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The potential for management development in NGO-private sector partnerships

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to study the potential for management development in non-governmental organization (NGO)-private sector partnerships.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper is an in-depth case study of a program run by the British subsidiary of a large European financial services company that had sent 60 middle and senior managers and two external consultants over a ten-year period (1994-2004) on capacity building assignments to nine NGO partners in southern India. Questionnaires, interviews and archives of the program were the sources of data.

Findings – The study finds that assignees described the effect of the assignments on them as profound, some as transformational. Managers completed the capacity building assignments successfully and returned with greater self-awareness and enhanced self-confidence, and with a greater ability to handle ambiguity and uncertainty. Based on the input provided by the NGO partners, they also benefited from the assignments. However, the benefits to the private sector company (financial services organization) are not clear from the study.

Research limitations/implications – This theoretical contribution is situated in the literature on self-awareness and proposes management development as a viable objective in NGO-private sector partnerships. Limitations of generalizing from a single case study are acknowledged and future research avenues identified.

Practical implications – The ten-year experience of a large European multi-national organization of partnering with nine Indian NGOs highlights rich potential for management development in such partnerships, through the development of self-awareness and self-confidence of key managerial talent. The circumstances under which such interventions might be appropriate are suggested.

Originality/value – To the authors' knowledge, the potential for management development in NGO-private sector partnerships has been under-studied in the academic literature. The authors believe that the paper offers interesting insights and suggests further avenues for exploration.

Keywords Non-governmental organizations, Private sector organizations, Partnership, Management development, Corporate social responsibility, India

Paper type Research paper



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NGO-private sector partnerships are not new. Indeed, the private sector has for many years demonstrated a willingness to contribute its resources to charitable causes supported by NGOs (DFI, 2005).

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Non-governmental organization (NGO)-private sector has only recently begun to attract the attention of researchers (Linton, 2005; Brugmann and Prahalad, 2007). Research to date in this area has come mainly from multilateral institutions and development agencies such as Development Finance International (DFI, 2005), the Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC, 2001), and the Business Partners for Development (BPD) Program of the World Bank (for a notable exception, see Bendell, 2000).

The DFI study, conducted with the collaboration of the Asian Development Bank, GSK Bio, and PDA, documents 18 case studies of such partnerships in Asia. The BPD Program was set up in 1998 with the participation of 120 organizations to study, support, and promote strategic examples of partnership involving business, government, and civil society working together for the development of communities around the world. It also outlines examples of three-way partnerships and proposes a set of key success factors.

The DFI study explores three considerations in forging successful partnerships between NGOs and the private sector:

- (1) the who (choosing the right partner);
- (2) the why (the objectives that the parties to the partnership want to achieve); and
- (3) the how (the dynamics of the working relationship).

Under the “why” question, the document outlines a number of possible objectives that NGOs typically seek, such as financial resources, technical know-how, improved profile in the community, leveraging the resources obtained from the private sector to acquire additional resources from development institutions, access to products and services demanded by low income communities, and expertise for advocacy. The authors also outline a number of possible objectives that could be sought by the private sector, such as optimal use of corporate social responsibility (CSR) funding, business benefits such as reduced healthcare expenses, access to local markets, and better compliance with regulatory and contractual frameworks.

One objective that has received little attention from researchers interested in NGO-private sector partnerships is management development for the private sector (Waddell, 2000 is an exception and provides some insights into the potential for human resource development in partnerships with NGOs). Based on rich data from a ten-year NGO partnership program in India run by a large European financial services company, we propose that NGOs offer unique conditions and contexts for the personal development of managers of private firms. Specifically, we provide evidence that well-structured capacity building assignments with NGOs in developing countries can significantly enhance the self-awareness of managers, which in turn can contribute to an improvement in their organizational effectiveness.

The program that we studied was run by the British subsidiary of a large European financial services company. It had placed 60 middle and senior managers and two external consultants in resource constrained contexts with Indian NGOs over a ten-year period (1994-2004) when we began our research. CSR, rather than leadership

or management development, was the primary objective of the program. Each manager was given a very specific assignment, typically four weeks in duration and within her area of functional expertise, to enhance the organizational capabilities of an Indian NGO partner. In almost every case, the manager was the only foreigner in the NGO during a given assignment.

