

SECTION 4

**PROBLEMS AND
SOLUTIONS
IN
DISASTER
MANAGEMENT
TRAINING**

Having seen each problem in running courses in disaster management (or for that matter in disaster management generally) as the need to assess the 'Driving Forces and 'Restraining Forces,' a strategy to resolve the impasse will be needed. In the text that follows these have been termed 'solutions,' which derive from

- increasing the driving forces
- weakening the restraining forces
- doing both at the same time

These problems and solutions are included to alert workshop leaders who are new to the subject to some of the potential difficulties in running training programmes, as well as to remind experienced trainers of some constructive ways to address problems. Whilst these regularly occur in training courses, they are normally balanced with many rich rewards for the leaders and organisers which will be referred to later in this manual.

Therefore, it may be an encouragement to recognise that it is unlikely that the problems listed in the text that follows will apply in any well prepared training programme, such as the Disaster Management Training Programme (DMTP), where there has been an extensive period of preparation including a thorough selection of participants.

Experience suggests that if the leaders know in advance of some of the potential problems that are likely to face participants in a course (as noted in the following section) they will be well placed to take effective action to minimise or remove most difficulties that arise. It is recognised that this document will be read by a number of trainers and training managers, each with differing needs and experience of staff development programmes. It is unlikely that many of the problems identified in Part 1 will apply, for example, in the UN DMTP in view of the level of UN resources and the careful planning that will precede their workshops.

However, the authors suggest that experienced trainers, when preparing to lead well organised training workshops such as DMTP, consider the problems and solutions noted in this guide as a mini-refresher course of their own approach to complex, and probably familiar, issues. A possible way to do this will be to read each of the problems noted in the text, and then to write down how they would tackle them before comparing their approach with the authors' suggested solutions. The authors will be very pleased to receive any critique of their proposed solutions, as well as hearing of other problems/solutions for possible inclusion in later editions.

Problems occur before, during and after workshops, so the material in this section will relate to the three phases of Pre-Workshop Planning, managing the actual Training Programme and Post-Training follow-up. Typical difficulties stem from four sources which have been broken down into:

4.1 Participant Problems

4.2 Course Management Problems

4.1 Participant Problems

4.1.1 Preparation by Participants

Problem

- The failure of participants to prepare for the training course (i.e. to read pre-reading assignments or bring required materials to the course, such as case study material maps, photographs, sit-reps, press-cuttings, etc.).

Solutions

- It is vital that participants are informed of their selection in sufficient time for them to prepare and delegate work to others, with time being made available, by their employers (outside of their normal work programme) to enable them to prepare fully for the course.
- Detailed information must be sent to participants well before the course starts to familiarise them with the leader's expectations of them.

4.1.2 Selection of Participants with the Wrong Level of Experience

Problems

- The selection of participants with an incorrect level of experience (possibly too high or too low) to match the focus of the workshop.
- **Mixing of participants with very different levels of experience and involvement in the disaster field.**

Solutions

- Very careful procedures need to be adopted for the selection of participants, with precise information being gathered on their range and level of experience.
- Careful examination of the needs of participants prior to the workshop, with further confirmation of these needs through interviews at the outset of the training programme.

4.1.3 Motivation to Learn

Problems

- A failure of participants to work energetically within the programme and display serious commitment to the subject or the course. The symptoms of this lack of enthusiasm are unpunctuality, absenteeism, attempts to vacate sessions early, cynicism, lack of

cooperation with workshop leaders, failure to complete assignments, etc.

Solutions

Participatory training puts the responsibility for learning directly on the shoulders of the trainees, telling them that learning will not occur unless they accept that responsibility.

Water and Sanitation for Health Project (WASH) 1990

- Discontented attitudes often derive from a participant having a fringe involvement with the subject in their current work. Further causes may stem from them being a reluctant student, having being obliged to attend the workshop by their employer, or from fear that their job may be changed during their convenient absence from their regular job. Language barriers and 'cultural discordance' may be other sources of discontent.

The solutions to the above problems are, firstly, the need for improved selection of participants to make certain that each course has been designed to be appropriate for its focused audience and, secondly, careful briefing of employers never to send a reluctant staff member to a training course.

