucratic structures and technological systems, but the way they actually function is confusing. He meets people with professional training similar to his own but who do not

always act in their work role as expected—yet he depends on them for getting the job done....Doing violence to the foreigner's (expatriate's) mores related to the usages of technology, science and organizational efficiency provoke frustration (Scott-Stevens 1987).

The same kinds of impressions and confusions exist on the counterpart's side when trying to work with and understand a foreign advisor.

There is ample evidence to indicate that cultural and linguistic differences and the uneven skill levels of individual advisors cause problems in the technical assistance arena. However, in reviewing the literature discussing reasons why technical assistance fails, a more varied pattern than expected emerged that has little to do with culture or language or the skills of the individual. Honadle et al. (1985) put it this way: "the problems with technical assistance extend far beyond the TA personnel themselves." It is important to examine these problems next because they serve as a framework within which a long-term advisor must work; this framework, in turn, must be considered when developing the competency analysis of the long-term advisor.

2.2 Organizational Environment Issues that Influence Technical Assistance Effectiveness

Technical focus, language, and culture definitely have an impact on the technical assistance process. However, a number of other factors, many beyond the control of individuals, can influence the effectiveness of TA personnel. This section discusses these organizational environment factors, and they form a backdrop for the competencies described in the next chapter.

The counterpart is not there.

It is very difficult to transfer skills and technology to a counterpart who is not there. Despite project plans and promises, it often turns out that the counterpart is simply not present at post for any number of reasons—he or she may be assigned on long-term training; the counterpart may have been reassigned "temporarily" between the time the project was designed and implemented; the person may not have been appointed or perhaps not even hired yet; if the project is outside the capital city, the counterpart may be reluctant to locate in a remote area; the person designated as the counterpart during the project design phase may have quit and taken a job in another sector because salary and benefits with a particular utility or government ministry are so low.

A variation of this problem is that the counterpart may be "present", but not really fully available because he or she has a "second"—and informal—job. The conditions of public service in many poorer countries force even the most dedicated public servants to earn

additional income, or cause them to work quietly at another "personal" job. Water utilities that have lower compensation packages than the private sector may suffer. Doing work outside the normal "official" job often means that such counterparts are absent from the office to a certain extent. It also means that their focus is not exclusively on their government work.

On the other hand, some counterparts are simply overworked in their regular government work, and have little time for the counterpart role. Forss et al. (1988) came to the following conclusion:

[the] counterpart situation is a problem in around two-thirds of the projects, and about half the TAP, who were supposed to have counterparts, did not have any...the old combination of on-the-job training and counterparts is not working, and not solving the training problems.

A number of factors cause a great distance between the long-term advisor and counterpart, and this difference creates barriers to the technology-transfer process.

In addition to the obvious differences of language and culture, there are usually differences in—

- *Compensation.* (There is often a great difference that exists here.)
- *Perquisites.* The long-term advisor often has part or all of several benefits provided: housing, educational allowances for children, transportation, access to certain kinds of foods not readily available on the local market, and so on. These differences are exacerbated when economic conditions worsen:

The life style of TAP becomes a special problem in countries with a negative economic growth (e.g., Tanzania, Zambia)...The average citizen experiences increasing hardship, and TAP are at the same time given more "fringe benefits" to be able to work. This means more protection and more special treatment (Forss et al. 1988).

- *Social status.* The long-term advisor tends to have a higher social status because of educational and economic advantages and because people in many Third World countries are very polite and hospitable to foreigners working in their midst.

- *Access to equipment.* This applies to both having the resources to control equipment presently in country and having the resources to buy new equipment.
- *Educational accomplishment.* Although the educational gap is closing, long-term advisors still tend to have more-extensive academic credentials as well as greater opportunity for attendance at professional conferences and seminars. In many cultures, these educational differences contribute to the social distance between the counterpart and the advisor.

The long-term advisor may not see the counterpart's organization as the primary client.

When the TA package is funded separately (as part of donor grant funds, for example), the advisor's organizational superior is usually perceived to be a donor organization project officer. In these cases, the long-term advisor is usually not fully accountable to the counterpart's superior, or at least the situation often works out that way in practice. This direct relationship with the donor's project officer often gives a certain amount of power to the advisor, allowing more autonomy. Moreover, the project officer may then become the advisor's primary client, the one who will recommend future work in other countries. This situation is exacerbated if the donor project manager has little or no communication with the counterpart and uses the advisor as an intermediary. All of this decreases the advisor's responsiveness to the organization he was hired to assist, and can reduce the focus on working closely with the counterpart.

Short-term goals and crises often drive out long-term objectives.

There is often a willingness on the part of everyone—government, donor, long-term technical advisor, counterpart—to be driven by short-term objectives. Short-term goals become accomplished at the expense of technology transfer, and the advisor becomes a "performer," someone who does the work, fills a gap. The skill-transfer goal somehow disappears. It was described this way in one study:

In practice the advisors often interpret their role narrowly...this is essentially a production model [which] encourages technicians to perform rather than instruct, and it reinforces the tendency toward short-term project perspectives (Honadle et al. 1985).

Expectations differ about the way in which time gets used.

The long-term technical advisor tends to allocate time for "real" work, the primary objective (i.e., getting the engineering project done), and this tends to crowd out the activities that

would help technology transfer—learning the language, allocating serious time to preparing training sessions, answering in full the counterpart's questions, and so on.

Also, the way time gets used on the job can cause friction. An example of this occurred in Indonesia: The consultants came to work early and left late. The Indonesians did the opposite, causing the consultants to wonder why the Indonesians were not as dedicated as the consultants—of course, the consultants had transportation provided, they had clear time limits on contract (and thus had different time horizons for achieving project accomplishments), and they had fewer family obligations. The counterparts had faulty transport, had to go out for lunch, had extended families, and viewed their jobs from a lifetime perspective (Scott-Stevens 1987).

A long-term advisor's paternalism can create a certain distance in the counterpart relationship.

Occasionally, there is a subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) racism, or paternalism, that affects how long-term technical advisors work with counterparts. As one interviewer said: "very often people assume 'they' are just stupid." The normal ethnocentrism that exists in most people may be intensified when they are recruited to "show people how to do things they don't know how to do." Especially when the assignment involves going to a "Third World" country that has "problems," it is easy for the long-term technical advisor to adopt a superior position. This is usually quite unintentional and unconscious, yet it distances the advisor from the counterpart, creates inequities, and makes it difficult to create a collegial working environment. One way to avoid this attitudinal issue is for long-term advisors to "develop the attitude that the client system is not problem people but rather 'people with a problem' " (Lippitt and Hoopes 1978)

There are some organizational disincentives to the process of transferring skills.