Our analysis shows that the managers completed their assignments to the satisfaction of the NGO partners and returned with improved self-awareness and self-confidence, and with a greater ability to handle ambiguity and uncertainty. Their employer benefited in some cases, albeit unknowingly, from this personal development experienced by the managers. However, this benefit did not accrue to it in all cases. Indeed, our interest in this study was triggered by the fact that in 2004, more than half the managers who had been on the Indian assignment over the previous ten years had left the company.

Our research explores the extent and the drivers of this personal development for the 60 managers and two external consultants who were sent on the India assignments with NGO partners. Based on our findings, we also offer reflections on what private sector organizations and managers need to do to specifically factor in management development as an objective in their engagements with NGOs and to ensure that the learning at the individual level is effectively harnessed by the organization.

In the remaining sections of this paper, we provide a brief background of Zurich Financial Services (ZFS), a detailed description of the India Program, and the design of this research. We then discuss our findings, link them to existing research on management development, and draw implications and recommendations for managers and organizations. We conclude acknowledging the limitations of our study and suggesting some avenues for future research.

ZFS: background

ZFS, founded in 1872, is an insurance based financial services company with headquarters in Zurich, Switzerland. Its core businesses are General and Life Insurance. In 2004, it had over 53,000 employees and was present in 120 countries and in all the major regions of the world: Europe, North America, Latin America, Asia Pacific and Africa. The 2004 operating profit and net income were US\$ 3.1 billion and US\$ 2.6 billion respectively.

The India Program was first launched in 1994 under Allied Dunbar, a life insurance business owned by BAT Industries. Allied Dunbar and Eagle Star (a general insurance business based in Britain) were merged to create British American Financial Services (BAFS). In 1998, BAT Industries exited the insurance business by divesting BAFS, which was merged with Zurich to form what is ZFS today.

The community development and philanthropic activities of ZFS were channelled through the Zurich Community Trust (ZCT), a separate legal entity constituted in Britain with a staff of 22 that worked with an annual budget of between four and five million British pounds (GBP) in 2004. The India Program was one of the many run by ZCT from Britain.

The British subsidiary of ZFS had seen difficult times in the 2001-2004 period, which had resulted in a reduction of the workforce from 15,000 to 12,000.

The India Program: characteristics

As of 2004, the India Program was working with nine Indian NGO partners, all of them based in the southern part of the country. India was chosen in 1994 because it offered a relatively safe and politically stable environment, with English as a working language, was friendly to women in the workplace, and had a well-developed voluntary sector of its own. The partners were:

- (1) The Association of People with Disability (APD), Bangalore;
- (2) Center for Education Development and Action Research (CEDAR), Madurai;
- (3) Aravind Eye Hospital, Madurai/The Lions Aravind Institute of Ophthalmology (LAICO), Madurai;
- (4) L.V. Prasad Eye Institute, Hyderabad;
- (5) Mobility India, Bangalore;
- (6) Spastics Society of Tamil Nadu (SPASTN), Chennai;
- (7) Development Action for Women in Need (DAWN), Madurai;
- (8) Action Disability and Development (ADD), Bangalore; and
- (9) The Training Research Centre for Rehabilitation (TRCR).

CSR rather than management development had been the sole objective of the India Program in its initial years under Allied Dunbar. Before the merger of BAFS and Zurich, no attempt had been made within Allied Dunbar to even achieve public relations visibility through the philanthropic activities. This changed under ZFS, with management seeking three kinds of benefits from such initiatives:

- (1) CSR, with the attendant public relations visibility;
- (2) management development; and
- (3) improvement in morale and better staff relations, through an improvement in how the company was perceived by its employees.

The India Program provided three types of assistance to its NGO partners:

- (1) funding in the form of grants, which over the life of the program had ranged from 50,000 GBP to 150,000 GBP per NGO partner;
- (2) capacity building at the NGO partners through assignments carried out in India by ZFS managers of differing levels of seniority and from different functional areas; and
- (3) networking, i.e. using the India Program as a platform for facilitating dialogue between the NGO partners.

We focus in this paper only on the capacity building facet of ZFS's intervention in India.