- However, leaders must recognise that the problem of poor motivation in the attitudes of trainees may reside with themselves since they may have developed a course which fails to capture the participants' imaginations. At an even more fundamental level, however, the leader may have a fixed agenda into which he or she wishes to fit the participants instead of determining their needs and designing the workshop accordingly.

...Your own aims may not relate to what the learner wants. Check them out at the start and from time to time during the workshop.

David Gauchos

not only will careful thought about your students help determine the starting point of the course, but it will help shape the course itself. It will help determine which examples are most likely to fit, what vocabulary to use, and even what instructional media and procedures to adopt...If you spend a tenth as much time thinking about and describing your students as you do thinking about your subject, you will develop a powerful tool for ensuring the effectiveness of your instruction.

Robert Mager

- Problems may arise from a lack of clarity concerning the expectations of the course leaders of participants. Therefore these to be fully set out in all course documents.
- A further problem that reduces motivation may be an unfamiliar mode of teaching that a participant finds very difficult to relate to.

The solution here may be for the leader to make a special comment at the outset where he or she invites the visiting participants to what will undoubtedly be 'an unfamiliar form of training experience, but one where there is a definite "rhyme and reason" for the structure and teaching/learning approach that has been adopted.' This could be followed with further explanation if this is needed.

- A 'learning contract' is one method for leaders to build motivation and mutual cooperation.

...when two or more parties from different backgrounds come together to work on a common task, their relative positions need to be checked and acceptable ways forward negotiated. These processes must take place before, during and after the event.

David Gauchos

This type of agreement is one method for leaders to build motivation and mutual cooperation. At the outset of the workshop participants can be asked to sign, or agree to a simple form of contract with workshop organisers, who agree to teach, and do all they can to assist each participant, in return for an agreement of trainees:

- to attend all sessions
- not to arrive late or leave early
- to participate fully in planned activities
- to do all they can to assist less experienced participants and
- to undertake required assignments.

Some regard this type of contract as being unnecessarily formal, but even an unwritten joint commitment is a useful formula to discuss the mutual obligations of trainer to trainee as a means of underlining the importance with which the organisers view the undertaking at the very outset of any training workshop.

- At the start of a training course, a very careful briefing is needed which should cover learning processes, the need for participants to share their problems and experiences of disaster planning with each other, leader's expectations vs. participants' expectations, the avoidance of distractions, etc.
- Motivation grows from an exciting, relevant training that relates very closely to participants' interests, needs and employment opportunities. Private talks are a very useful way for leaders and each participant to establish these individual needs.
- Coaching, and the 'teaming' of participants into working groups can encourage mutual support, leading to better results.

4.1.4 Distractions to Learning - Finance

Many senior officials are beholden to foreign experts for favours they can confer on them, such as a study visit abroad. This may seem to be rather a small thing, but in fact it is not. Visits abroad are highly valued in many Asian countries because the salaries of civil servants are incredibly low. Daily subsistence allowances at international rates on a visit lasting just one week, work out to be as much as a salary would be for a month.

Bernard Lecomte

Problems

- In many courses participants develop a preoccupation with financial matters (i.e. maximising per diem payments, seeking relocation to cheaper accommodation, etc.), rather than concentrating on the learning process.

This problem is particularly relevant to situations when participants attend courses in wealthy industrialised countries, where per diem allowances for meals and accommodation may be well in excess of their normal daily income levels (as noted in the above quotation), and they can understandably regard the course as an 'income opportunity.'

Such money may well be needed, since some participants can arrive for training with a lengthy shopping list to satisfy a vast extended family! There have been many participants who have applied for training for financial reasons, or their employers have sent them to the workshop as a form of reward for good service as a 'financial bonus.'

Solutions

- Financial distractions are not easy to remove other than by noting the problem in the briefing papers with very firm statements that participants will live together in the same accommodation as an integral part of the learning process, and that the leaders will not agree to individual relocation plans. Their public and private briefing of trainees should emphasise the need for them **not** to view the course merely as an income supplement.
- However, leaders need to be sensitive to the situation of participants coming from very poor countries with low salaries and therefore make certain that workshop allowances are both adequate, generous and available when the money is needed.
- In situations where the problem persists, and is clearly interfering with the training programme it is wise for leaders to set aside time to resolve each issue through private meetings with participants, or even a group session can help to ventilate a problem that is affecting several people. The key issue is to confront the problem rapidly, before it grows out of all proportion!

