THE LEARNING ORGANIZATION IN A POST-DEVELOPMENT ERA:
A CASE STUDY ON ORGNIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AT THE VALLEY TRUST

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Abstract

In the past two decades, the rise of Post-Development theory has witnessed the

questioning of the core assumptions of development. Post-Development theorists point to the

failures of "development" to create significant decreases in poverty or inequality worldwide.

Meanwhile, other theorists call for radical transformations of conventional practice. This paper

seeks to grapple with these questions, using the example of The Valley Trust, a development

NGO in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, as an entry point into the debate.

Research was conducted over a four-week period through a mixture of participant

observation and formal interviews with staff members of The Valley Trust. An account will be

given of the practicum done at The Valley Trust in this paper as well as an analysis of the

responses given by staff members in the interviews.

The conclusion of this paper argues that The Valley Trust, as an example of recent

theoretical developments in the field such as the learning organization and "developmental

facilitation," offers a possibility of one direction in which development practice could transform

so as to meet the needs of the coming century.

Introduction

The world has been engaged in a "development project," a project to address the deep poverty, rampant human suffering, and glaring inequalities in the so-called "Third World," for nearly 60 years now (Sachs, 1992). Though there have been many important actors in this endeavor, development focused non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have played an especially crucial role, leading the charge as it were to "end poverty." Especially in an era of neo-liberal economic policies and the "Washington Consensus," when many Third-World governments are increasingly pressured to privatize basic services and reduce spending on welfare, many look to NGOs to solve the seemingly intractable problems of poverty. It is now estimated that there are over 50,000 NGOs operating in the Third World (Petras & Veltmeyer, 2001; Edward & Hulme, 1997). Yet despite all the apparent good will behind the development project, there is much to suggest that its record is one of colossal failures. More than 100 developing and transition countries have seen declines in living standards since the early 1980s (UNDP, 1997). In South Africa, particularly, poverty, inequality, and unemployment are all on the rise despite the enormous presence of NGOs and other civil-society organizations (Kotze, 2004).

Given these seeming failures, there are many theorists that now call for an end to development altogether. Even if one does not go to such extremes, it is abundantly clear that a very critical look needs to be taken at the way the development sector operates and how development NGOs, as perhaps its most visible representatives, approach their work (Hillhorst, 2003). Many development scholars, social scientists, and even NGO workers are now doing

exactly that: questioning the impacts NGOs have on the eradication of poverty and the improvement of quality of life (Edwards & Hulme, 1997).

       The Valley Trust (TVT) is a development NGO in South Africa that has been operating in the same area for nearly as long as the modern concept of development has been around. As such, it has experimented with and adopted many different development paradigms over the course of its history. In many ways, the organization has always managed to stay ahead of, or at least on top of, changes in the field and in the realm of development theory (Bruzas and Jager). Most recently, the organization has adopted a deeply self-reflective and self-critical approach to its development practice, questioning some of its core values and long held assumptions about what constitutes "good" development work. Particularly, members of the organization have begun to question deeply the models of development that involve service- and resource-delivery. Many in the organization have asked whether these approaches do not simply build dependencies on the part of clients or else absolve government of its basic obligations. As an alternative to these old models of development, some have begun to place a new emphasis on the relatively recent concept of "developmental facilitation." This approach involves helping to facilitate the growth of capacity that is already inherent in clients, rather than "training" them or providing them with services. It is in many ways a novel approach and even at TVT it has not been met without some amount of friction.

       This paper seeks to explore just how successful these organizational developments within The Valley Trust, both a greater emphasis on self-reflection and a shift towards a facilitative development paradigm, have been. And, in broader terms, the paper will try to address whether or not these new trends in development practice exemplified by The Valley Trust can provide a continued relevance and importance for development itself in the 21st century. In my work at The

Valley Trust, I have sought to elicit the views of staff members on a variety of questions, including ones like: "How has the rhetoric of developmental facilitation and people-centeredness translated (if at all) into practice in the field?" "What are the views of clients on the new ways in which TVT approaches its work? Do they view the changes as positive?" and "What kind of resistance, if any, has there been within the organization to the shifts to new paradigms?" From these interactions I hoped to gain a broader understanding of how, or even whether, the much-vaunted theoretical models like "the learning organization" and "developmental facilitation" might provide the radical shifts in development practice needed to make it a meaningful endeavor in the coming century. I hope that this paper will be able to shed some light on the matter.

This paper begins with a general background and history of The Valley Trust. This section will give the reader a context in which to place the rest of my research on TVT. Of especial importance in this section is the brief history of major organizational interventions that have taken place within the organization. The next section of this paper consists of a review of the available literature on Post-Development theory and the various arguments for transformation within development practice. It is in this section that I raise the question to which my analysis of The Valley Trust's experience ultimately pertains: should development be abandoned altogether as the Post-Development theorists suggest, or can radical transformations within development practice redeem it to become a meaningful and relevant endeavor in the 21st century?

The next two sections of my paper consist of a methodology section and a limitations section. In the methodology section I briefly outline the main ways in which I approached my research at The Valley Trust, both formally and informally. In the limitations section I try to

outline some of the most serious drawbacks in this study, including the all-too-present biases with which I approached my research. While of course I hope they do not invalidate my research, I hope that the reader will keep these limitations seriously in mind as the paper progresses.

In the next section I describe in general terms my practicum at The Valley Trust, giving a broad overview of the various activities I participated in while I was there. Then, in the body of my paper, I present the findings of my research: specifically, the views of staff members on what they view as some of the most important issues facing the organization today. The body is divided into five sections: The Valley trust as a learning organization, the Facilitator Development Programme (FDP) at The Valley Trust, obstacles to transformation at The Valley Trust, The Valley Trust and its guiding statements, and finally the views of clients on changes at The Valley Trust.

Finally, in the conclusion to this paper I attempt to tie what I learned at The Valley Trust back to the larger issues in development practice that I discussed in my literature review. It is in this section that I explore what light, if any, the experience of TVT can shed on ways that development practice in general can be transformed to meet the needs of the coming years.

Background and description of The Valley Trust

General background and description

Dr. Halley Harwin Stott[*] founded The Valley Trust in February, 1953, as a "socio-medical project focused upon the promotion of health" (Stott, 1959). Two other projects accompanied the Trust as components of the overall socio-medical experiment: the Botha's Hill Health Centre, established in 1951, and a tuberculosis settlement founded by Toc H, Natal, in 1952. All three organizations were situated just outside of a Zulu reserve in KwaDedangendlale (The Valley of a Thousand Hills), approximately one hour west of Durban, KZN (Stott, 1959). Dr. Stott had observed that patients form rural areas were frequently admitted to a hospital with illnesses related to poor nutrition. They would spend time in the hospital and apparently be cured, only to be re-admitted after sometime with the same symptoms. Dr. Stott recognized that unless the root causes of ill health were addressed, no significant change in people's health would occur. (*History*, n.d.) Thus, he established The Valley Trust to address "those factors in the aetiology of ill-health that have their origin in the socio-economic life – particularly those factors underlying malnutrition with its many implications" (Stott, 1976).

From the start, a certain set of core values guided the work of The Valley Trust. Among these values, as explicated by Stott, are an avoidance of "all forms of imposition or interference in the lives of the people, particularly their institutions, such as the indigenous 'medicine' men and women" and of "short-term measures of expediency which could stultify human initiative and resourcefulness." The Valley Trust was also committed from the beginning to the encouragement of "the use of available local human initiative and resourcefulness" and of

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[*] See Photograph 1 in Appendix D

"community participation and involvement in the development of the experiment as a whole" (Stott, 1976).

By the late 1950's the activities of The Valley Trust included a demonstration vegetable garden, a food preparation unit to encourage correct cooking practices, a home produce market, a maize-grinding mill, a fish culture project, recreational facilities, and a small library[*] (Stott, 1959; *History*, n.d.). A complementary relationship between the services of the health center and the health promotive work of TVT was maintained, with a focus on good nutrition being central to both organizations. Visits by multidisciplinary teams to the homes of patients were a feature of this period (Bruzas and Jager).

Considerable interest was shown in The Valley Trust at both the national and international level. In 1955, the World Health Organization (WHO) invited TVT, as one of six pilot health projects around the world, to undertake an extensive family health survey. This study, completed in 1959, together with several other anthropological, sociological, epidemiological, and other research studies, provided a baseline of information relating to environmental, social, and health conditions and nutritional practices in the Valley (Friedman, 1993).

Dr. Stott, who had been both the Chairman and Director of the Trust from its inception, retired in 1982 (Friedmanm 1993). With Dr. Stott's retirement, Irwin Friedman was appointed the medical director and Chris Mann the administrative director of the Trust. Whereas Stott's emphasis had been on the health center and the follow-up of patients through a carefully designed referral system, the focus of The Valley trust under the two directors started to change towards a community health paradigm, informed by the emerging concept of basic needs and utilizing a "multiple intervention strategy." Thus, while the individual and the family were still of utmost importance, the role of the community organization, in the form of both community

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[*] See Photographs 2, 3, 4, and 5 in Appendix D

structures and community action, was seen as playing a major role in the promotion of good health (Bruzas and Jager).