The assignments were available only to management grade staff and were announced through the company's internal system of communication, such as the company magazine and the intranet. Each assignment specified a required profile in terms of functional expertise and addressed a very specific shortcoming identified in a partner NGO organization. Assignments typically involved capacity building in the areas of Human Resources, IT, Communications, Planning, etc. Deliverables were agreed between the program staff and the NGO partner. Individual managers who fit

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the profile and were interested in going on assignment could then apply, provided their direct superiors (business unit managers) were agreeable to releasing them for a three-to five-week period. One former director of the India Program pointed out that one of the most difficult challenges during her tenure had been to achieve the buy-in from the business unit managers, many of whom were sceptical about the business impact of the assignments on ZFS. One-half of the working days committed to the assignment was contributed by the managers from their vacation time with the other half being borne by the company. During the assignments, the managers typically stayed in guest houses or other similar accommodation close to the offices of the NGO partner.

Each assignment involved two pre-assignment briefings, one in England and the other in India. After the assignment was completed, the NGO partner submitted a detailed evaluation report to ZFS on the different aspects of the assignment, including the effectiveness of the assignee. The assignee was also thoroughly de-briefed upon return to England by the program staff.

Research method

The method chosen for this research was in-depth case studies (Yin, 1989; Stake, 1995). Yin observed that the research case study is the appropriate methodology to follow when the research question is a why or how question, when relevant behavioral variables cannot be manipulated, and when the focus is on contemporary events (Yin, 1989, p. 17). Our objective was to take full advantage of the unique access we had to data over ten years from ZFS's India Program. As Stake (1995, p. 4) notes:

We do not study a case primarily to understand other cases. Our first obligation is to understand this one case. In intrinsic case study, the case is pre-selected. In instrumental case study, some cases would do a better job than others. Sometimes a "typical" case study works well but often an unusual case helps illustrate matters we overlook in typical cases.

We decided on a grounded approach due to the exploratory nature of our work, given that to our knowledge there was little academic work that had explored the potential for management development of NGO-private sector partnerships. Consistent with this approach, we embarked on the study with minimal theoretical framework, with our research questions being motivated by the phenomenon itself. The questions that we sought to answer were:

- What did the assignees learn from working with the NGO partner on the capacity building assignments?
- How did this learning take place?
- How did the private sector organization benefit, if at all, from the learning of the individual managers?

After we had analysed the data, we followed an iterative process to relate our findings to existing theoretical frameworks, in a process referred to as recursive cycling (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). We situate our theoretical contribution in the literature on self-awareness, and suggest that NGO-private sector partnerships have the potential of being leveraged for enhancing the self-awareness of managers.

Although our research officially started on September 24, 2004, the first author had "shadowed" the India Program manager on her previous visit to India during the summer of 2004 and had obtained a deep understanding of the intricacies of the

program. We then conducted an in-depth interview of more than three hours with the ZFS India Program Manager on September 24, during which she explained the origins and evolution of the program over its ten-year history, and the significant impact it had had on the assignees. Based on this interview, we explored the learning that had taken place at the level of the assignees as a result of having participated in the assignments, the sources of this learning, and the extent to which this learning had been harnessed and deployed effectively by ZFS.

With the help of the program manager, we designed a questionnaire to be sent to the assignees. It was sent to 48 of the 62 assignees who had been to India on assignments. One of the assignees was the program manager, and 13 could not be traced. Some of the assignees who had left the company were traced back from ten years earlier. A total of 28 written responses were received and responses from four assignees were provided verbally. See Table I for a summary of the survey responses. Information from the pre-assignment briefings, post-assignment debriefings, personal journals during the assignments and the comments from the assignment evaluation notes of the NGO partners were also studied during the research process to understand how the assignment had unfolded and what the assignee's experience had been in India. Table II provides detailed data for each assignee (names withheld) on age, gender, position held at the time of the assignment, date of joining ZFS, assignment date, whether survey sent to the assignee, and whether response received.

After receiving the completed questionnaires and the information collected from the various documents, a discussion with the program manager was re-initiated to select candidates for in-depth interviews. Six candidates were interviewed in a semi-structured format by telephone (interviews of about 30 minutes each) and their perspectives on the assignments were recorded and studied.

In 2001, the company had introduced a system for identifying and developing talent within its managerial cadre. One part of this system was a two by three matrix, with the two dimensions being current performance and future potential. The three levels within current performance were: does not meet expectations, meets expectations and exceeds expectations; and those within future potential were: limited growth, some growth potential and high growth potential. The assignees that were sent to India after the introduction of this system were mapped on this matrix. See Figure 1 for the different classifications on the matrix. Using this information, we synthesized the findings of the study and developed the recommendations and conclusions.