4.1.5 Distractions to Learning - Participant Problems

Problems

- Distraction from the main business of the workshop can be caused by the demands of 'secondary agendas' which compete with a participant's concentration. Typically, these include personal or family problems as well as the pressures of work, which are often increased by participating in the course.
- Office pressures can provoke a stream of interruptions including the need to answer telephone or fax messages during the course, being pulled out of workshop sessions to sign papers, talk to their employers and colleagues or attend meetings. Such problems can rapidly lead to frayed nerves as working groups suddenly lose their chairman or as workshop speakers have to repeat salient material for participants on their return from a telephone call, etc.
- The distractions noted above are rarely confined to the person in question. Whilst they may start with one person, they rapidly become the concern of the entire group within an interactive programme.
- Many participants arrive at workshops with anxiety that during the course their position within their organisation will be adversely changed, possibly involving demotion or a transfer. Such concerns often prove to be very well founded.
- They also may have the certain knowledge that their regular work will not be done by anyone in their absence, causing them understandable anxiety.

Solutions

- One well proven approach to the removal of personal distractions is to ask each participant to fill out a form at the outset of the workshop listing all the matters that might disturb their concentration on the course issues. As a symbolic dismissal of the distractions these forms then can be placed in sealed envelopes and handed to the leader until the end of the workshop, or where leaders have a more theatrical inclination they can be ceremonially burnt as a sacrificial offering in full view of all!
- Seek to obtain prior agreement with participant's employer not to permit distractions to disturb their staff, however this may only be forthcoming when the employer is fully committed to the value of the training programme (which is not always the case).
- It may also be possible to make employers aware of the insecurity and fear that many participants have that their position in the organisation may be undermined whilst they attend the course. Employers may be able to provide assurances that all appointments

will be secure during the training, and on a more positive note, that attendance may enhance promotion prospects.

- There will be advantages in not running the course in the same town or city as the organisation's head or field office, or in the premises of any participating body. Rather, move it away from the workplace and hold it out of town suitably remote from potential distractions as noted above.
- This will provide the opportunity for using evenings for 'casual learning' social events, workshop sessions, video films or free-ranging discussions, whereas if the workshop is non-residential participants will return home each evening, and these opportunities for learning and building relationships in a relaxed environment will be lost. However, the authors recognise that this proposal carries a heavy price surcharge to cover the extra cost of accommodation and meals in hired premises, but in our view this will prove to be money very well spent!
- The problem of interruptions can be partly overcome if adequate free time is built into the programme. Therefore generous time should be allowed for tea/coffee breaks (i.e. 30 minutes minimum), and lunch (60-90 minutes) to allow sufficient time for really urgent matters to be attended to without causing disruption. Within workshops that are longer than a week's duration, there is also likely to be the need to include a half or full day's break as well as weekend breaks.
- Free time, as well as providing time to attend to extremely urgent business is also essential as a way to facilitate contact between participants. Sufficient time should be given to digest material and undertake assigned tasks. If workshop facilitators ask participants to do these in their own time (i.e. during evenings and weekend breaks) their advice can be interpreted as placing a low priority of importance on such assignments.

It is also important to provide this free time to enable trainees to go shopping, attend to their laundry, write letters home, visit banks and have time for sightseeing, exercise and recreation.

Experience would suggest that due to pressure from workshop sponsors for a comprehensive programme linked with the acute time pressure of any short workshop, free time tends to be the first victim. Time that may have been carefully designated for the tasks noted is eroded. The effects of such actions can be frustration in the trainees, absenteeism, and failure to undertake assignments.

4.1.6 Coping With Participants With a Narrow Vision

Problems

- Certain participants find it very difficult to take a broad view within the training. This may require them to lose sight of their own agency, its reputation, mandate and needs. A wider perspective will also help them to forget their own pressing needs or preoccupations as they begin to see the extensive scope of the subject, and the needs of others. Where there are parochial perceptions a competitive spirit can result with excessive loyalty being devoted to their own organisation whilst downgrading the value of others (often to the acute annoyance of other participants).

This problem is particularly apparent in courses where several non-government agencies which normally compete for funds are involved. The problem can also apply to workshops where there are representatives of a number of UN agencies present, or staff from diverse government ministries that may be traditional rivals for resources or influence.