The application of the multiple intervention strategy resulted in the creation of more departments to undertake the increasing diversity of work, eventually reaching eleven by 1987. In addition, The Valley Trust began about this time to undertake "labor intensive, sequential site, asset-generating projects" that would generate jobs while also creating community assets such as roads, dams, and a water pipeline. Later, TVT embarked on a "food for work stamp program" which rewarded work with stamps, which could be redeemed for food and other basic needs at local stores (Bruzas and Jager).

In 1991, the partnership between the two directors ended due to growing differences in management style (Friedman, 1993). There were attempts to run the organization through a Board of Managers, but opinions on the effectiveness of this board were mixed and it was decided in 1992 to establish strong leadership again with a single executive director, Keith Wimble. Wimble immediately set out to make the organization more businesslike: workshops were held to review the direction of the organization and managers attended a course to enhance their efficiency (Bruzas and Jager).

However, the really significant changes were initiated in 1993, when it became obvious that political change would soon lead to a democratic South Africa. TVT had built much of its approach around filling the "gaps" which had been created through the neglect of the Nationalist government, and it was clear that the organization would have to rethink fundamentally its role in a fast changing political climate. To aid in this endeavor, TVT invited community representatives to participate in three workshops, held during 1993 and 1994, to explore future options for the work of the organization (Bruzas and Jager). The Valley Trust concluded from

these workshops that its role in providing infrastructure and temporary employment was no longer appropriate and so decided to change its mission to that of becoming "a centre of excellence for training and education in primary health care and sustainable development" (*10 years*, 2004).

The organization interpreted its intention to become a center of excellence for training in the most literal sense. The Valley Trust set about establishing itself as a learning center, offering courses aligned with the requirements of the newly constituted South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). The anticipated rush of clients did not materialize, however, and evidence was scarce that the courses were having much of a positive impact on the community. In light of these facts, a group of staff in what was then the Appropriate Technology Department began to ask questions about the organization's understanding of "development," "training," and "education." Recognizing the dangers inherent in one department heading off on its own journey, Wimble decided in 2001 to create an Organizational Development Department to coordinate a more coherent development of the entire organization (Bruzas and Jager).

Major organizational interventions at The Valley Trust since 2001

Because of the nature of my research at The Valley Trust, quite a bit of reference will be made to these interventions in the body of this paper. As a result, it will be essential for the reader to have some sense of the nature of these interventions.

In 2002, TVT managers initiated a listening process that would involve all TVT personnel in "surfacing paradigms" about development, specifically people-centered development (PCD). The overall purpose was to move from identification of "mental models" through a process of dialogue, to the adoption of a single, organizational paradigm based upon a

shared vision that would inform practice and behavior of all in the organization (for a discussion

of "surfacing paradigms" and "mental models," see Senge, 1990). This process came to be

known in the organization as the "development dialogues" (DD).The output from this process

was a series of documents reporting the dialogue themes and highlighting significant issues and

recommendations. However, TVT personnel viewed the results of the development dialogues

with mixed feelings: on the one hand, there were those who were disappointed that the process

did not result in the changes expected and that it did not lead immediately to a deeper process of

developing the TVT practice approach. On the other hand, there were those, mainly in

management, who held the contrasting view that the process had been "hijacked" by staff gripes

about working conditions (Bruzas and Jager).

The organization took a number of important steps at its 2004 strategic planning

workshops, including a reformulation of its vision and intention. It was at this workshop that

TVT decided to articulate its vision as "communities in which people take responsibility for

improving their own health and quality of life within a democratic society" and its intention

(later to become the purpose) "to create and hold processes that enable people to realise their

own potential" (*Vision & transformation goals*, n.d.). Another outcome of these strategic

planning workshops was the decision to become a "professional organization," which was

understood as one which offers "unique responses to unique situations" (Bruzas and Jager).

Finally, it was decided to create a coordinated process of practice development that would lead to

the practice development process workshops in 2005-2006 (The Valley Trust, 2007).

The focus of the practice development process was to build a conscious, "good" practice

that would affirm what was effective and consistent with the vision and purpose of The Valley

Trust and consciously uses monitoring, evaluation, and reflection for improvement and

knowledge creation. It also became clear through these workshops that, as a professional organization, TVT's primary role was no longer about service delivery or product development, even though these might still provide support for a developmental practice (The Valley Trust, 2007).

Finally, in 2006 TVT initiated an in-house Facilitator Development Programme to develop a group of "highly competent and committed personnel able to work creatively in teams and partnerships" (*vision & transformation Goals*, n.d.). The program ran over three workshops and started with 29 staff members. In 2007, seventeen members of this first group moved on to a second phase of the program. Additionally in 2007, the program was expanded to include staff members who were not able to participate in the first phase. A program was also initiated for those staff members whose core work is not facilitation of developmental processes, but who nevertheless wish to work more "facilitatively," in the context of training, for example (The Valley Trust, 2007).

Literature review

On 20 January, 1949, the so-called "Development Era" began when Harry S. Truman for the first time declared, in his inauguration speech, the Southern hemisphere to be "underdeveloped areas" (Sachs, 1992; see also Escobar, 1995). Thus began a huge, worldwide project to integrate these "underdeveloped areas" with the "developed" (and by extension, "Western") world (and, some would add, with the rapidly expanding global capitalist market). At the forefront of this project were a host of development focused non-governmental organizations (NGOs), grassroots organizations (GROs), community based organizations (CBOs), international aid agencies, and national governments (Edwards and Hulme, 2002). The number of "international NGOs" skyrocketed from a mere 176 in 1909 to 28,900 in 1993 (Commission on Global Governance, 1995). From 1970 to 1980, total flows of financial resources to "less developed countries" burgeoned from around US$17 billion to US$85 billion (Wood, 1986), while from 1980 to 1993 total spending on the part of development NGOs registered in the OECD countries of the industrialized "North" grew from US$2.8 billion to US$5.7 billion (OECD, 1994).

Yet for all this massive investment of financial resources and human capital, the "Development Project" has achieved remarkably little in aggregate terms. To be sure, certain parts of the developing world have done remarkably well during this period (look, for example, to the performance of the so-called Asian Tigers in East Asia), though the contribution of external development instruments of the West to this growth is perhaps arguable. Regardless of the performance of some individual countries during this period, however, the overall global picture of tremendous increases in both poverty and inequality in absolute terms is startling.

Between 1987 and 1993, the number of people with an income of less than US$1 a day increased by almost 100 million to 1.3 billion people, one third of the population of the "developing world." Yet, between 1989 and 1996, the number of billionaires increased from 157 to 447. The value of their combined assets exceeded the combined incomes of half the poorest of the world's poor. Since the early 1980s, more than 100 developing and transition countries have suffered cuts in living standards and failures of growth more prolonged than anything experienced by the industrialized countries during the Great Depression of the 1930s (UNDP, 1997). Thus, for every citizen of the developing world (say, someone in East Asia) who has seen an increase in standards of living since the development project began, many more have actually seen decreases.

This, then, is what Ivan Illich warned against as early as 1971 as the "chronic underdevelopment" of the global South. There are many explanations that could be offered to help understand this glaring (if perhaps not total) failure on the part of the development project. This paper will focus on two main approaches to explaining why "development," as a paradigm, has failed thus far and what this entails for the future of development work. On the one hand, one has the proponents of the "Post-Development" critique. These theorists argue that the very premises that "development" is based upon are fundamentally flawed. Indeed, they argue that development was only ever a tool used on the part of the West to continue its exploitive practices in an era when colonialism and imperialism were no longer politically acceptable. Thus, to "Post-Development" thinkers, the solution is not to reform the development paradigm but to abandon it altogether. On the other hand, there are those progressive forces within the development community itself that, while they agree that there is much that is seriously flawed within both conventional development theory and practice, argue that there are fundamentally

new approaches to development that can succeed where others have failed. A few of the more promising of these new approaches will be elaborated on in more detail later in this paper.

Why have all the various organizations behind development, and development-focused NGOs in particular, failed in so many areas? Jenny Pearce in "Development, NGOs, and civil society: the debate and its future" (2000) argues that the increase in poverty worldwide has been caused by neo-liberal reform policies adopted by many governments and aid agencies. This economic agenda involves liberalizing trade markets, privatizing basic services, and reducing government spending on education and welfare, all of which have taken place around the world and have already been shown to be detrimental to the poor (Pearce, 2000; Kotze, 2004). Development NGOs contribute to this end when they focus attention onto local development projects and away from those institutions that put these anti-poor policies in place (Pearce, 2000; Petras and Veltmeyer, 2001).