Findings and discussion

Figures 2-5 provide summaries of the assignee responses for four questions:

- (1) assignee job satisfaction prior to assignment;
- (2) whether assignee was looking for a job change after the assignment;

Assignee type	Survey sent	Response received	Response rate (%)
Former employees	27	17	63
Current employees	20	14	70
Non-employees	1	1	100
Total	48	32	67

Table I.
Survey data

Table II.
Assignee data

Assignee no.;	Age in 1/2005	Gender	Designation at time of assignment	Date joined ZFS	Assignment date	Survey sent	Response Interviews
43	34	Male	Partner-Persona Partnership	External	August 2001	Yes	Yes
7	45	Male	Practice Consultant	August 1994	May 1996	Yes	Yes
52	51	Male	Senior Applications Developer	June 1999	May 2003	Yes	Yes
8	59	Male	Programme Manager (ZCT)	March 1980	March 1996	Yes	Yes
28		Male			April 1999	Yes	No
25		Female	Training and Development Manager		February 1999	Yes	Yes
54		Male	Senior IT Consultant		August 2003	Yes	No
27		Female	Systems Analyst		March 1999	Not reachable	
16		Male			September 1997	Yes	No
45	29	Female	Sales Controller	October 1999	September 2002	Yes	Yes
50	53	Male		December 1985	March 2003	Yes	Yes
6	37	Male	Lead Designer	September 1991	January 1995	Yes	Yes
58		Female	Customer Service Manager		January 2004	Yes	No
53		Male	Senior Housing Consultant		June 2003	Yes	Yes
12		Male			October 1996	Yes	No
51		Female	HR Account Manager		May 2003	Yes	No
62	33	Female	Business Support Advisor		October 2004	Yes	Yes
11		Female	Business Support Advisor Manager	May 1998	October 1996	Yes	No
5		Male	Project Manager		October 1996	Yes	
26	50	Male	Divisional Accountant		January 1996	Not reachable	
44		Male	Accountant	April 1984	February 1999	Yes	Yes
39		Male	Business Analyst	External	July 2002	Not reachable	
23	43	Female	Business Sales Support Manager	July 1988	April 2001	Yes	Yes
					August 1998	Yes	No

(continued)

Assignee no.;	Age in 1/2005	Gender	Designation at time of assignment	Date joined ZFS	Assignment date	Survey sent	Response	Interviews
4		Male	Practice Consultant		July 1995	Not reachable		
18		Female	Business Sales Support Manager		October 1997	Yes	No	
35		Female	Management Accountant		October 2000	Not reachable		
32		Male	Business Plan Manager		February 2000	Yes	No	
46	32	Male	External Services Manager	September 1991	September 2001	Yes	Yes	
21	37	Female	Technical Development Consultant	August 1987	June 1998	Yes	Yes	
17	34	Female		August 1988	October 1997	Yes	Yes	
61	46	Male	Sales Trainer	October 1998	October 2004	Yes	Yes	
38		Male	Team Leader		January 2001	Yes	Yes	
42	41	Male	Relationship Director – Internet banking	September 1989	October 2001	Yes	Yes	
14		Male			March 1997	Yes	No	
48	34	Female	Business Analyst	September 1997	October 2002	Yes	Yes	
55		Male	ISS Investment Planner		September 2003	Yes	No	
47		Male	Sales Trainer		October 2002	Yes	No	
33	40	Female	Communications Consultant		May 2000	Current Program Manager		
40	29	Male	ISS Investment Planner	September 1997	September 2001	Yes	Yes	
1		Male			October 1994	Not reachable		
31		Male	IT Consultant		January 2000	Not reachable		
13	38	Female		July 1981	November 1996	Yes	Yes	
56	47	Female	Regional Development Manager	April 1990	October 2003	Yes	Yes	
41	39	Male	Sales Trainer	August 1987	October 2001	Yes	Yes	
22		Male	Senior Accountant		July 1998	Not reachable		

(continued)

Table II.

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Table II.