The professional background of the participant relative to other disciplines or sectors, which they consider to be of less consequence than their own position, may be at the root of this difficulty.

Solutions

- Leaders need to emphasise at the outset that there is a need for all participants to temporarily lay aside the burden of their immediate needs, professional positions, allegiances (and prejudices) during the training as 'excess baggage.' They may have to be shown why a 'party spirit' with loyalty to their agency and a preoccupation with their rank can disturb an open spirit with a common goal of seeking together to gain knowledge, attitudes and appropriate skills in disaster management.
- In the initial briefing session it may be useful for leaders to state that whatever a participant's status at home or in their work situation (in terms of academic or professional qualifications, or administrative rank), as far as the training is concerned everyone will be regarded as being on an equal footing, with identical opportunities to contribute. Wise leaders will have already anticipated any likely problems with certain participants who appear to be particularly conscious of their status and will have held private conversations on this need before any such public comments are made. (This highlights the need for a social gathering before the first formal meeting of the group.)
- As a symbolic way of underlining this egalitarian approach the group may be asked whether they would like to address each other by first names from the outset of the training workshop.

Conclusion

Since training is an activity that is costly and requires advance planning, it is imperative that money and effort not be wasted by choosing the wrong time. Therefore, the above factors need to be very carefully considered before selecting the optimum time to hold a course.

It is also clear that the question of timing is related to staff replacement. Organisations need to consider how to cover staff whilst they attend training courses.

4.2.2 Fixing the Size of the Workshop

Problems

- Workshops can become much too large (i.e. over 25 persons). This may be due to the organisers not being able to resist political or other pressures to admit too many participants. Therefore, some training workshops begin to resemble major conferences, and are not effective learning experiences.
- Conversely, workshops can be too small (i.e. fewer than 8 persons), where there are insufficient participants to promote a wide sharing of experiences.

Solutions

- To some extent the size of a workshop is closely related to its function. Very small groups are needed for any development in skills since close supervision is needed. However, it is possible to handle much larger groups if the intention is to raise general awareness. As has been already noted in this guide, the purpose of general disaster management workshops is normally to train and develop attitudes, skills and knowledge. The optimum size thus has to be a compromise to suit the different functions.
- One of the most important initial tasks is to seek to weld together all the varied personalities into a single teaching/learning unit. This is likely to occur in a very natural manner if the workshop is not too large, or too small (i.e. between 15 and 25 persons). With such numbers it is possible to devise a highly productive interactive programme.

4.2.3 Establishing the Duration of the Workshop

Short-term training is intense when you are attempting to teach much more than usual in a given period of time. It can also be intense when the lowest acceptable level of learning (performance) is very high. It can be intense because the learning goals are very specific. Time is probably the single most important dimension of short-term training. You have less of it than in traditional instruction. There is less flexibility, less room for error, and less opportunity for regrouping.

John W. Loughary and
Barrie Hopson

Problems

- Some workshops are too long for their proposed audience in light of their pressing normal responsibilities. The result is that the people who badly need the training are unable to attend, or leave early. This problem is particularly relevant to very senior officials.
- There is also the opposite problem where some workshops are too short to achieve desirable outputs.
- One of the most common problems is when far too much material is crammed into too short a time.

Solutions

- The duration of training course should be related to available resources, objectives and the needs of the audience. Therefore, in the planning phase the potential participants or their employers will need to be consulted to establish the duration relative to aims and content.
- The problem of 'over-cramming' a workshop with excessive events and topics can be due to each training session being regarded as a single event. If (as this guide suggests) training is seen as a continuous, planned strategy, then there will be the opportunity for carefully planning to solve training needs in a realistic manner.

4.2.4. Selection of Participating Bodies

A voluntary homogeneous, closed group is usually the easiest to design and manage. However, what is easiest is not always the most effective.

John W. Loughary and
Barrie Hopson

Problems

- Competition for resources, influence and leadership between agencies can prevent appropriate bodies from collaborating with each other in a training programme (or in disaster-management generally). As a result, there is frequently a 'go-it-alone' mentality which causes a single body to set up training that is purely focused on the needs of its own staff.