Most long-term advisors are rewarded for visible results. Isely (1983) put it this way:

The focus of donors is also frequently on products rather than on results that are meaningful in a development sense, such as the achievement of self-help status, the building up of a functioning infrastructure, or the enhancement of managerial skills.

It is much harder to prove that a counterpart is more efficient or more competent after working with a long-term advisor than it is to point to a product—a new water treatment system in place or a new sewage system, for example. Although such comparisons may not be conscious ones, these disincentives are mostly unintentional, they are still powerful and make an impact on how the long-term advisor chooses to use and allocate resources.

It is important to note that the pressure to produce tangible products comes not only from donors or government but, possibly, also from the advisor. After all, it is only human to want to see some "hard" results after leaving home and investing much energy in a project for a limited time period. If the counterpart situation becomes difficult in the eyes of the advisor, or if some things seem to be taking too long, the tendency is to begin to "do it yourself" and focus on more immediate, concrete outputs.

The long-term advisor (or even the project) is often accepted reluctantly by the host government.

Technical assistance is often accepted because it comes as a precondition to receiving other resources the utility or host government wants; as a result, utility or government managers may really not be interested in technology transfer—even if the donor is.

According to one interviewee, host nationals came to monthly staff meetings and made such remarks as these: "You're just the price we pay to get the equipment" or "I use advisors to sell my boss on ideas that he wouldn't take seriously if they came from me; you know, 'the advisor says'...." The individual (a long-term advisor) believed that although the host nationals were deliberately trying to be provocative, there was a certain amount of truth in the remarks.

Even if the situation is less stark than the example above, the recipients of technical assistance are sometimes simply indifferent to it. However, they may conclude that if funds for the technical assistance come from the donor, it would be unreasonable to resist:

African heads of department are mostly well-educated, open minded, hospitable people. When donor agency personnel argue that TAP are necessary in order to secure "safe" implementation of a project at no extra cost to the project itself, why should they object? (Forss et al. 1988)

The counterpart position does not always attract the most competent people.

Being a counterpart is not always attractive and does not necessarily interest the best and the brightest. As one person said, "I don't even like the term *counterpart*—it is a guaranteed way to get a lemon. There are no performance expectations because of the term counterpart." Counterparts are often entry-level professionals and therefore much more junior than the advisor.

It is often difficult to recruit high-quality, mid-career people who are willing to go overseas to live and work.

Many mid-career people have families with children in school, spouses who have their own careers, or job situations in which an overseas tour would take them out of the organizational and career mainstream. Such people are often unwilling to go abroad for an extended period of time. Thus, projects may attract candidates that are either near the beginning of their careers or retired and embarking on a second career. Although there are talented people in these categories, they may lack the seasoning or drive of the mid-career professional.

One other factor which affects recruiting top quality people is the delays which often occur as a result of the competitive bidding process. Although these delays are often understandable and the competitive process is desirable, it frequently means that the person(s) who was designated as the long-term advisor takes another position or loses interest. This, in turn, means that the winning bidder scrambles at the last minute to find a suitable substitute on short notice, and this decreases the likelihood of finding a high-quality advisor for the job.

These organizational and personal factors are all in addition to those expected—cultural and linguistic differences, the professional focus on technical accomplishment, and so on. When one considers all the factors—personal, cultural, professional, and organizational—working against long-term advisor effectiveness, it is in fact a wonder that anyone ever succeeds at transferring skills.

2.3 Study Approach Given These Contextual Realities

Faced with these data about the difficulties inherent in the long-term advisor role, one of two assumptions could be made. The development management context might change, for example, with appropriate conditions precedent devised and adhered to before completing final arrangements for the provision of long-term advisors. If the conditions were not met, the long-term advisors would simply not be sent. If the world actually worked like that, we could simply look at those skills which precisely matched an advisor's ability to work cross-culturally in the technology transfer area.

However, for a host of reasons these conditions will rarely be met in reality, even if they are met on paper, and long-term technical assistance will still be sent. Thus, we reach the second assumption, that circumstances will never be ideal. The very nature of development work implies problems, less-than-ideal circumstances, and decisions that are made for a variety of reasons that may or may not have much to do with the advisor's performance.

It is safe to assume that many of the organizational climate factors which make work difficult for long-term advisors will be present, and that part of the job is to work effectively within that context. Thus, the competencies need to reflect the reality of working within a development framework and to assume a broader role of development worker as well as

"technical" advisor. These competencies, if clearly spelled out in a way that reflects the development work context, should help in the process of recruiting, selecting, and orienting people who have the skills to deal with the situations they will face.

The competency descriptions that follow in Chapter 3 are competencies for the "total person" who is to work in a development context. They take into account that the long-term advisor will generally be working in situations requiring skills far beyond the technical area.

3

COMPETENCIES

3.1 Overview

Competencies are performance-based categories which describe as clearly as possible what constitutes effectiveness in the long-term advisor's role. The competencies include operational definitions, followed by a number of specific behavioral indicators that portray good performance in each competency category.

The competencies are presented as descriptively as possible to counteract the inclination of some to be vague and general when talking about traits a person should have to fill a certain role. In fact, much of the literature is filled with words and phrases like "be flexible," or "be sensitive," or "must be an expert in the technical area." The desired characteristics are often explained in the most rhapsodic and idealistic language. Although Lippitt (1972) was not talking specifically about long-term advisors, his description of requirements for a consultant is very relevant:

A list of the professional capabilities of a consultant is extensive. It looks like a combination of the Boy Scout laws, requirements for admission to heaven, and the essential elements for securing tenure at an Ivy League college.

These capabilities are described in a variety of ways; some fairly typical examples (Campbell 1989) follow:

- Know yourself; learn to understand your own strengths.
- Be aware of your impact on other people.
- Be an active listener and observer; be prepared to wait for a full picture of what is happening.
- Develop a good understanding of communication processes, which are more complex....
- Be open to criticism and don't avoid confrontation.
- Be self-confident without being arrogant.

At one level, one could not argue with these descriptors. Exactly what these terms mean, however, differs from person to person—and the difference can be quite important. Moreover, because people understand the terms at a general level, they may think they agree on what they mean when they really do not. For example, everyone may agree that a person should be "sensitive." However, one person may mean that this describes a candidate who will listen closely to a counterpart, use active listening skills, give clear indications that a planned program for skill transfer is based on the counterpart's present knowledge base, and adjust the level of dealing with technical issues to the counterpart's ongoing ability to comprehend. On the other hand, another person could assume sensitivity means only that someone does not yell too loudly at others, or does not lose his/her temper too often in front of others, or does not invoke a delty when employing choice expletives. Imagine the consequences if both of these people were involved in the same search process, nodding sagely to each other as they agreed they needed someone with "sensitivity" in this post, while each looked for different things.