Assignee no.;	Age in 1/2005	Gender	Designation at time of assignment	Date joined ZFS	Assignment date	Survey sent	Response Interviews
9		Female	Programme Manager (ZCT)		March 1996	Yes	Yes
49		Male	CRC manager		January 2003	Not reachable	
2		Male	IT Project Manager		April 1995	Yes	No
30		Male	Operations Manager		November 1999	Yes	No
24		Male	Development Analyst		January 1999	Not reachable	
20	36	Male	Sales Trainer	February 1992	April 1998	Yes	Yes
34		Female	Business Analyst		September 2000	Yes	No
10		Male			June 1996	Not reachable	
15		Male			March 1997	Not reachable	
19	43	Male	Senior Consultant	September 1994	March 1998	Yes	Yes
29	37	Female	Team Leader	September 1990	October 1999	Yes	Yes
37		Male	IT Project Manager		November 2000	Not reachable	
60	40	Female	Solicitor	November 2002	October 2004	Yes	Yes
59	48	Female	Senior Communications Specialist	April 2002	August 2004	Yes	Yes
57	42	Male	Senior HR Consultant	March 2000	November 2003	Yes	Yes
3	41	Male	Practice Consultant	February 1994	May 1995	Yes	Yes
36	54	Female	Team Leader	September 1994	November 2000	Yes	Yes

Notes: 22 female assignees (35 percent); average age of respondents at the time of survey: 41.14 years

Future Potential	High	7 Enigma Role Mismatch/ New to Role	8 Growth Employee	9 Next Generation Leader
	Medium	4 Dilemma Role Dilemma/ New to Role	5 Core Employee	6 High Impact Performer
	Low	1 Under performer	2 Effective	3 Trusted Professional
		Does not meet/ Partially Meets Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
		Current Performance		

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Figure 1.
Overview of the nine-box matrix

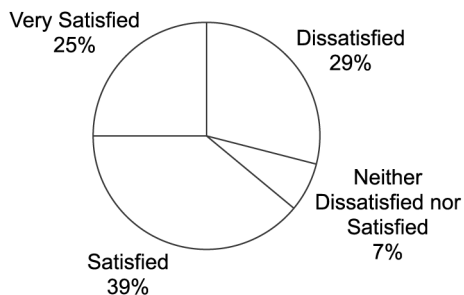


Figure 2.
Assignee job satisfaction prior to undertaking the assignment

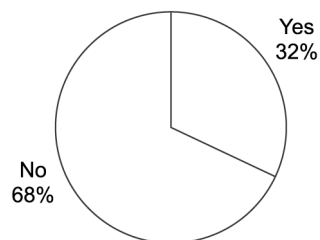


Figure 3.
Prior to assignment the assignee was looking for a job change

- (3) whether assignee was still with ZFS or not in 2004; and
- (4) for those assignees who no longer were employed by ZFS in 2004, the reasons for their departure from the organization.

Impact at the individual level

Our most notable finding was that most of the assignees described the effect of the assignment at the individual level as profound, some as transformational. We provide below some representative quotes (each quote is from a different assignee):

The overall experience was the most rewarding/scary/emotional + developmental one of my life (up to the birth of my daughter 5 years ago!)

I experienced significant growth, which impacted on confidence levels and provided time to review work and what needed to be done differently.

My confidence was enhanced and I'm now able to operate with little support or guidance.

The Indian challenge provided a fresh challenge which in turn provided confidence to make changes on my return.

I have improved confidence in my ability and a willingness/desire for new challenges.

I was given space to stand back, consider and change behaviors.

I'm more aware of what I want and where my strengths are to deliver. The experience has spurred me on to think about what I want personally and I am now also a trustee [of the Zurich Community Trust]. You don't get all the learning immediately but it crystallizes as you reflect.

Figure 4.
Assignee status at the end
of the ten-year period
(based on all the assignees,
not just survey
respondents)

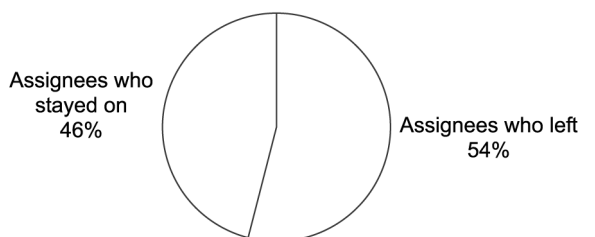
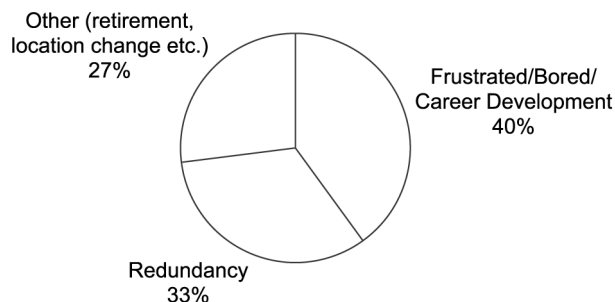


Figure 5.
Reason for leaving



I have improved communication and listening skills which have helped develop the role.