The result can be a very friendly 'in-house' training programme, where everyone knows each other and which is very easy to organise. Such workshops, however, tend to lack 'bite.' The missing dimensions will be the lack of the value of the perception of one agency or department of another and its actions. These insights can be a stimulating challenge to the 'status-quo' of any body that can easily assume that its 'time-honoured' practices are the **only** way to operate.

- Where a number of agencies or departments collaborate to sponsor a joint training initiative, there can be a problem of deciding who should lead the enterprise.

Solutions

- Attempt whenever it is possible to run training programmes with a variety of participating agencies in order to promote cost-sharing, mutual learning, improved coordination and, perhaps most important, team building.
- International funding bodies can exercise some leverage by insisting that they will not provide funds for 'in-house' training programmes for a single agency.
- Establish inter-agency steering groups to run such events. This formula can resolve the issue of leadership, since it will be possible to rotate leaders throughout the course planning and implementation.

4.2.5 Selection of Participants: Balancing Workshop Trainees

This subject of participant selection has already been discussed in various places above. In addition to these issues there is a further matter to consider concerning the balance of a workshop.

Problems

- Many workshops are limited in their effectiveness through their lack of balance in the participants (i.e. if all are of a similar age; there are too many men and very few women; too many government staff and no NGO personnel; too many technical people; few staff with social responsibilities, etc.).

Solution

- The aim is to achieve an equilibrium of workshop participants. In training programmes where the organisers have the luxury of being able to select the participants, therefore, it is essential to seek a careful balance between participants to suit the specific needs of a particular course being organised. This could relate to a

Balance of Staffing

- male and female
- older and younger staff

Balance of Experience

- experienced and inexperienced staff
- field and central administrative office staff
- local and external knowledge
- various sectors/ disciplines
- government, NGOs, academia and private sector
- self-motivated and less motivated staff
- technical and social experience

Balance of Hazards

- experience of various hazards
- pre and post disaster experience

However, to state the obvious, there will always be occasions where there is a need for participants to be 'unbalanced' to suit the needs of specialised courses. For example a course on earthquake damage assessment does not require the participation of social workers, whilst one on the assessment of post-earthquake needs does. The vital need for balance is particularly important in any general course on disaster management that covers varied agencies and sectors.

4.2.6 Creation of a Working/Learning Environment

...decide what kind of tone you wish to establish for the workshop formal/informal, pragmatic/preplanned, experience/expertise, bottom up/top down. Which of these can you comfortably handle? You will find that the tone usually becomes set within the 20 minutes. Be clear about your own role.

David Jaques

A good learning climate will enhance good teaching procedures and will compensate for poor teaching procedures.

John W. Loughary
and Barrie Hopson

I never teach my pupils, I only attempt to provide the conditions in which they can learn.

Albert Einstein

Problems

- Many teaching/learning opportunities are lost due to hostile settings that actively prevent the growth of knowledge, skills and attitudes. The problem relates to Physical and Social/Psychological environments

Physical Factors

- Small overcrowded rooms for workshop
- Lack of space for small group working
- Poor furniture layout (i.e. no writing tables)
- High noise levels (i.e. external traffic noise level, air conditioning fans)
- Poor black-out facilities
- Overcrowded participant study-bedrooms with no desks, etc., thus making private study difficult to impossible
- An 'unloved, lifeless room' where leaders have failed to pin-up posters, maps, quotes, etc.

Social/Psychological Factors

- An unfriendly, cold atmosphere with remote leaders, inaccessible to participants
- A lack of freedom to express ideas
- General vagueness over leaders expectations of participants
- An uncreative atmosphere where 'risk-taking' is openly discouraged
- A workshop that is filled with an endless procession of lectures with minimal opportunity for participants to contribute in an active manner to proceedings

Solutions

- The precise opposite of each of the above problems.
- Consider the training environment with great care.

...how many rooms are you going to use? Are there problems in keeping everyone in the same room? You may wish to keep a close eye on what subgroups are up to or you may wish them to work independently. Put groups in separate rooms mainly for longer sessions as you will lose time as they move between rooms.

David Gauchos

□ **LOVING T.O.U.C.H.**

TRUST each other to be doing everything possible to support everyone else in the group.

OPENNESS to open our hearts and minds to the group and the opportunity to learn.

UNDERSTANDING to treat everyone's comments with a kind understanding attitude. Even when we don't agree, we should try to understand.

CONFIDENTIALITY when we do or say stays here in this place and time.