Vague generalities mask such disagreement, whereas specifying competencies in detail will increase the chances that different people engaged in the same position search will be looking for the same performance potential. If they find they disagree, the competencies will provide a specific enough tool to allow the possibility of working out this disagreement (or at least acknowledging it).

Examined from the perspective of a potential long-term advisor, the problems caused by ambiguous job criteria are of equal importance. A candidate may think that he or she is "sensitive" or "self-confident without being arrogant," yet be quite different from what the writer of the job description intended. More-specific, performance-based competencies allow a candidate to better match his or her skills with those required to do the job.

Some of these competency descriptions will be similar to those required of a good manager, a good consultant, or a good technician. But it is the *combination* of skills, including those in the cross-cultural area, that tends to make the advisor position unique—and difficult.

There is another consideration, one suggested by a manager of advisors who said that he thought the skills required might vary depending on the type of job it was, how far into the job it was, whether it was a new project or an old one, and how many client groups there were. Adjusting this view somewhat, there would still be a general set of competencies for the long-term advisor position, but some of the specific behavioral descriptions may change moderately or become more or less important depending on the actual situation.

3.2 Competencies

Five overall competencies will be discussed:

- Technical leadership
- Training and coaching
- Cultural sensitivity
- Commitment to development
- Building and maintaining collegial relationships

As mentioned earlier in relation to WASH's *Lessons Learned*, there are two important technical assistance principles which underlie these competencies: first, it is the long-term advisor's job to help government and counterparts learn how to do things themselves, and second, the advisor must work toward achieving sustainability (i.e., the system, or at least that part related to the advisor's role, is able to function effectively after the advisor has left). Teaching others and aiming toward sustainable gains are very difficult undertakings in a development context, and these difficulties will be reflected in the varied performance requirements spelled out in these competencies.

3.2.1 Technical Leadership

Operational Definition

Effective long-term advisors are solidly grounded in their technical discipline. However, technical knowledge alone is not sufficient. Advisors must also be able to make their substantive knowledge available to others in ways that fit local cultural and technological circumstances. In addition to technical competence and the ability to teach it to others, the effective advisor serves as a spokesperson for the technical discipline, engenders enthusiasm for technical matters, and describes ways in which technical advances will contribute to development processes in the country. Moreover, the effective long-term advisor maintains an interdisciplinary perspective and actively integrates contributions that other disciplines can make to achieving successful project results.

Behavioral Indicators

- Produces exemplary results according to the standards of the advisor's particular discipline. "A consultant's most important attribute is to have content expertise" (Isely, 1983).

- Addresses project issues at a level of technological complexity that can be supported by the environment without undue reliance on external resources.
- Serves as spokesperson for the technical discipline; talks enthusiastically about the technical field.
- Continues to strive for professional growth; asks questions about local applications.
- Keeps technical "big picture" in mind at all times; handles technical details, daily operations, and crises without sacrificing progress toward long-term technical accomplishments.
- Sees the contributions that other technical disciplines can make to development problems that he or she is facing; welcomes help from people with other technical backgrounds; exhibits understanding of the ways that problems might have cross-cutting causes.
- Uses technical competence to establish credibility with colleagues and counterparts; avoids using own technical knowledge and expertise as a way to build barriers between self and counterparts/colleagues.

3.2.2 Training and Coaching

Operational Definition

Effective long-term advisors see the act of transferring skills to counterparts as "being as much a part of their job as any other 'task' for which they had been hired" (Scott-Stevens 1987). In order to carry out this role competently, advisors must employ a variety of educational means—formal and informal—to transfer knowledge and skills to counterparts. This requires *planning* skills, to be able to design short teaching sessions over a period of time; *teaching* skills, to deliver these sessions; *coaching* skills, to work with counterparts on a one-to-one basis; and *performance feedback* skills, to provide data (in culturally appropriate ways) about how the counterpart is performing.

In general, what enhances advisors' chances to be effective in the training and coaching area is their ability to see the relationship with counterparts as true partnerships, wherein both can contribute to job completion and both can learn from each other.

Behavioral Indicators

- Exhibits willingness to teach in the technical area; articulates reasons why the teaching function is a critical variable in the overall role; understands that transferring knowledge saves them time and helps the advisor do a better job
- Makes technical topics clear and understandable; explains new theoretical knowledge or skills in ways that fit the local work and cultural context.
- Sequences technical subjects in ways that are understandable to counterparts; arranges subjects in absorbable amounts ("chewable chunks").
- Provides reasons and explanations when counterparts' work has to be corrected.
- Finds teaching opportunities that are woven into everyday activities and do not add time to the day.
- Coaches others through asking clear, open questions; listens and watches as people try new things; "nudges" counterparts appropriately to experiment and try new ways of doing things; makes suggestions.
- Prompts counterparts to ask questions and analyze the strengths and weaknesses of their own work.
- Negotiates an appropriate way to provide performance-based feedback to counterparts; uses descriptive, specific, nonjudgmental language in describing performance; calibrates degree of directness based on local culture and the negotiated agreement with counterparts.
- Asks for and encourages feedback from counterparts; expresses appreciation when it happens; helps counterparts provide feedback.
- Distinguishes between matters of preference for task accomplishment and those when something is technically right or wrong; acts on that distinction by allowing counterparts to do things that fit their preferences unless technically incorrect.

- Exhibits willingness to take risks by letting people do something entirely on their own as they make progress through coaching activities; helps others take risks.
- Involves others in significant decisions about the work.
- Embodies the concept of partnership, always working with counterpart; brings counterpart along to appointments and meetings, constantly reinforcing the message of partnership ("involved their counterparts in every phase of the job," Scott-Stevens 1987); aims for achieving apprenticeship in the true sense of that word.

3.2.3 Cultural Sensitivity

Operational Definition

Effective long-term advisors enjoy the opportunities afforded by working in multicultural situations and employ a variety of skills to make cultural differences either a positive factor or a nonfactor in everyday work situations.

The ability to do this begins with a thoughtful understanding of ways in which the advisors' own cultural values and norms affect their behavior. This understanding serves as a foundation for approaching relationships with people from other cultures in a nonjudgmental way. Effective advisors are able to handle ambiguous situations in an apparently comfortable manner.