In similar vein, Stephen Commins argues in "NGOs: ladles in the global soup kitchen?" that NGOs are no longer seen as offering significant advantages either in community development or in complex emergencies. Instead, they are "useful fig leaves to cover government inaction or indifference to human suffering," both in complex emergencies and in economic restructuring (see also Petras and Veltmeyer, 2001). Dorothea Hilhorst (2003) also warns that development NGOs are increasingly being pushed into adopting a government agenda and becoming "missionaries of the [neo-liberal] era" (p. 7).

These are some of the most important criticisms that arise from within the development paradigm itself. Ultimately, these criticisms do not invalidate the paradigm altogether. Those who advocate the Post-Development critique, however, go much farther. They see the flaws in conventional development practice to be much, much more fundamental. Thus, the impasse of

development does not spring from its supposed weaknesses, but from the core of the theory itself (Booth, 1985). The thoughts of Nabudere, Illich, and George will be briefly discussed here as three examples of the various strands of this critique.

In "Development Theories, Knowledge Production, and Emancipatory Practice," Dani Wadada Nabudere argues that the development paradigm will never be successful in non-Western societies precisely because it is the product of a Western knowledge system. Indeed, development is no more than the "innovatory paternalism of the second colonial occupation" (Low and Lonsdale, 1976). For Nabudere, development theory was born through a system of European knowledge imperialism that mirrored its economic imperialism, in which raw data was collected in and then exported from the colonies, processed in the laboratories or research centers of the mother country, and then re-imported as a finished theory into the colonial "market" for consumption. Furthermore, as a theory that was ultimately produced in Europe (albeit using raw data from the colonies) it was designed to serve European aims, namely the continued extroversion of the natural resources present in the newly autonomous colonies. Crucially, the "knowledge extroversion" that Nabudere describes was dependent on denying the colony's ability to produce its own knowledge (just as the economic extroversion required the colony to lack the means to create its own processed goods)—this was the role of the mother country. Ultimately, then, for the crisis of the developing world to be tackled, these former colonies must "emancipate" themselves from the domination of Western knowledge systems as much as from Western commercial interests and begin once again to produce their own, indigenous knowledge. This process will provide the much-needed alternative to development for Nabudere.

Ivan Illich (1971) argues that, in total contradiction to its stated aims, development is actually a theory of planned poverty. Illich powerfully illustrates that the ostensible goal of

having the developing world "catch up" with the industrialized countries is unreasonable to the point of being criminal- the lifestyle enjoyed by the citizens of the global North would be totally unsustainable if it was shared by the entire world. Thus, development, as a practice of indoctrinating people to believe that the Western lifestyle, rather than their own indigenous lifestyles, is what should be aspired to, actually serves to create a system of permanent poverty, for it would never be possible for all humans to actually enjoy this lifestyle. In the meantime, however, the citizens of the developing world will have abandoned their own, traditional lifestyles and opened themselves totally to the capitalist system, providing a huge new market for the industries of the North. Moreover, as long as this system of planned permanent poverty continues, that market will never disappear.

Susan George (1992), on the other hand, cynically argues that the development project has in fact succeeded, if not in the way perhaps that is proponents had intended. George claims that "development," as it has operated in the past six decades, has actually been a process of the poor developing the rich (i.e. that the developed nations have been the ones who have derived all the economic advantage from the relationship). How is this possible, given that the developed nations have given so much financial aid to the developing world? George points out that the returns developed countries have made off the third world debt crisis have more than compensated for any financial outlays they may have given. In the period between 1982 and 1990, for example, total resource flows to developing countries amounted to US$927 billion, including official development finance, export credits, and private flows. During the same 1982-1990 period, developing countries remitted *in debt service alone* US$1,345 billion (interest and principal) to the creditor countries. These figures give a total balance of US$418 billion in favor of the rich countries, but George adds that to get a truly accurate picture one would have to add

other South-North outflows such as royalties, dividends, repatriated profits, underpaid raw materials, etc. Given that creditor countries gave the loans that gave rise to the "third world debt crisis" in the name of "development," it is easy to see why George would ultimately conclude that development is simply one more way for the rich countries of the world to exploit the poor ones.

Given these powerful critiques that reach to the very core of development, does the paradigm hold any rightful place in the 21st century? Should the world abandon it as these writers suggest, or is there some way to reform (or perhaps transform) it in such a way as to make it relevant and positive in the coming decades? There are a host of new ideas in the world of development NGOs today- the learning organization, participatory monitoring and evaluation, action learning, and so on- that might provide the beginnings of a solution to these deeply entrenched flaws in conventional practice, or not.

When describing an alternative development paradigm that would have a place in the 21st century, the Community Development Resource Association (Kaplan, 1998) is at pains to point out several key aspects. Crucially, at its heart this paradigm is about "facilitating resourcefulness" and not delivering services. The first tenet of this paradigm is that honest development work cannot under any circumstances be done on behalf of third parties (like donors, for instance). The paradigm demands that development interventions flow out of the development processes of those seeking to develop, and not from the intentions (however benign) of a third party. This is not to say that external donors cannot finance development, but that the donors must of necessity be removed from the planning and implementation of the development process itself.

Second, intervention specifications which are predetermined, and which do not respond to accurate and sensitive readings of the particular situation with which a development practitioner is faced, will warp and destroy the development process. And also, because situations change continuously in response to the development intervention (and other factors) responsiveness, flexibility, and mobility are required from the development practitioner. These considerations require that development organizations develop new capacities with regard to reflecting, learning, and managing.

Thirdly, development has no end; the effective development intervention opens things up, rather than closes them down. Equally, development does not begin when practitioners decide to intervene; it had already begun. The concept of the development project, then, with its beginning and end, its externally generated specifications, its notion of predictability and its lack of adaptability and mobility, has little to do with the effective development intervention, let alone with development itself- indeed, it is "the repository of all that is wrong with conventional development practice" (Kaplan, 1998).

Fourth, and because of these other tenets of the paradigm, practitioners who are skilled in the processes of facilitating change are of far more value to the development endeavor than technical experts, advisors, or trainers.

Fifth, it is precisely because of the inevitable unconscious projections and assumptions on the part of development practitioners that they have to pay attention to their own development. This is not a luxury, and it is not an addendum to other capacities; it is a central requirement of the paradigm.

Finally, participation is an end, not simply a means. The whole point of development is to enable people to participate in the governance of their own lives.

This paragraph is clearly a radical departure from conventional development practice, though it still fits within the overall notion of development itself. The CDRA's article touches on several important points that are explored more in the overall literature on development. One of these is practitioner and organizational learning. James Taylor defines a learning organization (a concept first popularized by Peter Senge in 1990) as "the organization which builds and improves its own practice by consciously and continually devising and developing the means to draw learning from its own (and other's) experience." Within this definition, Taylor recognizes four critical elements.

First, a learning organization is not simply one which learns, but one which learns consciously. It introduces a necessary level of conscious intent and commitment to the process of learning. The importance of this point is to note that all organizations, and all the people within them, are learning all the time. They are learning from a variety of sources and in a variety of ways. Very often the learning is taking place at an unconscious level and is therefore not effectively being captured and maximally used to change and improve future practice. The challenge is to become more conscious of how learning already takes place, in order to use and further develop this innate ability.

Second, the learning that takes place within a learning organization must lead to "improved practice." This simply means that the test for whether learning has in fact taken place lies in the extent to which the practice of the organization has actually improved. While knowledge, information and the ability to think critically and analytically can play an important role in the type of learning which results in changed action, knowing or understanding does not by itself guarantee changed practice.

The third aspect of the learning organization highlighted by Taylor's definition is the ongoing nature of learning that is required of the learning organization. In the learning organization the process not only becomes more conscious, but also more continuous. This requires finding an appropriate balance between "reflection, learning and action." Learning builds on itself through improved action, which in turn opens new opportunities for understanding and further learning. Ideally, the process of learning is an ongoing upward spiral through which the implementation of improved practice, when measured against expected outcomes, continually provides opportunity for new learning.

Finally, Taylor's definition highlights "experience" as a source of learning. The learning organization draws on a variety of sources for its learning but places specific emphasis on developing the means and ability to exploit fully its own actions and experience as a primary source of learning.

Mark-Easterby Smith (1997), meanwhile, points out that the literature on learning organizations is "pragmatic, normative, and inspirational" (p. 1). It is pragmatic in that it focuses on how organizations successfully acquire, share, and use knowledge to achieve organizational goals. There is a strong emphasis, echoing Taylor, on creating "knowledge for action," not knowledge for its own sake (Agyris, 1993). Further, the literature recognizes that organizations are part of complex social systems, systems over which it is unlikely they can exert control. Rather than trying to isolate or protect itself from its environment, an organization ought to be closely attuned to it, striving to embrace the opportunities that changing circumstances can offer and, as more recent theorists have urged, "ride the wave" (Duersterberg, 2001; Merron, 1997). Another aspect of the pragmatic orientation is that learning theorists, unlike many of their academic counterparts, have also developed an array of techniques and tools for doing

diagnostics, examining patterns of behavior in organizations, and engaging in "transformative thinking" (Wycoff, 1995).