HONESTY to say what we mean, and to mean what we say."

Trevor Bentley 'The Business of Training,' 1990

4.2.7 Separating the Responsibility for Teaching and Workshop Administration Within a Single Organisation

Problem

- In running any workshop the organisers have to cope with a pair of interrelated activities: the overall training process (i.e. content and communication) and the administration of the course (i.e. arranging travel and accommodation, financial matters, etc.). If participants experience problems concerning the administration they can rapidly effect their capacity to learn effectively.

Solution

- If different people are responsible for the workshop administration and the leadership of the training programme that can help the above problem considerably. Where a participant is experiencing problems over his or her accommodation or financial allowances then the leader of the training programme can claim ignorance of such issues, and can therefore usefully remain, 'well above such day-to-day problems.' Through this detachment the training momentum can be maintained.

However, the reality is that these two leaders will need to keep very closely in touch with each other since any administration problem will have to be tackled rapidly to avoid contaminating the training experience. There can also be 'vice-versa' problems where a participant may find the training not to his or her taste and may demand the return of their fees, etc.

4.2.8 Opportunities for Participants to Apply their New Capabilities

Training is a means to an end, not an end in itself. Its purpose is to enhance capabilities. At the ADPC (Asian Disaster Preparedness Center) all course participants are told that the measure of the success of the training that they have received will be what they do when they return home with the knowledge that they have acquired. It is not enough that they are better informed; they must put their knowledge into practice. Each participant is invited to make a list of personal goals for the next twelve months and encouraged to report his achievements.

Brian Ward, Director
Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre (ADPC)

Although most development agencies understand the relationship between human resource development and institutional performance, they have generally had limited success in designing projects that bring the two together.

Water and Sanitation for Health Project (WASH) 1990

Education is the leading of human souls to what is best...the training which makes men happiest in themselves also makes them most serviceable to others.

John Ruskin 1819-1900

Problems

- In an ideal world, training and work needs and opportunities would be closely integrated. A given organisation that has carefully determined the scope of the training experience could encourage trainees to apply their new attitudes, skills and knowledge as soon as they return from the training workshop. However, there is rarely such a close link which can have two adverse consequences:
 - the content of the training will not be tailor-made for the needs of the participating organisations. This can result in training taking on a life of its own, with irrelevant material being repeatedly taught that relates to yesterday's problems.
 - the trainees may be highly frustrated, to the point of acute disillusionment, that they have acquired new abilities that their agency apparently neither needs nor wants. Many are aware of this during their participation in a course with the obvious effect of poor motivation to learn.

Solutions

- In designing the content of a training course, organisations need to recognise the need to identify the specific skills, attitudes and knowledge that their staff need to improve disaster management. The reason that this diagnostic process rarely occurs may be that these bodies do not know what they need, or their directors do not regard training as a sufficiently important endeavour to direct their staff to spend precious time in developing detailed specifications for its content.

A further common reason is that managers can feel very threatened when their staff obtain skills or knowledge that is beyond their own experience.

- It is possible for the leaders of training programmes to help to stimulate a close match between training and work requirements by explaining the need for the linkage to the organisation managers. Their new enthusiasm may be a much more potent lever than the best articulated demands.
- Perhaps the most potent incentive will be the pressure of a funding body in demanding (as a prerequisite to the receipt of funds) that workshop design be taken very seriously by the organisations to the point of determining the specific focus, with assurances that participants will be positively encouraged to apply what they learn.
- Workshop participants are also in a very strong position to place two strong demands:
 - that the training programme satisfies their detailed needs
 - that their employers give them the opportunity to apply their new capabilities to the benefit of their agency

4.2.9. Development of Future Workshops in the Light of the Training Experience

Problem

- Training courses are a major effort to organise, and funding may have only been available for a single workshop. Therefore workshops remain isolated events.

Much donor-sponsored training consists of single-shot ad hoc workshops. Unfortunately, single events have limited impact.

Water and Sanitation for Health Project (WASH) 1990

Solution

- From the very outset of course planning, authorities need to be considering the sustainability of training. Continuity of funding is needed, as well as maintaining leadership and administration. A cadre of training staff and local resource persons also need to be retained. They need to monitor and evaluate each workshop and apply the lessons which will inevitably emerge in subsequent training events.