In building a long-term relationship with counterparts, effective advisors are successful at assessing the "biculturalism" of their local colleagues and adjusting their own interpersonal behavior accordingly. Effective advisors also are able to consider and undertake ways to build certain elements of a "third culture" into their working relationships with counterparts. In this instance, third culture means behaviors and norms that are not rooted in either culture, but are shared by both as guidance for their interactions (Scott-Stevens 1987).

Behavioral Indicators

- Recognizes ways in which his/her cultural values and perceptions affect cross-cultural interactions.
- Observes interactions and figures out basic cultural interactive modes; uses local cultural norms (e.g., third-party communication) in culturally appropriate ways.

- Reads the level of biculturalism in counterparts and in the working environment. This is what one long-term advisor reported: "Most of the people we work with are far more bicultural than we are; they know us far better than we know them, they are very observant and sophisticated, far more tolerant of us than we are of them. They are able to adapt—we have a partner in cultural sensitivity who meets us halfway."
- Adeptly creates elements of a "third culture" that borrows and adapts from both counterpart and advisor cultures.
- Travels to field sites as appropriate, normally with counterparts.
- Displays a sense of fun when working in multicultural environment: laughs at situations and self, shows enthusiasm for learning, asks questions, makes comparisons, takes risks in trying new things and new behaviors.
- Recognizes how own cultural values affect actions; finds those particular values that may cause difficulty in this culture, and figures out how to balance for them.
- Withholds judgment and remains reasonably objective until enough information is available to make a determination; seeks information to understand the situation from the other cultural viewpoint before making judgments; in seeking such information, "avoids moralistic, value-laden, evaluative statements, (and listens) in such a way that the other person can fully explain self" (Harris and Moran 1987).
- Manages ambiguity effectively by reacting to new, different and, at times, unpredictable situations with little visible discomfort or irritation (Harris and Moran 1987); effectively manages feelings associated with being in confusing or culturally baffling situations somewhat outside of the advisor's control.
- Exhibits and communicates curiosity about the local "geography": people, organization, city maps, fun things to do, recent history, local political and cultural situation. As an interviewee noted, "If you don't know these, how can you do a good job with your counterpart?"
- Demonstrates special interest in at least some aspects of local culture. Another interviewed gave this example: "Wrestling was important locally, and [long-term advisor] was clearly interested in wrestling. He

went to the matches, he could talk about it with some degree of sophistication—he appeared to enjoy it."

- Learns the local language or shows clear commitment to trying to learn the language.

3.2.4 Commitment to Development

Operational Definition

The essence of the long-term advisor's role in the water and sanitation sector involves working in development projects; it is, in the words of an interviewee, "not just another job or a technician at work."

Effective advisors understand from the outset that technical performance is only one variable in their role. It is critical that people who undertake an advisor job be able to see the "big development picture," keep everyday things in perspective, and conceptualize ways that short-term actions move toward long-term goals.

Effective advisors understand that they will encounter a series of insufficient resources, unexpected occurrences, and unanticipated blockages as part of their jobs. Not only do they expect these things to happen, they also consider that addressing these issues in creative and persistent ways is a normal part of their job descriptions. Indeed, they attack them energetically in ways that fit local cultural attitudes and resources, they serve as a role model for colleagues, and they help coach colleagues to address issues like these.

As part of the job, effective advisors understand that the end goal is empowerment, creation of the conditions that enable local colleagues to carry on after the technical assistance has ended. The advisors see technical excellence as a way to contribute to this goal and to establish credibility; however, they also understand that to be successful, they need to undertake a range of things that go well beyond technical accomplishments.

Behavioral Indicators

- Articulates clear development purpose for long-term advisor role and its contribution to the project; continually stresses long-term development purpose: in one advisor's words, "to leave something behind when you go."
- Communicates enthusiasm and clear belief in the project; expresses faith in the success of the project; transmits that sense of enthusiasm to others, convinces "doubters."

- Engages in efforts to evaluate project progress and makes this a collaborative effort with colleagues and counterparts.
- Identifies change when it occurs over time; indicates keen sense of "seeing" change when others may fail to see it; applies long-term perspective to framing the change process; expresses satisfaction from seeing change, even if it is not caused directly by the advisor.

An interviewee stated it this way: "I had strict orders: we would not do anything if the Thai government did not do it. When things came to me that they were not involved in, I didn't just say no—I said it won't work unless it is Thai, we need to look for opportunities to make it Thai. Then we would brainstorm, look for ways to do so, and we would find them."

- Makes certain that everything (or almost everything) that gets done moves toward some long-term development goals; sets reasonable goals, given this long-term perspective; understands that progress may be a step forward at one time and a step backward at another; displays persistence.
- Indicates willingness to step back and transfer ownership of ideas and their implementation to counterparts, even at a cost to transitional performance.
- Exhibits entrepreneurial behavior—seizes unusual (as well as usual) opportunities to move the project forward, to transfer technology, to teach; in some instances, models with counterpart creative ways to get new resources to achieve reasonable results; in other instances, uses available resources ("makes do") to achieve results.
- Gets things done, keeps going, in spite of a variety of typical development obstacles: inadequate resources, unusual setbacks, unexpected delays, hazards, unsatisfactory working conditions, and ambiguous roles; sees obstacles as "part of the job," finds creative ways to overcome or live with them; avoids cynicism and unproductive complaining.
- Communicates and acts on belief that development takes time and that achieving short-term or tangible targets is not the only indicator of effectiveness; accepts different sense of pace and time for "getting things done."

3.2.5 Building and Maintaining Collegial Relationships

Operational Definition

Long-term advisors can only be effective in the water and sanitation sector if they are able to build and maintain collegial relationships with a wide range of people. Effective advisors value this part of the job, allocate time to building relationships, and definitely do not see it as "a waste of time." Effectiveness in this area requires good listening skills, the ability to facilitate meetings, and the skills needed to communicate necessary messages in culturally appropriate ways.

It is important to note that this competency does not simply mean being "nice" or "agreeable"; people who are merely agreeable without adding substance or honesty do not contribute significantly to development work situations. Rather, in order to build effective relationships, advisors must maintain a balance between empathy with local conditions and a certain critical perspective necessary to improve the way things work. If the advisor becomes too "understanding" and stops pushing, the catalytic spark an outsider can bring will be missing; on the other hand, if the advisor is unrelentingly critical, people will begin to discount the "advice." *Effective advisors are able to build relationships that will allow them to say what needs to be said in ways that others will hear and understand.*

Behavioral Indicators

- Sees relationship-building as integral to succeeding in the job; allocates time to do it and demonstrates a sense of genuineness in doing so; enjoys being with people and opts to do so as often as not.
- Establishes sound relationships with a variety of people from different organizations and different levels; moves fluidly between encounters with diverse groups, from colleagues and counterparts to the managers of the long-term advisor's contract.
- Provides honest assessments and comments about key items within appropriate cultural norms; opts to "do the right thing" when faced with key situations (does not back away for fear of offending someone or because it poses some risk to the long-term advisor role); on the other hand, does not see every situation as critical and momentous.
- Listens carefully to others, asks open-ended questions, paraphrases and summarizes at appropriate times; clearly takes into account what people say when expressing own views; avoids always dominating the conversation by playing the role of "expert."