The approach is normative in the sense that there is a strong set of underlying values that inform practice within a learning organization. These values include commitments to valuing different kinds of knowledge and learning styles, dialogue and exploration of different perspectives and experiences, teamwork and breaking down traditional barriers or blinders within organizations, and fostering leadership potential throughout the organization (Pettit and Roper).

The learning organization literature is inspirational in the sense that it presents models as something of "ideal types," which no organization can realize in full. Individuals as well as organizations are engaged in an ongoing quest for knowledge, their struggle to "unlearn" dysfunctional behaviors is continuous, and because change is constant, they must constantly change (Pettit and Roper, see also Reeler, 2001).

While the model of the learning organization was originally developed for the private sector, Taylor argues that development NGOs differ from other organizations in ways that make it all the more important for them to take their own ability to learn extremely seriously. He states that the primary difference lies in the fundamental role and purpose that the development sector expects itself to fulfill in society. The ultimate societal need that the development sector concerns itself with is the need for social cohesion and integration; it attempts to work against the forces that increasingly marginalize, exclude, and impoverish more and more of its members. Despite their stated good intentions to create and distribute wealth, the economic and state sectors have proven to be ineffectual in reversing these trends. The development sector is

charged with the primary responsibility for learning about these destructive forces and seeking ways of reversing them.

All this is not to suggest, however, that the learning organization will necessarily prove to be the panacea to solve all of development's ills. David Kelleher et al. criticize the learning organization in development practice as a "borrowed toolbox," while Vijay Padaki suggests that the theoretical model of the "learning organization" is simply the latest management fad. Perhaps the learning organization will prove as transitory as other "solutions" to the development impasse (like Basic Needs). Only time will tell for certain.

So, should the world abandon "development" altogether, as the proponents of the Post-Development critique advocate, or can radical departures from conventional development practice save it as a relevant paradigm in the contemporary world? It would seem that radically new approaches, such as the learning organization, could offer a response to the otherwise devastating Post-Development critiques if they could be implemented properly. By its very nature a learning organization could, through critical reflection, become aware of the deficiencies in its practice and adapt to correct those deficiencies. Similarly, by facilitating resourcefulness and change in its clients, rather than trying to meet their basic needs, deliver services to them, or otherwise impose development from without, a learning organization could avoid some of the pitfalls described by Nabudere and Illich. What is crucial here is that, as the CDRA advocates, the organization only facilitate those development processes that the clients were already undergoing and which they have chosen for themselves. Where there is not any development already in place or where the people do not wish to develop along the lines that a NGO could assist with then no intervention should be made. Similarly, while George may be right that development as it currently stands is serving primarily to enrich the industrialized countries at

the expense of the developing ones, institutional reforms such as debt forgiveness and increased aid could be made so as to bring development's effects in practice in line with its stated aims. Ultimately, however, whether or not these transformations can, in their totality, overcome the very potent objections of the Post-Development critique is a question I humbly submit to the estimation of my reader.

Methodology

To gather information at The Valley Trust, I relied upon a combination of participant observation, informal interactions with various staff members, review of the published material of The Valley Trust, and a number of formal interviews and focus groups, with an emphasis on the latter. I participated in several field excursions, including a workshop done with a school governing body (SGB) at a primary school in Pholela, near Bulwer, and a women's rights awareness meeting with community members at another school in KwaXimba. And of course, living and working at The Valley Trust for nearly four weeks I had myriad conversations with TVT staff members over lunch, at break during teatime, on long drives out to field locations in the Drakensberg, etc. These interactions provided me with a very strong background and context for my work at The Valley Trust and they allowed me to build up a strong rapport with many of the staff members. However, it was through the process of formal interviews and focus groups that I gained most of the information most directly related to my research.

While I have included a sample list of interview questions in my appendices, it must be emphasized that I conducted these interviews and focus groups in an extremely open-ended manner and the course that a given interview took was often very much dependent on the views and interests of the individual participant. It must not be assumed, therefore, that I asked questions in the order listed, that I asked all questions at all interviews, etc. However, some general statements can be made about the format of the interviews. It was important to me that the interviews take place where my interviewee felt comfortable, so the interviews were often held in the interviewee's office, though occasionally they took place in the library or canteen. Obviously, the interviews all took place during the weekday, and I generally had to fit them around staff members' relatively busy schedules. I also felt that is was essential to receive a

variety of views from within the organization, so I attempted to interview a wide spectrum of staff at the Valley Trust. Accordingly, I spoke with the executive director, the managers of each of the departments except one, and a large number of staff members from a number of different parts of the organization. In total, I was able to conduct formal interviews and focus groups with 21 staff members from the organization, out of a total staff of about 90. Of course, I was able to talk with many more staff members through informal conversations and interactions during my four weeks there.

It must be noted that my information-gathering approach was not without its flaws, however. Many staff members were enthusiastic about the opportunity to express their views and opened up wholeheartedly to the interview process (some even admitting that they could talk more freely there than they ever could with their managers). However, I also felt that there were some staff members who were reluctant to open up so quickly to an outsider in the relatively structured format of an interview. I should also point out that despite my best attempts to obtain a wide variety of views from staff at The Valley Trust; I often had to accept what staff members told me at face value. I did not have much ability to verify their statements (especially since so much of what I was asking for was opinion-oriented rather than strictly factual). Nevertheless, most staff members were more than happy to give me their views on the ways in which the changes TVT has undergone in the past six years have impacted their work as development practitioners, and I found the amount and quality of the information they provided me to be tremendously useful.

Limitations of the study

The extent to which an outsider like myself with no prior experience with The Valley Trust can spend four short weeks researching TVT and then claim to understand complex change processes in the organization that have been in the making for many years and which have been contentious in their own ways is obviously very limited. There are many staff members at The Valley Trust who have been grappling with these issues for a long time, and while I hope that this paper will be of some use to them, I know that any research I have done will ultimately pale in comparison with their own work in the organization.

I should also point out that I did not enter into my research without biases of my own. While my primary purpose was to find out whether or not a facilitative paradigm of development actually worked well in practice, the idea had fascinated me from the outset, and it is probably true that I wanted it to succeed and expected that it would have been a positive move for the organization. Given that the history of this paradigm shift in the organization has been largely but not entirely without contention, it is possible that my analysis is colored in some ways that may not do full justice to all the views represented at The Valley Trust. I have striven my hardest to avoid all such biases in this paper, but I feel obliged to recognize and acknowledge the possibility of their existence nonetheless.

Practicum with The Valley Trust

Though my primary work at the Valley Trust consisted of holding a number of formal interviews and focus groups with staff members, I also endeavored to participate in as many of the day-to-day activities of the organization as I could in order to gain a better sense of TVT's work. I was able to observe a wide variety of activities, ranging from work with clients in the field to workshops held for TVT staff members to an all-staff meeting. I will give brief discussions of each of these activities here.

On my first Friday at The Valley Trust, I participated in a workshop for TVT staff members entitled "Facilitating Community Based Food and Nutritional Security Planning[*]." The workshop was led by a Ph.D. student from Kenya who has been doing research with TVT, Jesse Okecth. Through here presentation, which lasted the entire day, Jesse modeled the way in which TVT staff members could facilitate greater awareness on the part of community members about how to achieve good nutrition. Jesse made the workshop very interactive: we started with a coin game in which she gave each of us a coin and each of us described in turn what our understanding of nutrition was like in the year the coin was minted. Later, some of the members of our group participated in a role-play, and overall the entire workshop tended to be focused upon the discussions of participants, with Jesse adding in ideas to start us talking. As the workshop progressed, Jesse took us through the 12 points of the South African Food Based Dietary Guidelines and the workshop ended with the question "where do we go from here?"

The next week I sat in on an abstinence workshop, open to everyone in the organization but attended mostly by members of the Community Based Health Department. It was a

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[*] See Appendix C for outline and role-play of the workshop

continuation of an earlier workshop that had been held and Clive Bruzas began it with a short

recap of what had already been discussed. After Clive gave his brief introduction, he turned the

workshop over to the group. Initially, people would make comments followed by long periods of

silence, but as the conversation gradually got under way people started to participate more. Staff

members asked a lot of questions and gave a lot views on how they could, as facilitators,

effectively promote abstinence in the community. After we returned from a tea break, however,

the group explored more of the positive side of sex, watching the documentary *Shag*, which

consisted of a number of interviews with women about their views on sex. The documentary

provoked some interesting discussion on the part of the group, with several staff members

speaking admiringly of the women in the interviews and mentioning that they themselves would

never be able to speak that openly about sex.