I now have increased responsibility, larger teams, higher profile and more complex projects. Working with others made it easier for me to adapt to work with third parties. I also now find it much easier to focus on what really matters and where to direct my attention.

The personal development that I gained from the assignment was exceptional. I was pleasantly surprised that I have picked up some personal learning that I had not expected, e.g. in a new found calmness for life and work.

I have a lot more confidence and a clearer view of what I want to satisfy me in my job . . . Earlier I could only manage people for the work I had done before, i.e. I knew all the details of the work. Now I am comfortable with a superficial grasp and have learnt to deal with ambiguity. I am able to trust people and know where to get the critical information when required.

Better knowledge of Performance Management System and it has improved my confidence of what I can do on my own.

Increase in own confidence and that I may have been selling myself low. I think I am a sports car already, and have good judgment.

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Factors influencing the change at the individual level

The assignees had to overcome different kinds of adversity before and during the assignment. For example, one assignee spoke of “a crisis of confidence” just before she left for India. Some of the assignees fell sick during the assignments and a couple even had to be hospitalized. The assignees found the accommodation basic but comfortable, and some struggled with the food. Most spoke of loneliness during the assignments, especially after work hours during the evenings. They faced different kinds of challenges in delivering the assignments, from difficulties with the terms of reference, to communications problems due to linguistic and cultural differences:

The experience could be more accurately described as “The Good, The Bad and The Ugly”. In addition to cultural and communication issues I also had initial problems with travel, food, sleep, heat, humidity and the lack of company. This, however, is the experience. You have to complete the agreed project within the timescales using your own initiative, with limited assistance and in difficult conditions.

From analyzing the responses of the assignees, we have identified the following factors as the main drivers of individual change.

Differences in the socio-cultural and economic contexts of India with respect to Britain. Several assignees noted the contrasts in India between the very rich and the very poor, and the precarious living standards of the latter. One assignee marveled at the fact the poor in India seemed happy in spite of having so little. According to one assignee:

[. . .] for me India was a shock. It's very crowded, 15 million in Delhi where I landed and all of them apparently on the road [. . .]. You see sights that make you totally reassess what you take for granted, you question your values, and you laugh and realize that India is different and best left observed and not judged.

The opportunity to work and live with the people in India. It was an unbelievable experience. I did not stay in hotels but stayed in the conditions they live in, including sleeping on the floor in a Catholic hall in Kodaicanal!

Differences between the missions of the NGO partners (purely service based and not-for-profit) and that of ZFS (for profit). One assignee remarked about her experience with the NGO partner:

It is very much a more enabling environment than in my own organization. In England, I was 20 percent effective, in India I was 80 percent effective. That is a great feeling. Now I am aware of how much the developing world and NGOs can offer businesses anywhere. Our partners are so resource constrained, and they have such compelling visions. By comparison, visions in the corporate world are so bland. Another difference is customers – in the corporate world, you do not really understand customers. In NGOs, you get into the hearts and minds of customers.

Differences in resource availability between corporate employer and Indian NGO. Several assignees made comments about the degree of dedication of the NGO staff and especially their ability to work with such limited resources – “So much they could do with so little.”

Loneliness. Many of the assignees complained of loneliness especially after work hours, when they really felt that they were away from their families and friends.

Successfully overcoming uncertainty. There were two sources of uncertainty that we found noteworthy. The first was the value placed by the NGO on the assignee’s skills and the sense of accountability that this expectation engendered in the assignee. This uncertainty was compounded by the fact that, barring exceptions, the assignee was the sole representatives from ZFS at the NGO partner organization during a given assignment, which meant that he/she was required to deliver results without the organizational support that he/she was accustomed to back home. The second source of uncertainty for the assignees was the fluid nature of the Terms of Reference, which often changed during the assignment, sometimes quite substantially. “The daily challenge of ever-shifting Terms of Reference.” The successful completion of the assignment and the clear causal link between this success and their own efforts gave them a newfound confidence in their abilities:

During the assignment I had to adapt to different circumstances. I had to change the original plan because of the sponsor (the person from the NGO partner who takes ownership of the assignment) requiring different deliverables and approaching the assignment from a different perspective [...] Since returning, I have had to quickly adapt to spending 50 percent of my time doing something else, whereas before I would never have thought I would be comfortable giving up things I like to have in my control.

