

Foundation for Leadership Development in Public Services (FLADPS) - Identifying Core Competence, Role Discovery and Scaling Up

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Background

In India after independence departments designed to deliver the public services developed a massive organizational structure to ensure delivery of the service. In the case of a leading state, the Department of Public Instruction (the school education department) had four major arms of the structure that dealt with academic delivery in more than 66,000 schools in 32 educational districts across the state. These arms were: the teaching structure in schools, the support bodies like academic support units at block and district levels, Directorate of State Education Research and Training (DSERT) (including District Institutes of Education and Training (DIET) that deal with development and research) and the general administration structure. In addition there was a dedicated unit for textbook production.

With a view to strengthening quality of school education, and in alignment with the Government of India's Educational Policies, the state government, set up the quality assurance wing and took initiatives to develop school level plans for improvement in learning levels in students and betterment of school infrastructure. These initiatives were considered pioneering in nature in the Indian context.

The management of school education in the state could be categorized into strategic, tactical and operational levels. While the top



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management, mostly civil servants drawn from the IAS and the State Administrative Service, had training in management concepts, the other levels in the edifice had little or no exposure to management training thus affecting the quality of service delivery. Previous efforts in organizing management development programs with mainstream management institutes did not have much linkage to the sectoral context or used conventional business management concepts with a “seasoning and flavor” of public service and development.

Management Development Initiative in School Education

In this background ABC Foundation, setup by a leading corporate group, undertook the initiative for management development for the officers of the school education department with a view to improving quality of school education (Suresh and Sridhar 2013). Training needs of officer levels as above were identified and the Management Development Program (MDP) was planned in four phases as follows:

- First phase with focus on ice breaking, framework of MDP, perspectives of education environment, quality in education, quality tools for problem solving, basics of project management
- Second phase with focus on project review, dimensions of human resources management, leadership and team building in education, work planning and review.
- Third phase with focus on training skills, as well as module development and test delivery.
- Fourth and final phase with focus on review of pilot delivery, action plan, blueprint of training to be undertaken (on a cascading model to lower levels) and certification of participants.

It was a first of its kind effort to link management development with the department’s program strategy. The four phases were preceded by pilot programs to test the pedagogic approaches (such as Case Method, Role Plays etc) and reaction of officers to advanced management concepts (such as strategic management in

public systems) in a public service context. The Management Development Initiative was a Certified one, an innovation in a government department. It was a large and innovative inter-organizational endeavor with the University Management Studies Department, Department of Public Instruction, and ABC Foundation as partners. The management development initiative was linked to project implementation unlike most such MDPs. 102 Management Development Facilitators (MDF) were certified.

Formation of FLADPS

In view of the limitations of working with university departments that had their regular academic programs, ABC Foundation and a few of the management experts associated with the MDP endeavor felt that it would be better if an independent setup was established to run the subsequent phases of the program. After a series of consultations between management experts, academicians, NGOs and education department officials it was decided to set up a separate organization under the Societies Act. Such a body, it was felt, could be formed, that was independent of the government structure yet help the government's school education department to bring in management orientation in its functioning by training functionaries at various levels. It was perceived that such an approach would eliminate the need for dependence on mainstream academic institutions which had more thrust on their own regular academic degree programs.

A group of like-minded individuals drawn from academicians in management field, ABC Foundation professionals, NGO functionaries, media professionals, education experts and concerned eminent citizens interacted and deliberated on the aspect of forming such an organization with focus on leadership development in public organizations. In a formal meeting convened in January 2007 the Foundation for Leadership development in Public Services (FLADPS)

was formed with the following specific objectives as below:

- To undertake leadership development in public services and strengthen management orientation in the same
- To undertake research projects in the interesting area of public services management
- To collaborate with like-minded organizations in this area
- To work in areas beyond education sector in due course
- To create awareness of relevance of management orientation in public services among bureaucrats, political leaders and general public.
- To undertake advocacy in chosen areas of public services

It was registered as a non- profit society with an elected board consisting of a President, Secretary and Treasurer. Initial seed money was raised through membership contribution. The FLADPS also signed MoU with ABC Foundation to implement the second phase of the Management Development Initiative in all the districts of the state. The MoU was for a period of three years. ABC Foundation agreed to provide financial support in the form of projects and part of the project cost also included 10% towards the corpus fund of FLADPS.