The next day I traveled with three staff members, Glen, Khantsho, and Mdu to facilitate a

workshop with a School Governing Body in Pholela, near Bulwer, as part of the Integrated

School Community Development Programme[*]. It was quite a distance away and we spent a little

over two hours driving just to get there. The workshop was held in a classroom at a local primary

school. Once there, Mdu led most of the facilitation in isiZulu with the SGB members. The

workshop tended to alternate between Mdu talking for awhile, referring to various flipcharts as

he did so, and the SGB members breaking off into discussion. As the workshop was the last in a

series, there was quite a bit of reflection on the process as a whole and how the SGB members

felt it had affected them. In general, their views were very positive, and they mentioned many

times how empowered they felt after TVT's intervention.

The next week I traveled with TVT staff members Pinky and Xoli to another primary

school, this time in KwaXimba. At the school, we participated in a women's and children's

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[*] See Photograph 6 in Appendix D

rights awareness meeting with the community. The meeting was extremely well attended and more chairs had to be brought into our packed classroom throughout the meeting. Besides us from The Valley Trust, there were speakers from several other NGOs and government departments. Once again, however, all the speeches were in isiZulu so I was not able to understand some of what was being said. It was obvious however that the speeches drew a lot of enthusiasm from the audience members (though, in the case of Pinky's assertion that physical discipline should not be used against children, this was manifested as strong disagreement) and there would be a lot of laughter or calls of agreement as the meeting progressed.

The rest of that week, the senior staff members participated in a series of strategic planning workshops led by an outside facilitator, and the next Friday an all-staff meeting was called to share what had been decided at the strategic planning. As it turned out, some radical changes for the organization were being proposed. Part of the reorganization would include an elimination of all departments within the organization, and the creation of three manager positions directly accountable to the executive director. A Transition Team consisting of the executive director and the managers of the organizational development and conference and leadership centre departments, respectively, was to oversee these changes, all of which were to take place before the beginning of the next fiscal year in April. After Tuki, TVT's executive director, explained the changes in broad form, we split into three groups for discussion: the first consisted of the Board, the executive director, and mangers; the second with all other staff who had attended the strategic planning workshops; and the third (and largest group) consisting of all other staff members. Even though I did not attend the strategic planning workshops myself, I sat in with the second group. Despite the fact that they had attended the workshops, the members of this group seemed to be very concerned that they still had many unanswered questions about the

process and the worry that reorganization would lead to staff retrenchments. In my follow-up conversations with staff members after the staff meeting, these views tended to be very common: staff generally tended to feel that these changes were very positive and necessary for the organization, but they also had deep concerns, fueled party by a lack of information and centering mainly around the possibility of retrenchments.

That Sunday I participated in my last field activity with TVT personnel. TVT had organized a soccer tournament in a nearby community to be accompanied by a voluntary HIV/AIDS counseling and testing (VCT) tent. TVT also provided lunch and refreshments throughout the day. The games were supposed to begin at 8:30, but the players were slow to arrive and the event did not really get under way until around noon. A lot of community members showed up and the soccer was good, but when I talked to staff members afterwards they mentioned that they were not sure how many people had actually taken advantage of the voluntary counseling and testing. One staff member felt that in order for an activity like this to be effective, it would have to be repeated several times in a row, but there did not seem to be any plans to hold another event like this one in the near future.

On the last Wednesday that I was at The Valley Trust, I attended a meeting for staff members who had attended the 2006 FDP workshops to present the portfolios they had prepared over the course of the past year about their own personal development as practitioners. These portfolios were due the following Friday, on December 14. However, many of the staff members at the meeting had not started their portfolios or else were at a very early stage in the process. Accordingly, Clive and Glen, who had already presented their portfolios at an earlier meeting, presented theirs again and there was some discussion about the overall process before the group

broke before lunch. When the meeting broke, it was not exactly clear if there had been a

resolution on what would happen to those portfolios that were not turned in the following Friday.

Combined, participating in these activities gave me a very good first-hand overview of

the work that The Valley trust does. While these participant observations were by no means my

primary source of information in my work at TVT, they provided a very good context with

which to ground my research.

Body of paper

The Valley Trust as a learning organization

Before attempting to analyze the effectiveness of certain theoretical models based on the experience of The Valley Trust, it will be useful to discuss how well TVT actually fits those models. As noted in the literature review, a lot has been made in recent years of the learning organization, so how well does the experience of TVT correspond with this model? For the purposes of the discussion here, I will use Taylor's definition of the learning organization as "the organization which builds and improves its own practice by consciously and continually devising and developing the means to draw learning from its own (and other's) experience." Does this definition apply to TVT?

First, does The Valley Trust learn from experience at a conscious level? From what I learned at TVT, I would say that most if not all of the learning that takes place at the organization is very much on a conscious level. While the Organizational Development (OD) Department was established in 2001 to "coordinate a more coherent development of the whole organization" (Bruzas and Jager), it seems as if its primary role in the organization since then has been to pull all the threads of learning in the various departments together and to articulate them on a conscious level. One of my respondents remarked that "*OD was created...to make sure that everyone is clear on what they're doing*" (Themba[*], personal communication, November 19, 2007), i.e. to make sure that the learning that is going on is shared with the entire organization. If I may be allowed to draw a Freudian psychoanalytic analogy, then, the OD department would function as TVT's conscious "ego" to the rest of the organization's unconscious "id." This is also

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[*] The names of twenty of the staff members have been changed to protect their anonymity.

to say that both elements are equally vital to the healthy functioning of the organization and its ability to learn consciously from its experiences.

Next, does the learning that takes place within TVT lead to improved practice? The answer to this would probably have to be "yes, but not necessarily immediately." All of the major interventions to facilitate learning in the organization within the past six years (the Development Dialogues, the Facilitator Development Programme, etc.) have ultimately had as their aim the development and improvement of practice (sometimes quite literally, as with the "practice development process"). However, many of my respondents would talk about "*the...problems of implementing*" (Marie, personal communication, November 20, 2007) and the large gap between theory and practice. One respondent noted that the FDP workshops had "touched me and impressed me as an individual" but that the she did not think the process "*has come through in the way that I work with the community*" (Bikwaphi, personal communication, November 16, 2007). However, Clive Bruzas, manager of the OD department, expressed the view that undergoing change on a purely individual level, even if it does not lead immediately to a change in practice, is a necessary and positive first step towards eventually consciously improving practice. Nevertheless, it seems clear that whatever the short-term goals, the objective of all these processes is ultimately to facilitate a growth in staff members as practitioners and therefore their work in the community.

How about the continuity of learning- is the process of learning at TVT ongoing and continuous? Once again, the answer will probably have to be yes. There has been a major process of organizational learning and development almost every year since the OD department was established (the development dialogues in 2002, the practice development process in 2005, the FDP workshops in 2006 and 2007) and it appears as if this process of development will be

continuing well into the future. In the strategic planning workshops that took place on November 20-23 of this year (2007), the organization made the decision to make some radical changes to its structure, including the elimination of departments. This change seemed to be the process of "integration," advocated for by Lievegoed (1973) and Schaefer (1986) in the literature and awaited by many in the organization for so long, and it seemed to signal that the organization had accepted the spirit behind Margaret Wheatley's (1999) claim that "change and constant creation [are] ways of sustaining order and capacity."

And experience? - Does the organization place emphasis on its own experiences as a primary source of learning? True, there is a strain of thought in the organization that emphasizes reading of external sources as a crucial aspect of reflection and learning. Nevertheless, even there external readings seem to be secondary, with experience still serving as the primary driver of learning. This seems to be one of the reasons that report writing and documentation seem to be so important in the organization, to provide a record of experiences in the field that can be drawn on as sources of learning.

The above would seem to suggest, then, that TVT fits well with the four main elements of Taylor's definition of a learning organization. What about the rest of the literature on learning organizations? In terms of the pragmatic orientation of this literature, TVT does seem able and willing to adapt to its environment and embrace the opportunities that changing circumstances can offer. TVT's shift from service and resource delivery to developmental facilitation in response to the 1994 change in the political dispensation could be taken as evidence of this, and indeed one of my respondents noted that "*[developmental facilitation] is what is required by the environment in which we work*" (Chloe, personal communication, November 12, 2007). Similarly, there seems to be a great interest in examining patterns of behavior and engaging

within the organization with, for instance, the development dialogues or even my own research project.

How well The Valley Trust has aligned itself with the normative values expressed in the learning organization literature is perhaps less clear. Certainly, there seem to be genuine commitments on the part of the organization to dialogue, teamwork, etc. In some ways, however, the organizational transformations towards developmental facilitation itself have, perhaps, ironically left some in the organization who are not so quick to change their paradigms feeling "*that what [they]'re doing is not being valued*," that their "*work has been looked at as perhaps less worthy than others*" and excluded from "*the predominant thinking*" (Chloe and Megan, personal communications, November 12 and 26, 2007). Perhaps the organization could use more of the "exploration of different perspectives and experiences" argued for by Jethro Pettit and Laura Roper. In similar vein, but from a very different angle, there are many in the organization who would have expressed views that the divide between management and staff are too great and that more could be done to "foster leadership potential throughout the organization."