- Makes clear commitments; follows through on actions to carry out commitments.
- Seeks to understand ways in which respect is expressed in local culture; uses or adapts these so that they become appropriate ways for a foreigner to express positive regard, encouragement, and sincere interest (Harris and Moran 1987).
- Discusses problems with counterparts and colleagues in supportive, face-saving ways; avoids attacking people personally when discussing problems; clearly separates performance issues from people.
- Communicates understanding when colleagues indicate they are having problems with work or life issues; exhibits culturally appropriate signs of empathy (the ability to "put oneself in another's shoes").
- Avoids expressing quick judgements about colleagues, about the culture, about "how work gets done here."

4

USING THESE COMPETENCIES

Identification of these competencies can be particularly helpful during recruitment and selection of long-term advisors; there are also various other stages of the project cycle where the competencies could prove useful. This chapter will offer a number of suggestions organized by chronological project phase. They focus on the significance of the competencies in each of the phases of advisor-assisted projects.

4.1 Project Design

Government and donor project designers can use the competencies during the project design process to test the roles they are conceiving for any long-term advisors. By focusing on the advisor's role and by examining closely the competencies as they are defined here and comparing them to project needs, designers can provoke serious dialogue among all those involved in the design process. Government planners can require that they be involved intimately, and that the final competencies agreed upon reflect their views about the long-term advisor. Moreover, the government can make certain that key employees are involved in the design meetings where the competencies are developed, and they can be clear from the beginning that they intend to hold contractors accountable for finding people that measure up to the competency descriptions.

As these design discussions continue, the particular requirements of the long-term advisor's role would be compared with the competencies, and project designers could make clear choices about the type of people to be recruited, the exact role the advisor was to play, and the kind of counterpart required by the project. This would help avoid the tendency for Terms of Reference (TORs) to focus mainly on university degrees, years of experience, or technical qualifications as requirements for the position. In essence, this process will serve as a reminder of the larger role that the long-term advisor can play.

It is important to note that project design must necessarily be an iterative process. The clarity and performance-based specificity of the competencies will force project designers to be clearer about other aspects of the project, and, as they do that, they will also get clearer about the kinds of competencies they desire in the long-term advisor. Changes will be made in the project design and in the competencies, and then further refinements will be made in both as time goes on. It will force project design language (and concepts) to move from the abstract, slogan level where everyone can agree easily, to the more concrete performance

level, where agreement is more difficult. Hopefully, through this process everyone will understand the agreement once it is achieved.

4.2 Recruitment and Selection

Once agreement has been reached on project design, the **government and donors** can require contractors to respond to the TOR (which will include the competencies) in the recruitment and selection stage. Because the competencies bring greater clarity to the process, contractor proposals can be examined more rigorously to see how well they satisfy the bidding requirements, especially those related to long-term advisors.

Contractors, in turn, will benefit from the list of competencies since they will provide a clearer picture of the kinds of qualifications that are being required by the government and donors. Contractors who are strong in the areas required by the project design will be better able to show how their strengths match the competencies. Contractors who may not be so strong can assess better whether or not they should undertake efforts to bid. If they decide in the affirmative, it will also help them search for appropriate candidates during the proposal phase. In general, identification of needed competencies will help reduce the "guesswork" involved in responding to proposals—"I wonder what they are really looking for in these long-term advisors."

As a result, **contractors** can make job descriptions more focused. Building written job announcements on the competencies will provide a more-exact basis for job applicants to decide whether or not they should apply. It will also help send a message to applicants that the job is more than just a technical position. Applicants can be informed that their resumes will be assessed according to the list of competencies they receive when inquiring about the job, and that they should revise their resumes to provide data about the salient competencies. Contractors can examine each resume for evidence that the applicant has experience or skills related to each of the required areas. No one will match all the competencies perfectly, but some will come closer than others. The comprehensiveness and clarity of the described competencies will force the reviewers to search through candidates' papers for skill areas and experience levels that may have been overlooked in the past.

Although it will be helpful for contractors (and eventually for government and donor decisionmakers) to use the competencies to assess resumes, it is clear that how candidates compare to some or many of the behavioral indicators will simply not be evident from paper. For this, face-to-face interviewing is the best method. However, lacking resources for that, candidates should at least be required to undertake a rigorous telephone interview. In order to get the most out of these interviews, a technique called behavioral event interviewing is recommended. This technique is described in the box on the adjoining page.

The individuals who decide which proposal wins a particular project, whether government or donor, should require that bidders clearly link their candidates' qualifications to the competencies and the performance indicators. Those bidders that have more detailed data about their candidates, and who are more creative about showing how candidates' backgrounds match up well against the competencies should be assessed more positively.

Candidates for the long-term advisor position will also find the identification of competencies useful. Anyone who expresses an interest in the role of long-term advisor should be sent the list. Candidates can utilize the operational definitions and performance indicators to get a more graphic depiction of what the role—the full role—actually entails. This will be helpful to some candidates who are not desperate to take any position that comes along; these people will read the actual competencies closely and will assess whether the various aspects of the role really fit them professionally. Such scrutiny may help diminish the number of advisors who have trouble with certain aspects of the role and then say that they were unaware they would face these conditions or that they didn't really know what was expected of them. With competencies, people recruited will have a more-accurate picture of what the job entails.

This section includes many suggestions about improving the recruitment and selection phase of projects. However, a caveat must be acknowledged: current recruitment and selection realities do not encourage a great deal of optimism that these suggestions will be used extensively. Most long-term advisor candidates are sought during a frenetic proposal or bidding process, in which many proposal writers are searching for people who "look good on paper" and have some sort of overseas experience. The paper "match" is paramount, and (given the costs of proposal preparation) many companies do not encourage their proposal managers to thoroughly check candidates' credentials with previous employers. As long as the person looks good on paper and agrees to be included in the proposal, the writer is likely to include the resume.