Did any assignees leave their employment as a result of the assignment?

Although nine of the 32 assignees stated that they were dissatisfied with their jobs prior to going on assignment, only four of them left their employment with ZFS as a direct result of the assignment experience. Unfortunately for ZFS, all four were high potential managers: three had been evaluated as being in box 9 in the matrix (see Figure 1) and one in box 6. We provide two responses below:

The project was a major test of my own abilities and has acted as a catalyst for career change since my return.

Organization [ZFS] did not seem to have a job for me where I was able to or supported in delivering the value I believed I could add [and the “Organization” told me it believed I could do too i.e. via the box 9 rating].

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Did any assignees who were thinking of leaving prior to the assignment, stay on as a direct result of the assignment?

Five assignees that had been dissatisfied with their jobs at ZFS came back energized and stayed on at least for some years in the company. Three of the assignees had been placed in box 8 and one in box 6. The fifth assignee did not respond to the question of which box s/he had been placed in. One assignee stated that she was more dissatisfied upon her return. Fortunately for the organization and for her, she was given a new role some months after the assignment. According to her:

I was given extra responsibilities six months upon return [...] There was certainly more dissatisfaction with the current role I was doing. Timing of the new job within ZFS was good, else I would have certainly left ZFS.

Another assignee who indicated that she had been looking for a job change prior to going on assignment, explained her reason for doing so:

Discussions with manager about new opportunities – felt had been in previous job long enough and needed to either radically change the way I was approaching it to create opportunities to develop in role, or look for something else.

At the time we got the assignee’s response (January 2005), which was more than two years after she returned from assignment (November 2002), she was still with the company, albeit in a new role (changed from IT to HR).

We asked an assignee (rated 5 on the 9 box matrix prior to the assignment) why he had not left the company in spite of being dissatisfied in his job. He responded:

I became a local councilor after I came back. The India Program gave me the confidence to go into politics. It was very much connected to the India experience. This had been at the back of my mind before I left. I became proactive about it, about how NGOs rise to the challenge in spite of being resource constrained. It gave me a wider outlook on life. Earlier I was focused on day-to-day details. In India, I learnt to see the bigger picture. I became structured about taking a vision and getting people aligned to it. If the organization had leveraged my learning and experience, I would not have seen the need to go into politics.

Theoretical contribution

Self-awareness has long been recognized as essential in enhancing individual effectiveness and in turn individual job performance in organizations. According to Atwater and Yammarino (1992, p. 143) self-awareness is an “individual’s ability to assess other’s evaluations of the self and to incorporate these assessments into one’s self-evaluation”. Church (1997) defines self-awareness as “the ability to reflect on and accurately assess one’s own behaviours and skills as they are manifested in workplace situations.” In connection with 360° feedback, it has been suggested that self-awareness is the degree of congruence between one’s own rating and the ratings of others (McCarthy and Garavan, 1999).

Goleman (1996, 1998) has suggested that self-awareness is one of the important personal competencies that make up the construct of emotional intelligence. Church

(1997) found that high-performers showed significantly higher levels of self-awareness than average performers. Consistent with this finding, Church and Wacławski (1999) found that higher levels of self-awareness translate to improved levels of effectiveness as reported by superiors.

From our findings, we conclude that the India assignments contributed to the managers' self-awareness in multiple ways: first, they helped the managers get a better idea of what they were truly capable of. In all the cases, they were pleasantly surprised that they were capable of more than they had given themselves credit for. This resulted in a higher self-confidence in their capabilities. Second, the managers were able to understand their own preferences better. Third, they reported a better ability to prioritize between different tasks. Fourth, their inter-personal skills (communication and persuasion) underwent an improvement. Finally, they expressed that they were calmer and better able to handle uncertainty. In accordance with prior research findings linking self-awareness and managerial effectiveness, we submit that these managers were now in a position to handle positions of greater responsibility and complexity.