The formation of FLADPS was welcomed and there was all round enthusiasm. A founder member of FLADPS was nominated as Coordinator on a full time basis. It was envisaged that the founder members, many of whom were management professionals, education experts and academicians with fulltime jobs elsewhere, would contribute to FLADPS through full time young Research Associates recruited to undertake various projects. These young professionals would work under the guidance of the founder members. The founder members worked in FLADPS projects most of the time free of charge basis due to their conviction of strengthening public services. In addition, FLADPS also hired independent consultants when

required and financially compensated them for their professional services. While the payment was not top notch it was nevertheless attractive for the independent consultants. In addition, where necessary, founder members got involved on specific projects and were also compensated for their professional services.

Initial Activities of FLADPS

Initially FLADPS operated from temporary premises and subsequently shifted to rented premises. Every fortnight a few of the original founder members met at the house of the President and reviewed progress of activities. Initial focus was on streamlining operations, recruiting Research Associates and setting up accounting processes. The discussions also focused on possible activities that can be undertaken in addition to the leadership development programs taken up in the school education system in the state (second phase of the MDP initiative referred to earlier)

FLADPS also undertook review of project planning undertaken by MDFs. As part of the of the leadership training programs, MDFs were required to identify projects in their own territory. These projects were meant to improve quality of school education and school infrastructure in their respective education districts. The project could be improving school buildings or identifying academic initiatives as part of the School Development Plan that sought to improve school level performance (in relation to District and State level average test scores) in quality assessment tests conducted by State School Quality Assurance Organization.

Around 2008-09, a few founder members of FLADPS won a major research award to study Grassroots Leadership in School Education in the State. This award, given by a major global publishing house, was the only one selected across India from several proposals submitted. It was decided to conduct the research with field, operational and analytical support drawn from FLADPS staff, while the winners of the award (all of whom were management professionals or education experts) would conceptualize the research and get involved in specific

milestones for review and direction setting. Such a research strategy was adopted to enhance the image and visibility of FLADPS.

Activities undertaken in FLADPS (as of 2013)

Management Development Endeavour (sometimes referred to as Education leadership development program- ELDP) that began in 2007 had trained about 2200 educational functionaries in the first phase. Another group of 2000 functionaries from 16 districts were being trained at different places across the state. FLADPS was also engaged in carrying out several ongoing projects such as Cluster Level Improvement projects, District School Leadership Development Programme being organised with support of ABC Foundation (Annual Report of FLADPS 2012-13)

Strengthening DIET Project

FLADPS worked in collaboration with the State Knowledge Commission and the Directorate of State Education Research and Training (DSERT), a non-profit Educational Consortium and seven DIETs on a project called Samartha. This project sought “to strengthen and empower DIETs in the state for becoming decentralized lead resource institutions.” FLADPS worked with these DIETs from January to November 2011 and helped in formulation of projects that were conceptualized and designed by each DIET based on ground realities in their districts. Examples of such projects include ‘Micro Studies in Educational Research’, ‘DIET-Block Resource Centre linkages for mutual support and peer review’, ‘Creating learning resources in a collaborative manner using digital methods’ etc.

Health Sector MDP Initiative

In 2012, FLADPS made a foray into undertaking management development programs for the health sector in collaboration with the Department of AYUSH of the state. The management development programs were conceptualized for district level officers and AYUSH medical officers with a view to building capacity amongst AYUSH personnel to manage health delivery to the public. The goal of the training endeavor was to improve service delivery and access to quality

health care under the AYUSH scheme. Around 40 persons were trained. The expansion of the training program faced bottlenecks due to internal constraints in the sponsoring agency.