Although there are exceptions to this approach (e.g., some care might be taken to identify a chief-of-party for a large project in which the organization thinks it has a good chance of a winning proposal), mostly the proposal and bidding system drives responding organizations to choose and select people based on paper. Often, there is no face-to-face interview, and the telephone conversations are typically used just to gain assent and to fill in parts of the candidate's background. Certainly, the receiving country ministry has little contact with the process, and so it too must rely on paper. The counterpart(s) will rarely be involved in the review or selection process.

At the very least, it is recommended that the government require that contractors' long-term advisor candidates match the competencies as closely as possible. Better yet, a key individual or individuals from government ought to participate in the final selection of the candidates, and that selection in turn ought to be based on face-to-face, behavioral event interviews.

USING BEHAVIORAL EVENT INTERVIEWING TO ASSESS PEOPLE AGAINST THE COMPETENCIES

Project decision-makers must agree on key behavioral indicators in each of the competency areas. Once having agreed upon these indicators, they can then construct an assessment sheet—a rating scale with room for comments under each of the behavioral indicators. After the assessment sheet is designed, questions can be devised that will give interviewers more-precise data about the candidates' experience in each of the areas.

An interviewing approach called "behavioral event interviewing" or "critical incident interviewing" can be used effectively with the competencies. This approach entails designing a series of interview questions based on incidents related to a particular competency. For example, on coaching one might ask questions such as these:

Tell me about a time when you were involved in coaching someone to learn technical skills. What did you do first? Describe the first meeting (or planning meeting, depending on how the candidate responds to the first question). Be as specific as possible.

What was the situation? What kind of skills were you aiming at?

How did you approach the coaching situation? Describe one actual coaching session that you had. What exactly did you do? What were you doing when it worked well? When it did not?

What about cultural variables? How did they play into the coaching situation you just discussed?

These questions could be followed up with more-specific questions to get a clearer understanding of the behaviors and performance the candidate sees as important in this area. Five or six major themes for questioning can be constructed in this way, and the responses will get much more performance data, all related to the competencies, than would a normal interview.

One other device to use during the interviewing session is to ask the candidate to undertake a task that would allow the interviewers to see the skills under consideration. The candidates could be told about this in advance, so they could prepare for it, or it can simply be a natural part of the interview process. For example, returning to the coaching area once again, the interviewer might say—

Imagine that I am your counterpart, and I am trying to learn about "x" (this can be taken from the candidate's area of technical strength). I would like you to carry on a coaching session with me for 10 minutes or so.

This mini-coaching session will provide much valuable data about performance indicators in the coaching area. It uses the same principle as asking a potential football quarterback to pick up the ball and throw it several times, as opposed to talking about how well he would throw it given the chance. Obviously, not all of the competency areas lend themselves to this technique, nor should it supplant the whole interview. But it is clearly very useful to use these "try-outs" as a data-generating technique during the interviewing process for key performance indicators.

4.3 Project Implementation

At the beginning of the project, the **contractor and the long-term advisor** can use the competencies as a training and preparation tool. The competencies spell out in fairly clear terms those things an advisor needs to do to be effective, and this can be used as the basis to do some individual professional planning that will help make certain that all aspects of the role get serious attention. In particular, the long-term advisor can also use certain parts of the competency description to clarify what effectiveness looks like in certain less-familiar areas (for example, someone unversed in coaching might be able to get a clear picture of what it is—and what is expected—by reading the competency description). At least, that would be the first step toward being able to do it.

Contractors can help their long-term advisors assess their capabilities against the performance indicators contained in the competencies. Where there are areas of weakness, the contractor can arrange for publicly available training to broaden the skill base for the advisor. When there is no relevant public training or when there are teams of advisors going abroad, it might be possible for the contractor to do the training "in-house." In order to do that, the most important performance indicators in need of attention could be used as the basis for the program design. Importance can be decided in one of two ways:

- Assess the long-term advisors' skills against the competencies (mentioned above)
- Bring together a group of experienced and effective long-term advisors, help them understand the requirements of the project, and have them choose and agree on the most important competency areas they think will be required for effectiveness in the long-term advisor's role.

The actual training program might be 2 to 5 days long, depending on the number of subjects to be addressed. Because so many of the indicators require a relatively sophisticated set of skills to undertake successfully, the training program should be highly interactive, experiential, and skill-focused. Such a program would require some clear and simple performance-based models (which could be built from the competency indicators themselves).

For example, in working with the competency entitled "cultural sensitivity", there are some indicators which describe characteristics of expressing interest in and finding out about another culture. These are critical skills, related to personal, social and professional effectiveness in working with other cultures. A model can be built from the related indicators and from work done in the cross-cultural field; short, practical cases can be developed based on similar work done prior to this project in the target country. Participants in the workshop would address the issues in the cases, would even practice working through some of the

issues trying out scenarios. Then, as a final activity, the participants could do some planning for how they might use these skills in the real situation they will be facing shortly.

The workshop approach, then, would consist of presenting and discussing a model, undergoing some practical experience which allows practice with the model, getting feedback on conceptual responses and performance practice, and planning application for the real job. If a contractor has only one person scheduled to work in another country as a long-term advisor, such a workshop becomes problematical. One recommendation is for the contractor to search out other contractors to see if they have people that are going overseas to fill long-term advisor roles; if so, it may be possible to join forces in a collaborative training venture.

During implementation in-country, the *long-term advisor* can use the competencies as a guide for indicating how well he or she is carrying out the role. Once on a job, people tend to get too focused on certain aspects of the role and lose sight of others. Just reading the competencies periodically would remind the advisor of the role's comprehensiveness, and give him or her a chance to ask, "How am I doing in this area? What haven't I paid attention to at all?" This kind of occasional self-assessment would be very useful, given the complexity and pressures of development work.

4.4 Evaluation

The *government—including the counterpart—and the contractor* can use the competencies and performance indicators to evaluate the performance of the long-term advisor. (Although the competencies represent an ideal, making excellence in each area probably unattainable, the competencies do provide a thorough, performance-based standard to use for evaluation.) In fact, the evaluation process could begin as soon as the advisor arrives in-country by having key stakeholders review the competencies or agree on priorities among themselves so that the competency statement fits the actual position. Agreements can be reached spelling out how the document will then be used as part of the performance monitoring process and at what times the advisor can expect to receive data that compare performance with competencies.