Finally, the organization's move in the past six years towards developmental facilitation and away from service and resource delivery paradigms that it felt were outmoded is a clear example of what Doug Reeler would call the "unlearning" of dysfunctional behaviors and perhaps illustrates the organization's ability to continuously adapt to changing circumstances.

I think that the above points make it clear that while The Valley Trust may not perfectly align with the literature on learning organizations in all of its precise details, by and large TVT serves as a very good example of the model. So, then, how well has this model done in practice? Has The Valley Trust been able to translate all these learning processes into significantly improved practice? The next section will attempt to delve deeper into how well the Facilitator

Development Programme, as perhaps the most important attempt on the part of TVT to develop learning into practice, has fared these past two years.

The Facilitator Development Programme at The Valley Trust

Interestingly, perceptions among staff members at The Valley Trust about the number of their colleagues who have gone through the process vary greatly. The estimates generally ranged from "*50%, I might be over-optimistic*" (Emily, personal communication, November 12, 2007) to nearly everyone in the organization. Most agreed that it was about half, however. There was also a common belief that the ideas presented in the workshops have spread quite effectively throughout the organization, even to those who had not been able to attend. Thus, it is probably fair to assume that all non-office staff members have at least had exposure to the ideas presented in the Facilitator Development Programme, even if not all might agree with those ideas.

So what have been the general views of staff members on the Facilitator Development Programme? It should be noted here that virtually every one of the staff members I interviewed had attended at least a few of the workshops, so the views presented here should be taken only as representative of that group within the organization. On the whole, I would say that the responses I received from staff members about the FDP were overwhelmingly positive: "*I enjoyed FDP*" (Themba, personal communication, November 19, 2007), "*it was fascinating*" (Emily, personal communication, November 12, 2007) "*I think we all came away with a richness we hadn't had before*" (Megan, personal communication, November 26, 2007), "*it was all perfect, the way they conducted FDP*" (Bhekabantu, personal communication, November 26, 2007). This is not to say that all respondents felt that all aspects of the program were equally well executed. Some respondents mentioned that they felt the process "*ended up getting confused*" (Thembekile,

personal communication, November 28, 2007) by the last workshop, others felt that the process did not really start to get going until the last workshop, yet others felt that the role-plays could have been done better, etc. Nevertheless, staff members tended to have very positive views about the process as a totality.

Yet, despite how much they seem to have enjoyed the process, staff members rarely feel that their work has changed much in practice. One staff member noted that "*FDP is not like a machine you go through and out comes a perfect facilitator*" (Marie, personal communication, November 20, 2007) while another admitted, "*it's quite difficult to change things overnight*" (Bikwaphi, personal communication, November 16, 2007). Yet another staff member explained that, when recently she was looking over some proposals for new projects she realized "*the proposals were [still] service-proposals*" (Chloe, personal communication, November 12, 2007)! There were many explanations given for this gap between theory and practice. One of the most common sentiments was that it is nearly impossible, once a program is already in place and a relationship with clients has been established, to come in and radically change the nature of the work. This view was summed up by the statement of one staff member that "*the main concern is, we already have our ways of doing things...which...don't fit to what the organization is actually trying to do [i.e. developmental facilitation]*" (Bhekisisa, personal communication, November 28, 2007). Another major obstacle to transformation of practice that many staff members remarked about and that will be expanded upon in the next section is TVT's relationship with its donors. Despite these difficulties, however, there is a fairly common consensus among staff members that as old programs are completed and new ones are initiated (and providing that TVT can establish the right relationship with its donors) that the ideas behind the Facilitator Development Programme will gradually filter into the work of the organization.

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This, then, are the overviews of staff members on the success of the Facilitator

Development Programme thus far. While the great majority of staff members have been very

pleased with the program itself, there are recurring doubts as to how well that program has

influenced practice. One of the most important obstacles to this transformation is TVT's

preexisting relationships with its clients, but there is confidence that this problem will slowly

evaporate as TVT begins to work with new clients. There are other, more institutional, obstacles

to transformation that staff members have alluded to, however, and it is these that will be

elaborated on in more detail in the next section.

Obstacles to transformation at The Valley Trust

Three major obstacles to a transformation into a developmental and facilitative practice at

TVT really stood out in my conversations with staff members. These obstacles include serious

difficulties in TVT's relationship with donors, continuing resistance to the facilitative paradigm

within the organization itself, and a lack of communication with the Board of The Valley Trust.

Of these three obstacles to transformation, TVT's relationship with its donors

undoubtedly stood out as the greatest. In my interviews, many staff members repeated the

sentiment that TVT is "*donor-driven*" (Chloe, Bikwaphi, and Bhekisisa, personal

communications, November 12, 16, and 28, 2007). And donors do not always understand what

TVT views its core work as being. As of the time of writing, TVT was undergoing a severe

financial crisis, with departments being forced to initiate what were termed "poverty budgets,"

program activities being cancelled, and common worries about staff retrenchments. Clearly, TVT

does not have a lot of financial leeway with which to negotiate with its donors. Staff, meanwhile,

are concerned that "*The Valley Trust as it stands now...we are relying on funders and donors,*

and donors I think are disappearing fast" (Marie, personal communication, November 20, 2007)

and "*they worry that their work isn't participatory enough, isn't interactive enough, that they're*

driven by donor-targets" (Emily, personal communication, November 12, 2007). There is a

sentiment that donors will be reluctant to fund programs whose results are not easily quantifiable.

Not all staff members view this as a totally negative state of affairs, however. One of the staff

members I interviewed emphasized that negotiating a relationship with donors is "*actually going*

to [positively] test the organization big time" because it will challenge TVT's ability to "*stand*

our ground" and stay committed to the organization's core values. This same respondent went on

to say, "*in most cases we've been donor-driven because we've...been afraid of talking to our*

donors" (Bhekisisa, personal communication, November 28, 2007). Other staff members agreed,

stressing TVT's need to find the right donors and to negotiate a positive relationship with them,

in which TVT would be allowed the freedom to pursue its core work. There is great frustration,

however, that even when donors give positive feedback, like "*we value your confidence in your*

approach" (Lindiwe, personal communication, November 27, 2007), they still will look

elsewhere to disburse their funds. Clearly, this is an area where TVT needs to put a lot of thought.

Another obstacle to transformation at The Valley Trust identified by many staff members

is the small but vocal minority within the organization that actively resists moves from a service-

delivery paradigm to a facilitation paradigm. These staff members express views like "*the*

dividing line between service [delivery] and unique response becomes very blurred. So from that

point of view...you can see it both ways" (Marie, personal communication, November 20, 2007),

that "*there are some instances where we really need to provide resources, even though we need*

to work in a developmental way" (Bhekisisa, personal communication, November 28, 2007), and

that perhaps process like the FDP are just a lot of "*hot air*" (Emily, personal communication,

November 12, 2007). Explanations for this resistance vary, but in general there is a consensus that those in the organization whose work remains primarily service- and product-oriented often feel that what they are doing is not being valued and is viewed as less worthy than other roles in the organization. It is very understandable why people in these situations would feel threatened by the changes that the organization is undergoing. Staff members whom I interviewed emphasized that constructive engagement with those who are unhappy with the new paradigm "must happen" and that "*we have to put everything we've got into moving that [constructive engagement] forward*" (Chloe, personal communication, November 12, 2007). There is also a hope among some that as more people are able to attend the FDP workshops and as greater understanding of their content spreads in the organization, this unhappiness will dissipate. Regardless, however, it is clear that this is a very serious issue in the organization that needs to be addressed.

Finally, there is the issue of whether or not the Board of The Valley Trust really understands the new approaches in the organization and its core work. Some staff members do not "*think the Board is on the same page*" as the organization or "*even know us*" (Bikwaphi, personal communication, November 16, 2007) and they worry that "*there is a certain level...on the Board that does not understand the work that we do*" (Chloe, personal communication, November 12, 2007). When asked about the issue, however, executive director of the organization Tuki Maseatile stated clearly that, while he could not comment on the state of the Board prior to his appointment in October 2006, he had made sure during his time at TVT to place the Board on the same page with the rest of the organization. He also commented while some individual board members were not able to attend all meetings and as a result might have a patchy understanding of recent developments on the organization, in his view there was genuine

commitment on the part of the Board as a whole to active engagement with the organization (personal communication, December 3, 2007). Thus, while if it is the perceptions of staff members or the understanding of the Board itself, or perhaps more likely, both, that need to be changed, this seems to be another important issue for the organization to address in order to achieve positive transformation.