Research Initiative

In 2008, three of the founder members (who were working as academicians elsewhere) were awarded an important research project by a global publisher. The research proposal was submitted by the three founder members as a research team. This research project, the only project selected on the basis of a competition from several research proposals with an Indian focus, focused on Grassroots leadership in school education. The findings were to be used in conceptualizing school leadership development programs implemented by ABC Foundation (Suresh, Sridhar and Joshi, 2008). The research study was done under the auspices of FLADPS to enhance the image of FLADPS. While conceptualization including the research design and tools for research were done by the research team, it was envisaged the Research Associates (on payment of honoraria and other costs) would be drawn from FLADPS. The link between FLADPS and the research team did not happen at all as the Research Associates were busy with various projects such as ELDP and DIET strengthening project. Ultimately the research project was completed jointly by the research team with the help of another member who was an academician

Advocacy and Public Awareness

FLADPS also initiated awareness talks and panel discussion in the area public services. General public, concerned citizens and NGOs were invited for the same. Themes around which these were organized included one on Citizens Charter Scope and Implementation and another on Lateral Entry in Civil Services. In addition, FLADPS also considered initiating an annual survey of public services in the state (similar to the one on Environment by Centre for Science and Environment, Delhi at the national level). This idea of FLADPS though

well appreciated did not take off due to lack of funding support and operational issues of undertaking field research and analysis. The constraint of research execution experienced in the earlier research study on Grassroots Leadership remained.

Activities in 2013-14

A training program on “Supportive supervision” to the Medical officers of Dept of AYUSH and Evaluation of functionality of Village Health, Sanitation and Nutrition committees in 4 districts of the state was organized. In addition a proposal was submitted to the state government to conduct district health management programme for district health officers based on earlier pilot program that was conducted. However, the health sector program faced constraints in approval from the government.

The Education Leadership Development Program (ELDP) started in September 2011 was in its last phase focusing on developing master trainers in Education Leadership and the Management Development. The program covered more than 200 educational functionaries in the government sector such as Block Resource Persons (BRPs), Educational Co-ordinators (ECOs,) Inclusive Education Resource Trainers (IERTs), District Institute of Education and Training (DIET) Faculty. One of the components of the entire process of developing Education Leadership was the selection of potential master facilitators who would then cascade the process of developing leadership in their respective districts. Around 125 master facilitators were selected to carry on the task of developing Education Leaders in districts.

In collaboration with ABC Foundation a cohesive School Leadership Development Program was initiated on a pilot basis in one of the districts. Around 56 school head teachers were trained in modules such as Personal Effectiveness, Educational Policies, Quality Education Model, School Development Concept, Process and Quality tools, Educational Leadership, Teacher Cohesion, School and Classroom Environment, Stakeholders Participation, Parent-Teacher Partnership

etc. These were followed up by project identification for school development by participants. A few of these projects were school library expansion, laboratory development, developing school garden, bathing room for tribal students, field visit as part of subjects for more learning, Parent-teachers dialogue, Strengthening School Development and Monitoring, Committee (SDMC) participation in school development, Safe drinking water. The conceptualization of these projects was reviewed by FLADPS team and improvements were facilitated (Annual Report of FLADPS 2013-14)

Consultative Discussions in FLADPS (2013-14)

FLADPS had interactions internally and had a consultative discussion among founder members, identified specific issues in two domains, research domain and education leadership domain as follows (Internal Note 2013):

- Continuation of management development programs in all districts of the state
- Advocacy within education system for structural and process changes
- Development of internal human resources within FLADPS
- Collaborating with Research Domain for documentation and identification of insight for practice in MDPs
- Conceptualization of larger issues in education leadership and linking them to management development programs

In the context of research domain the following issues were identified (Internal Report, 2013):

- Public services are undermanaged, new solutions have to be found in this emerging area
- Without research, undertaking context specific MDPs or advocacy would be difficult
- FLADPS needs to link up with other agencies for financial and knowledge support. Hence FLADPS has to diversify its activities

- MDPs can be time consuming and resource intensive (net surplus may not be high for corpus)
- Context driven research either for MDP or advocacy was critical in FLADPS' evolution
- Without research and knowledge generation, institutional initiatives would wither away
- Knowledge documentation- synthesis of past experiences
- Identification of the themes to focus, immediate or for the subsequent three years. Research focus is critical in the Indian context. Research not linked to implementation might not be relevant in Public Services
- Research cost money. Identification of funding support for the same
- Research involved committing time. Need for Research Associates for doing ground work
- Issues pertaining to remuneration for researchers
- Dissemination of research findings. Appropriate format ought to be identified given the small size of FLADPS
- Need to develop an in-house library

Other Initiatives

FLADPS also sought support from UNICEF and XYZ Trust, a funding agency set up by a leading Indian business house. It also endeavored to float the idea of management development program for the City Development Authority. Efforts were also made to forge links with the state health department for conducting MDPs for health department officers at the district level. Many of these initiatives did not take off due to changing policies in the concerned agencies. FLADPS also thought of undertaking a survey of common citizens' level of satisfaction with public services. It did not take off as it required a large deployment of people for field research and possible political ramifications.