However, the question of whether the organization (ZFS) itself benefited or not and in what ways is a more complex question. For the first few years of the program, no business benefit was even sought. In later years, some high potential assignees left the organization as a direct result of having been on the India Program. Others who had been dissatisfied prior to the assignment decided to stay on. Clearly, there were no organizational mechanisms in place to leverage the learning that had taken place at the individual level for the benefit of the organization as a whole. Whatever business benefit resulted from the individual learning occurred without the organization explicitly seeking it.

This study leads us to conclude that private sector organizations from developed countries that participate in such capacity building partnerships with NGOs in developing countries must realize that their managers will necessarily undergo change to varying degrees and in unforeseeable ways as a result of interacting with the NGOs. The main source of the change is the need imposed on the managers to adapt to the stark differences between the contexts in which the two partners operate and to deliver results that satisfy the expectations of the NGOs. The contextual differences can be summarized under two broad headings: organizational differences – missions, cultures, and resource availability, and differences in the broader socio-political and economic environments – cultures, languages, social habits, values and norms.

Implications

Several authors have claimed that businesses can learn from non-profit organizations (for example, Drucker, 1989). In the ten-year program that we have studied, individual learning was a clear outcome of the NGO-private sector partnerships. However, the private sector organization did not benefit in all cases from the self-development of its managers. Indeed, four high potential managers left their employment as a direct result of the India assignment. In our view, this lack of connection between individual learning and organizational development raises some interesting questions:

- (1) *How should such an initiative be framed within the organization?* Our research indicates that it is important for the organization to include a program such as

this one within its leadership development program rather than only as part of its CSR initiative. This will not only have the benefit of explicitly outlining the business objective right up front, but will also lead to the NGO being treated like an equal partner rather than only as a recipient of or an intermediary in the corporation's charity initiatives, by making explicit the potential learning contribution the NGO can make to the corporation. Naturally, this means that the program must have the visible backing of the top management team.

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- (2) *What criteria, beyond the obvious one of fit between the individual's abilities and the NGOs needs, ought to be used to choose managers for assignments?* In the case of ZFS, the managers self-selected into the program. We believe that if the program is structured for leadership development, it must be open to a limited number of high potential individuals. From this pool, candidates must be allowed to self-select into the program. Corporations must be cautioned that individuals who self-select into such a program could be dissatisfied or bored with their current assignments, and probably need to be stretched. The implication of this is that some might leave the organization as a result of the transformational impact it can produce on people.
- (3) *What processes need to be put in place to ensure that the business benefit to the organization is optimized, without undermining the capability development of the NGOs or the personal development of the managers?* Defining the program as a leadership development initiative (as mentioned in point (2) above) is an important first step. The process in terms of matching the managers' capabilities with the NGO partners' needs, the pre-assignment briefings, and the post-assignment de-briefings, are obviously critical steps in the process. It is also important to manage the expectations of the assignees in order that they fully understand that their employer is unlikely to change to the same extent as they probably will during their time on assignment. The message to the assignees must be that it is their responsibility to contribute pro-actively to drive the change process forward. In accordance with this, the organization must be willing to give these returnees new roles and increased responsibilities.
- (4) *How can the organization increase the likelihood that the managers will stay in its employment after their return from the assignment?* The evidence that we have examined clearly shows that the organization cannot realistically hope to manage in a deterministic way either the extent or the dimensions of learning at the level of the individual managers. Therefore, it must resign itself to a certain level of attrition amongst the managers as a direct consequence of their having gone on the NGO assignments. Nevertheless, the organization can take steps to reduce the risk of attrition by ensuring appropriate selection of NGO partners and of managers to be sent on assignment, proper matching of the managers to the needs of the NGOs, and adequate post assignment re-induction into the organization.

Limitations and future research

We are cognizant that this research has some limitations. First and foremost is the obvious limitation to generalizability that comes from a single case study. In this sense,

we believe that the uniqueness of ZFS's India Program and the richness of the data to which we had access raise interesting questions about NGO-private sector partnerships for management development, rather than provide any definitive answers. Second, it is important to remember that the managers were all British nationals going to spend some weeks in India. The unique linkages between these two countries that have resulted from close to 200 years of British presence in India represent a further barrier to extrapolation.

Notwithstanding the above limitations, we believe that our study has demonstrated the management development potential in NGO-private sector partnerships. This benefit for private firms provides one more reason for them to engage with NGOs in developing country contexts, and for the latter to be treated as equal partners based on the tangible benefits that they can contribute.

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