These then, are three of the obstacles most commonly perceived by staff as preventing the positive transformation of TVT's development practice. Despite these obstacles, however, has The Valley Trust been largely able to live up to its guiding statements? Staff members occasionally complain about the fact that it takes an entire printed page to articulate all of TVT's guiding statements, and it is by no means my intention to go through all of them here. Instead, I would like to draw attention to two particular values, namely, being a "proponent of people-centred development" and reflection (a value implied by TVT's commitment to "[enhancing] effectiveness by working as a learning organisation"), that staff members often express concerns about (*Strategic Priorities*, n.d.).

The Valley Trust and its guiding statements

While staff members generally did not voice concerns about the majority of the statements that guide TVT's work, there were two particular areas (people-centered development and reflection) where respondents often felt that a lot of improvement was needed. This section will briefly touch on each.

One of the things that became clear through the process of development dialogues in 2002 and 2003 was that for many staff members, a people centered practice required commitments to "people-centeredness" within the organization as much as it did out in the

community. As one staff member put it, "*I don't understand how you can do one thing out in the field, or claim to do something out in the field, and do something else in here!*" (Emily, personal communication, November 12, 2007). What became equally clear through this process was that many staff members felt that TVT was most definitely *not* people-centered within the organization, which led others in the organization to feel that the DD process had been "hijacked" by staff gripes about working conditions. It should be noted here that, even among staff members who had voiced a lot of concern in the Development Dialogues, there is a strong consensus that there has been quite a bit of improvement (even if that improvement was quite belated) in the organization since then. However, concern remains, from people on both sides of the issue. Many tend to feel that "*there is a gap, a serious gap between what they call senior staff and other staff members*" (Emily, personal communication, November 12, 2007) and that "*they [the managers] are living in their own world. And the staff, we're living in our own world*" (Bikwaphi, personal communication, November 16, 2007). The concerns of staff members centered almost exclusively around the perceived "*lack of transparency*" (Emily, personal communication, November 12, 2007) on the part of management and the fact that "*we don't know what's happening in managers' meetings*" (Bikwaphi, personal communication, November 16, 2007). For their part, managers spoke of the lack of forthrightness on the part of their staff in voicing genuine concerns. It is interesting to note, however, that while frustration with management as a whole was not an uncommon view among staff members, almost none expressed dissatisfaction with their own individual manager, suggesting that their concerns were more structural than personal. The one unifying theme in all of these concerns is that they related to a deficiency in communication, and there was awareness among some that this deficiency came from both ends. One staff member who felt strongly about management's lack of

transparency and the "*need [on the part of managers] to open [themselves] up to being criticized*" also admitted that "*we [staff members] need to...learn to be honest*" with concerns about management (Bikwaphi, personal communication, November 16, 2007). One manager admitted that until these "*environmental*" issues relating to people-centeredness are resolved within the organization, staff members will not be able to approach their work in the community with "*clear minds*" (Zenzele, personal communication, November 28, 2007).

The other value on the part of TVT that many staff members felt was jeopardized was the value placed on reflection as tool for learning and for growing one's capacity as a development practitioner. Taylor stresses that a learning organization must find an appropriate balance between "reflection, learning, and action" but almost no staff members felt that The Valley Trust had achieved such a balance. Instead, there was an almost universal consensus (with one or two exceptions) that "reflection" is badly underemphasized at TVT. One respondent worried that "*there's always a tendency to just rush out and do*" and that "*often things are not well thought-out*" (Emily, personal communication, November 12, 2007) while another admitted, "*I don't think we have developed proper reflection functions*" (Bikwaphi, personal communication, November 16, 2007). Yet another staff member said that reflection was hard because "*you don't get time to sit down and write*" (Tholakele, personal communication, November 22, 2007). While some staff members felt that they were not able to reflect because they were overworked and had no time, many readily admitted that acting out in the field is easier than sitting down and reflecting, and that that was the real cause of the undervaluation of reflection in the organization. Almost all thought that this was a serious problem that negatively influenced their capacity as development practitioners, however.

These views suggest that while TVT has made very great strides in terms of its development as an organization, the organization could still do more perhaps to bring its practice fully in line with the guiding statements it has articulated for itself. However, it would seem as if the most important test for the success of any changes within a development focused organization would be the positive impact those changes have had on the clients whom the organization is ostensibly helping. So, what are the views of clients and local community members on the transformations TVT has undergone? Do they view these transformations as largely positive, or negative? While interviewing clients themselves was unfortunately not feasible in this project, I did find that staff members themselves tend to have quite a strong sense of how their work is viewed in the community.

Views of clients on changes at The Valley Trust

According to staff members, the clients and community members with which TVT works have not always met the shifts on the part of the organization away from service and resource delivery and towards developmental facilitation with the most positive attitude. This is a bit paradoxical and more than a little bit troubling, given that "developmental facilitation" is supposed to be inherently participative and consultative, and that, furthermore, it is fundamentally about facilitating clients' own development processes and empowering them to reach their own potential. How could any development interventions that really live up to these aims be met with negative attitudes on the part of clients?

One explanation often given by staff members to explain this paradox is the view that in its prior work as a service- and product-delivery organization, TVT had built up a dependency on the part of community members. Staff members explain that in the past "*the people from The*

Valley trust [would]...come, build a road, build whatever, give some people some stamps" or else

deliver "*like those Styrofoam boxes to keep the food warm*," and that these approaches on the

part of "*TVT [have] created a dependency*" (Themba and Marie, personal communications,

November 19 and 20, 2007). Because of these approaches in the past, staff members feel, "*the*

comments from them [clients] sometimes are to complain" - "*oh, TVT is useless*" because "*there*

is no stipend any more" and TVT is "*not mentioning money*" (Themba, personal communication,

November 19, 2007). In the words of another staff member, "*people, they like...free things...some*

of them, are not happy because they are not getting things" (Bhekabantu, personal

communication, November 26, 2007).

On the other hand, staff members feel that there are many other clients who have reacted

very positively to the developmental facilitation that TVT provides. Respondents felt that this

was particularly the case with those clients who did not have a preexisting relationship with TVT

and so had not built up a dependency on the organization's services. One staff members felt that

clients sometimes expressed views like "*you know I'm rich today because TVT has shown me the*

way" (Themba, personal communication, November 19, 2007). This perception was well borne

out in my observations of TVT's field work, especially my field visit to meet with the school

governing body in Pholela. This field visit, the last in a series of workshops that TVT had been

participating in with this particular SGB, was the most obviously facilitative of the field work I

observed. The SGB members gave a lot of positive feedback in their discussions, often noting

how far they had come and how much more empowered they felt to deal with the very serious

issues facing their schools. These comments tended to be both general and specific (for instance,

one member of the SGB mentioned how TVT had helped her realize that just getting angry at

educators, in this case, for refusing to abandon corporal punishment as a means of disciplining learners, was not a productive approach and that she must find better ways to engage with them).

Clearly, there are still mixed views on the part of clients and the community at large about TVT's new facilitative emphasis. While some feel very empowered by TVT's work, there are other who seem to wish that TVT would just go back to its old ways of doing things. Perhaps this is still an issue that greater engagement and consultation with clients can solve. While TVT has clearly decided what its role in the community should be, more discussion and dialogue with community members could convince them to see the value of this approach, even if they still have reservations.

Conclusions

So, what, if anything, can the experience of TVT tell us about "the learning organization in a post-development era? In the body of this paper I have laid out many of the most important themes that run through the beliefs and opinions of staff members at The Valley Trust, particularly about their own work as development practitioners. What I would now like to do is to relate these themes back to some of the major issues and controversies in development work that were conveyed in the literature review. Particularly I would like to return to the question of whether the experience of The Valley Trust provides an example of a meaningful and relevant development practice in the 21st century, or if instead the work of TVT is victim to the same fundamental flaws that Post-Development thinkers believe invalidate the rest of the development enterprise.

As I have argued earlier in this paper, The Valley Trust as it operates today fits very well with certain theoretical models that are much in vogue in development theory these days, particularly Senge and others' learning organization model and the concept of "development facilitation." Thus, TVT should provide a good litmus test for how well these generalized theoretical constructs actually function when they are applied to practice in the field. If, indeed, these are paradigm shifts that can redeem "development," then they should have been successful when implemented by TVT.

I have tried to relate as truthfully as possible the views of individual TVT staff members on the success or otherwise of the transformations that their organization has undergone. Obviously, the views of staff members are not the be all and end all, and there are many other actors (clients, donors, the government, other NGOs) who might give a very different picture

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about the success of these interventions. Nevertheless, interviewing staff members seemed the logical place to start and in the absence of conflicting information their views should be taken as a moderately reliable indicator of the changes hat the organization has undergone.

As I have also argued in this paper, the views of staff members about how positive the transformations of the organization have been are largely mixed. However, where they do have concerns, these concerns seem generally to suggest that TVT is still very much in the process of transformation and that "completing" this transition (or at least the first stage of it) successfully will resolve most of the concerns. By contrast, very few (if any) staff members I interviewed had serious reservations about the process of transformation itself or its underlying motivations.