Performance data, measured against the specific behavioral indicators, will provide *long-term advisors* a clearer, more exact picture of how their performance is regarded than they ordinarily receive. The performance data will then also be specific enough so that areas for improvement will be clear and related mostly to specific skills. For example, an advisor may find that she is doing well at "making technical topics quite clear and understandable and explaining new knowledge in ways that fit our situation here," but is not doing so well at "providing reasons and explanations when a counterpart's work has to be corrected." In traditional terms, this advisor may be told that "coaching is going okay, although some things could be better" or even that "she teaches well, but could do better." Using the performance

indicators, on the other hand, gives clearer guidance to the advisor about what people see as actual performance strengths and weaknesses.

Of course, government and donor project managers and long-term advisors must take cultural variables into account when considering the way in which the performance monitoring is to take place, but "cultural differences" ought not to excuse a lack of performance data. In most instances, the people who work most closely with the advisor or who manage the project have some ability to work in multicultural environments; this makes it possible to arrive at ways to provide project monitoring that may represent a "cultural compromise." Actually, in many instances professionals in developing countries are quite effective at providing performance feedback or messages.

5

WAYS TO IMPROVE THE SKILLS OF LONG-TERM ADVISORS

Skill and technology transfer is a difficult process, and the degree of difficulty is often underestimated. Many people think that anyone can do it; if someone is sound technically, that person automatically becomes an expert teacher or coach in the area of technical expertise. Yet, even within those development projects that have favorable conditions for technology transfer, the results are not always satisfactory. There are a number of reasons for this:

- Some mistake skill transfer for simply "telling"; these people spend much time telling counterparts how to do things and explaining why things work like they do. Unfortunately, they spend little time checking to see how much of the telling is being absorbed in a useful fashion. When it is not absorbed sufficiently, unfavorable conclusions may be sometimes reached about the counterpart's capabilities.
- Some people think skill transfer happens almost automatically if someone works alongside a technical expert: learning occurs through some sort of "osmosis." This may indeed be true if the period of apprenticeship is long enough, but it generally takes more years than are available in most development project situations. With no other planned instructional interventions, people generally learn less through "osmosis" than most technical experts assume.
- The interventions necessary for skill transfer involve elements of coaching, teaching, and performance feedback. These activities take some thought and allocation of on-the-job time. Yet, even with the best of intentions, this teaching and coaching time can often be curtailed or eliminated altogether in pursuit of short-term project results or addressing immediate crises. Transferring skills is the ultimate long-term goal, and it is very easy to "put it off today and pick it up again next week." And the same thing happens the next week.
- Although some people are natural coaches and teachers, most are not. Moreover, many technical experts have immersed themselves in the intricacies of their craft and have quite naturally learned very little about the methodology of teaching and coaching. Indeed, some

technical experts denigrate teaching and coaching methodology as something without much value, something with little to add to their disciplines. These are the people who are most likely to use the "telling" method or to assume the "osmosis" approach.

- In some expert-counterpart situations, there is an element of condescension, especially if the relationship involves someone from a less economically dominant culture (which it does most of the time). This kind of attitude, although not tangible, can affect the way that the technical expert approaches the skill transfer activity. It is easy for counterparts to pick up a lack of respect, however subtly it might be expressed, and this adds a certain stress in the teaching/learning process. In addition, it is fairly common for people to "live down to" the learning expectations that others have for them.

Given these factors, it is clear that all involved in the planning and management of the long-term advisor role must pay more attention to the skill transfer process. The competency entitled *training and coaching* (Section 3.2.2) includes a number of specific skills and techniques which the effective long-term advisor uses to transfer skills to counterparts. Advisors and development project managers should read that section carefully. In addition to the information delineated there, a number of other suggestions are offered here that will help the long-term advisor ensure a reasonable chance of success with the skill transfer effort:

Assess skills and get training before departing.

People who accept positions as long-term advisors should assess their own skills in the coaching and teaching area before departing for their assignments. If some skill areas are lacking, the advisor should be required to undertake training on how to train others, or on coaching, or on the consulting process. The exact training chosen could be based on the assessment against performance indicators spelled out in the coaching competency. There are public programs available in the areas of training, coaching, and consulting, some aimed specifically at technical specialists who are assuming some aspects of skill transfer as part of their role.

At a minimum, carrying out this assessment in an honest and rigorous way and engaging in any needed training would be a superb investment. The employer should pay, and the government contracting for the services should demand the assessment and training be done as a condition of service (in addition to assessing candidate skills more assiduously to begin with). Although better recruitment and selection will increase the likelihood of advisors having more of these skills in the future, it is still probably accurate to assume that long-term advisors will be hired mainly because of their technical skills. Acknowledging this as a reality and requiring assessment and training in skill transfer will help.

Create a plan for skill transfer with the counterpart, and use the plan.

Near the beginning of the assignment, the long-term advisor and the counterpart should develop a plan for approaching skill transfer. They will need to carefully analyze the counterpart's present skill level against job requirements and from this identify what kinds of knowledge and skills need to be transferred in order for the counterpart to achieve appropriate technical and professional standards.

To make the plan a practical and useful tool, it should be simple, have readily identifiable benchmarks, and include an estimate of the time necessary to transfer key skills and knowledge. Progress should be monitored and appropriate adjustments made as conditions warrant. As part of the process, the long-term advisor and counterpart need to value accomplishments in the skill transfer area as much as accomplishments in other technical areas.

Based on the results of this collaborative planning process, they may then need to take a long view and see the present skill transfer efforts as a part of a longer process, not something that necessarily must be finished by the end of the current advisor's contract.

Systematically and realistically set aside prime time for the specific act of transferring skills.

Specific time should be allocated for coaching, teaching, demonstrating, and feedback; people involved in the skill transfer process should not make the mistake of assuming it will happen automatically. To be effective, the time for teaching and coaching needs to be "prime time," not evening when people are tired or some other time when all the "important" things are done.

Prime time is critical for two reasons. First, there is a greater chance that significant learning will occur if the coaching or training takes place during regular work hours when people may be at their peak efficiency. Second, it sends a message that the skill transfer process is a valued activity, a priority.

Make the best use of these prime time sessions by learning and using a simple methodology for these more-formal skill transfer sessions.

Some coaching and teaching will happen "on the fly," as part of the daily activities. Long-term advisors should spot situations for these spontaneous learning opportunities and should be energetic about making use of them. However, the advisor and counterpart will also need to schedule a series of formal coaching and teaching sessions. To be effective, these sessions should include at least the following:

- An *objective or objectives* so that both advisor and counterpart are clear what they are dedicating that time to achieving.
- Some *explanation and discussion* about a very carefully selected portion of a technical element or subelement. This instruction should be limited in duration, concise, and well thought out. The degree of depth and amount of material should be based on the counterpart's ability to absorb, and the counterpart should be made an active partner in that decision. However, a rule of thumb suggests that most adults' eyes glaze over after more than 20 to 30 minutes of uninterrupted technical "talk."
- Where appropriate, *physical demonstrations* so counterparts can clearly see what something is and how to accomplish certain tasks. As part of the demonstration process, there should be ample time for questions and answers.
- After the instruction or demonstration, *time to try out things, discuss* what happened when they tried it out, and *ask questions*.
- A period at the end of a particular subject discussion for counterparts to *draw conclusions* and *plan for application* of the new learning.
- At the end of the coaching session, a short amount of time for both advisor and counterpart to *assess its value* and *generate ideas* on how to make such sessions even more valuable.