Situation in 2014

ABC Foundation that was one of the major sponsors of FLADPS and its activities right from the beginning started outsourcing some projects to other training firms from 2011. In addition, ABC Foundation recruited experts to build capacity in the foundation for direct implementation of its education sector programs. Slowly the funding started drying up. FLADPS project coordinator also left to join ABC Foundation. There was no second rung leadership to take over. By 2014 funding completely dried up for FLADPS and most professionals left the setup.

Issues Confronting FLADPS

There were many issues faced by FLADPS as follows:

- Its dependence on ABC Foundation was very high (partially due to initial relationship in program implementation and personal relationship with ABC Foundation members). As one FLADPS well-wisher observed that FLADPS had virtually become a “training contractor” for ABC Foundation.
- The original concept of founder members (most were employed in other organizations or academic institutions) providing conceptual insights for ongoing projects and new initiatives with operational support from full time Research Associates in FLADPS did not evolve. As one member pointed out all the Research Associates were just too busy in field projects sponsored by ABC Foundation.
- Poor flow of communication from FLADPS to its members and to outside world was an issue. While a website had been designed there were no updates despite nominating a senior official in FLADPS for enhancing and improving the website. While there was an e-group that posted some general and unimportant developments, new initiatives were not communicated systematically to members. Examples included the district level school education leadership programme and the initiatives to link up with XYZ trust and UNICEF. As a member observed that new initiatives were known only during Annual General Body meeting

or through “outside” sources. There was not much consultation during the stage of proposal preparation.

- There was too much thrust on ‘project driven’ and ‘training session’ based initiatives. While individual resource persons were gainfully employed and financially compensated in this initiative, it did not help FLADPS’ diversification into other thrust areas such as policy analysis and advocacy. As one Founder member passionately argued in an informal consultation “we have not done anything to understand the issues faced by the downtrodden due to poor delivery of public services and have focused only project based training programmes”
- The only research project that was done under the auspices of the FLADPS was on Grassroots Leadership for School Education undertaken by a few founder members and another well-meaning member. The operational support of Research Associates of FLADPS being attached to the research study did not happen at all.
- Research studies involved proposal preparation and spending time during conceptualization prior to submission to funding agencies. FLADPS did not give much importance to this at all though there were founder members with strong research competence. Research studies also involved time commitment of a longer duration unlike training programs at FLADPS which were for a shorter duration and repetition of the same in different cycles at different locations. All the Research Associates were too involved in field projects sponsored by ABC Foundation.
- An allied aspect was the issue of compensation of professionals involved in writing proposals for research studies. While FLADPS compensated financially proposal writing for training programs there was no such policy for research studies. As a result only a few were interested in undertaking research. In the absence of any significant research and documentation efforts there was no document to show, as a Founder member observed, to large corporate trusts for institutional corpus grants.

- The training program largely focused on the education sector and most training programs became repetitive in nature. Other public services called for different training approaches and more domain knowledge.
- There were also structural and clarity issues pertaining to the roles of the FLADPS coordinator, President of the FLADPS society, executive committee and the informal advisory group of Founder members.
- The founder members were drawn from different walks of the society with competence in media sector, research, management, policy analysis, advocacy, educational philosophy, law etc. As FLADPS focused mainly on session based training programs many of these members slowly lost interest despite initial enthusiasm.
- As ABC Foundation's funding completely dried up FLADPS had to discover its role based on its competence and scale up its activities to make an impact. Was it a think tank with a down to earth approach or an activist NGO? Why could not FLADPS scale up and become like professional bodies such as CSE, PAC or PRADAN which were also started by well-meaning professionals? There were also emerging opportunities such as Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives in the public services sector.

Note: Names of organizations, references have been disguised.

References

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