Obviously, more can be done methodologically to make coaching sessions more effective and more fun, but these recommended steps will enhance the chances that genuine skill transfer will occur.

Let the counterpart take responsibility as the transfer process progresses.

The long-term advisor needs to be able to let go once in a while, to allow the counterpart to begin to take on real responsibility. In those instances where one person is teaching something to another, there is a great tendency for the former to perceive that the latter is never quite able to "do it." One consequence is that the "teacher" never gives the other a full chance to prove whether or not he or she *can* do it. In certain areas of educational and management research, there is something called the "Pygmalion effect" that sometimes occurs. Simply put, it indicates that people tend to live up to what others expect of them—or to live down to others' expectations. This is certainly true in counterpart-advisor situations. The latter needs to take reasonable risks and let the counterpart take responsibility. In that

way, perhaps we can avoid the sad situation found by Scott-Stevens (1987) in all the projects she studied: nowhere did she find a single instance in which the counterpart, at any level, wrote a portion of the final report.

Of course, all this advice on how to improve the skill transfer process is predicated on the assumption that there is a counterpart. If there is none, the advisor needs to work toward rectifying the situation. Depending on the reasons for the counterpart's absence, this may involve lobbying with a variety of people connected with the project. Often, it becomes clear there will be no counterpart available for the foreseeable future. In this instance, the advisor must strive to find reasonable substitutes, to search for other means to assure some level of skill transfer. This may involve looking elsewhere in the work context for candidates, people who may not have the exact qualifications but who could nonetheless learn some new and valuable skills that would be left behind when the long-term advisor leaves. Also, seeing skill transfer in its broadest context, the advisor may choose to look for opportunities to provide training to students at a local university or to provide in-service training to interested parties related to the development sector within which the advisor is working.

These last few suggestions assume that the long-term advisor is dedicated to that part of the role involving skill transfer. In fact, it requires just such dedication, even when it appears that others may not be so interested in the process—perhaps even the person within the government who was the original project decision-maker. Yet, the willingness to search for appropriate skill transfer activities in the absence of a counterpart is exactly the kind of expectation that should be set up for each long-term advisor position. In the long run, this is precisely the sort of message that candidates for long-term advisor positions and others engaged in development need to hear: skill transfer is very difficult but will sooner or later enhance chances for self-reliance,

6

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Conclusions

In the water and sanitation sector, long-term advisors are often included as part of a more-comprehensive technical assistance package in development projects. Providing such advisors, however well-intentioned, is often unsuccessful, especially in the area of technology transfer. There are a number of reasons for this lack of success, some of which are organizational or environmental and have little or nothing to do with the advisor's actual skills.

In those instances where the institutional forces are such that technology transfer is possible, the skills of long-term advisors are often inadequate. Most advisors are hired because they have a solid technical background, not because they are good at working with people or at transferring skills. Many have little preparation in these areas and are not inclined toward focusing much of their energy on technology transfer. Left to their natural inclinations and training, these "experts" would choose to build water systems or set up and manage a sound financial system for a struggling utility.

In total, the blockages to a long-term advisor's effectiveness are numerous and powerful, and they include environmental, institutional, and personal issues. It truly creates a situation in which we are surprised when somebody does succeed, as opposed to wondering why someone does not. Much needs to be done to help the long-term advisor model work better.

As one contribution, this study has laid out competencies that can aid the selection of candidates who would be more effective at the long-term advisor role *as it actually exists*. Also included are a number of practical suggestions for using these competencies during any phase of the long-term advisor process: selection, training, and performance evaluation in the country of assignment. In addition, specific steps have been described that advisors and counterparts can undertake to enhance the chances that skill transfer will occur.

6.2 Recommendation—Seeking the TA Receivers' Perspectives

Further work remains to be done in the area of long-term advisor effectiveness, especially in one critical area: there is currently little substantive action research that unearths the host government and counterpart perspectives about long-term technical assistance. What specific characteristics do host governments and counterparts look for in long-term advisors? What

actions do they see as effective or ineffective? In particular, what do they regard as helpful in the skill transfer area? This kind of research information could be very helpful as people look to managing the long-term advisor process more effectively.

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THE WASH PROJECT

With the launching of the United Nations International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade in 1979, the United States Agency for International Development (A.I.D.) decided to augment and streamline its technical assistance capability in water and sanitation and, in 1980, funded the Water and Sanitation for Health Project (WASH). The funding mechanism was a multi-year, multi-million dollar contract, secured through competitive bidding. The first WASH contract was awarded to a consortium of organizations headed by Camp Dresser & McKee International Inc. (CDM), an international consulting firm specializing in environmental engineering services. Through two other bid proceedings since then, CDM has continued as the prime contractor.

Working under the close direction of A.I.D.'s Bureau for Science and Technology, Office of Health, the WASH Project provides technical assistance to A.I.D. missions or bureaus, other U.S. agencies (such as the Peace Corps), host governments, and non-governmental organizations to provide a wide range of technical assistance that includes the design, implementation, and evaluation of water and sanitation projects, to troubleshoot on-going projects, and to assist in disaster relief operations. WASH technical assistance is multi-disciplinary, drawing on experts in public health, training, financing, epidemiology, anthropology, management, engineering, community organization, environmental protection, and other specialties.

The WASH Information Center serves as a clearinghouse in water and sanitation, providing networking on guinea worm disease, rainwater harvesting, and peri-urban issues as well as technical information backstopping for most WASH assignments.

The WASH Project issues about thirty or forty reports a year. WASH *Field Reports* relate to specific assignments in specific countries; they articulate the findings of the consultancy. The more widely applicable *Technical Reports* consist of guidelines or "how-to" manuals on topics such as pump selection, detailed training workshop designs, and state-of-the-art information on finance, community organization, and many other topics of vital interest to the water and sanitation sector. In addition, WASH occasionally publishes special reports to synthesize the lessons it has learned from its wide field experience.

For more information about the WASH Project or to request a WASH report, contact the WASH Operations Center at the above address.