Of course, many staff members felt that there are some among their colleagues who still have doubts about the whole notion of "developmental facilitation" and the motivations behind it. Unfortunately, because I was primarily interviewing those who had attended the FDP workshops, I was not able to hear the views of this group directly. Nevertheless, the fact that some might still be concerned about the direction the organization is taking should be kept in mind, and it would probably not be fair to assume that the views of the staff members I interviewed are completely representative of the views of the staff as a whole.

So we return to our original question: have these transformations been positive and successful or not? If one is to count the views of the majority of staff members at TVT, then I think the answer would clearly have to be yes, the transformations have been successful. Obviously these transformations are not yet completed and a tremendous amount of work remains to be done, but there is very little doubt on the part of the majority that these shifts to become focused on "developmental facilitation" will have very positive impacts on TVT's work. And, as I have also argued earlier in this paper, this perception has been largely borne out by my

own observations of the field work of The Valley Trust, the dependency-generating results of its past delivery of services notwithstanding.

What, then, can this success tell us about development practice as a whole? One could interpret the stunning failures of the development project to date to be the result of a focus on alleviating the symptoms of poverty and a systematic inability to address its root causes. Thus, conventional development practice has generally failed to eradicate these root causes or else has exacerbated them (through, for example, the creation of dependencies, absolving governments of their basic obligations, or even shouldering developing nations with whole new problems in the form of loans). It has viewed the poor as objects to whom development must be given rather than subjects in their own development processes, and has thus totally missed the mark in terms helping them in ways that would actually be useful.

From its very inception under Stott The Valley Trust has sought to deal with these fundamental root causes of poverty and ill-health. The Trust has experimented with a number of different approaches in this endeavor, some of which have been more successful than others, but dealing with root, systemic causes has always been its guiding vision. Part of the reason that TVT has been able to survive so long and to do as well as it has has been its ability to adapt to radically changing circumstances, political and otherwise, and change its work to meet the needs of the new environment. Looking forward, the organization's stated commitment to further transformations as a learning organization gives the hope that it will be able to continue its adaptations, constantly updating its work to meet new needs.

Even more than this, TVT's emphasis on "developmental facilitation" holds great promise in the world of development. Post-Development thinkers have powerfully illustrated that not only has "development" imposed from without has never succeeded on a large scale in

meeting its stated aims in the past, it never can succeed. This is because this model of development fundamentally denies its objects an active role in their own development, disempowering and demoralizing them in the process. What the paradigm of developmental facilitation realizes is that people must take responsibility for developing themselves: where they seek help in this process a practitioner can help facilitate them but where they do not it is both futile and potentially extremely damaging to take responsibility for the process for them.

This is not all meant to imply, however, that either the "learning organization" or "developmental facilitation" are some kind of final solutions to the deep problems in development. What I do wish to argue is that they do provide the beginnings of a vision of one possible direction that development could take in the 21st century so as to remain relevant and meaningful (not to mention beneficial). As one of TVT's other core commitments, being a "professional organization" that provides "unique responses to unique situations," indicates, there is no "one size fits all" approach to development and the approach of any development intervention must be radically situated within the local context in which it finds itself. Nevertheless, what is clear from the experience of The Valley Trust is that theoretical models like "the learning organization" and "developmental facilitation" can provide general guidelines, though certainly not proscriptive rules, as to how to create a meaningful development practice in the coming century.

Recommendations for further study

- A survey of the opinions of clients on The Valley Trust's current work and any changes in it that they have observed.

- An ethnography of people who working in development NGOs: what motivated them to choose development work, what it is they hope to accomplish, what they value within an organization, etc.

- A comparison between the experiences of The Valley Trust and another NGO that has dealt with similar issues. The Church Land Program in Pietermaritzburg could be an interesting organization to compare with TVT.

- An analysis of how NGOs normally interact with their donors and how power dynamics play out in these relationships.

- A systematic study of how and why dependencies are created in development clients: what kinds of development practice are they caused by, what role does the nature of the individual client have to play in it, etc.

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Appendix A: Sample interview questions

1. For the record, please describe your background here at The Valley Trust.

2. In general terms, how would you describe the change processes that TVT has undergone in the past 6 years or so (or since you started working here)?

3. How would you describe your own personal development as a practitioner over that same period?

4. Do you think that the various organizational interventions undertaken by The Valley Trust in the last six years (the development dialogues, the practice development process, the Facilitator Development Programme, etc.) have been successful in generating a more people-centered, professional approach at TVT and bringing its practice in line with its stated aims?

5. What impact, if any, has the Facilitator Development Programme had on the way in which you approach your work?

6. Do you think TVT has managed to strike an appropriate balance between reflection, learning, and action? Do you think that any one of these is emphasized too much or not enough?

7. What, in your experience, are the views of your clients on TVT's new emphases on a "people-centered practice" and facilitating transformation? Have they been aware of/noticed it at all?

8. Do you think all staff members have been equally pleased with the organizational transformations TVT has undergone, or do you think that there has been some resistance to them?

Appendix B: Timeline of major events at The Valley Trust (with an emphasis on events since 2001)

1953
Establishment of The Valley Trust (TVT) as a "socio-medical project focused upon the promotion of health" (Stott, 1959).

1982
Dr. Stott retires.
Appointment of Irwin Friedman as medical director and Chris Mann as administrative director.

1991
The partnership between the two directors ends.
Board of Managers, led by a non-executive Group Manager, left in charge of the organization.

1992
Keith Wimble appointed executive director.

1993-1994
Workshops with community representatives to explore future options for the work of TVT.

2001
Department of Organizational Development (OD) formed to "coordinate a more coherent development of the whole organization" (Bruzas and Jager).

2002
TVT managers initiate the "development dialogues" (DD) to "surface paradigms" about people centered development (PCD).

2004
TVT reformulates its vision and intention in strategic planning

2005
Practice development process workshops held in April, July, and October.

2006
First phase of Facilitator Development Programme (FDP) workshops held in July, August, and November.

2007
Second phase of FDP workshops.
Expansion of Facilitator Development Programme to include colleagues who were not able to participate in the first phase.

Appendix C: Nutrition Workshop Outline and Role-play

FACILITATING COMMUNITY BASED FOOD AND NUTRITIONAL SECURITY PLANNING

Time	Topic	Planning steps	Facilitation Methods
9-9.30	**1. Introduction and getting started**	Food and nutrition security vision What could be the most useful information for me from this training?-Expectations	Coin game Interactive discussions
9.30-10.00	**2.Overview of the planning process**	The outline and objectives	Facilitators summary
10.00 – 10.30	T E A B R E A K		
10.30 – 1.00	**3. What is nutrition?**	Why do we need to eat? Have you heard of the word "**nutrition**" before this training? What does the word "**nutrition**" mean to you?	Concept mapping through interactive discussions Facilitators summary
		What is eating healthy eating/good nutrition? The South African Food Based Dietary Guidelines	Buzz group activities - food flash cards
1.00 – 2.00	L U N C H		
2.00 – 2.30	**Malnutrition-Common community nutrition problems**	What happens if families do not eat well?	Role play as a CODE for problem posing?
2.30-3.15	**Causes of malnutrition**	What factors might affect a family from eating healthy in our community?	Causal analysis- brainstorming in small groups Finding linkages between causes
	Community Interventions	What can we do to improve healthy eating for our families' in the community	Action plan based on the causal model. Prioritise based on networks/available resources
	Reflections	Food and nutrition implementation plan Key take home messages	Interactive discussions Idea cards

ROLE PLAY

Case Study-John

Social History

- John has just celebrated his 3rd birthday
- He lives with his grandparents, 2 older sisters and 3 cousins
- When John was 6 months old his mum died
- Grand mother takes care of them all but she is living with diabetes and she is overweight
- Both of the grandparent receive pension
- The family have no running water and electricity.

John's medical History

- John was developing fairly well until he was 4 months old when his mum became very unwell and he stopped breastfeeding
- The mother died before John completed his immunizations
- John's weight started to drop.
- At 15 months old, John himself developed pneumonia and was treated

John's clinic visit today

- John has been unwell with diarrhoea and general weakness for several weeks now
- His weight has further dropped
- The doctors has recommended john's grandmother to talk to a nutritionist/health worker next door about nutrition

John's diet history

- **M**ealie meal porridge for breakfast
- 1 slice bread and margarine for lunch
- Small portion pap and sugar beans for dinner
- A glass of water before going to bed
- Fruits twice per week
- Meat two or three times a week
- No greeny leafy vegetables or milk and milk products as Gogo thinks these worsen diarrhoea

Health worker	Please sit down (*name*). You are welcome. How are you today?
Gogo:	We are OK. It is John who has not well
Health worker	Describe the problems that John is having?
Gogo :	John has been having diarrhoea,
	And you are worried about the diarrhoea
	Yes. It is probably just the milk and those imifinos her Aunty gave him. The doctor said to come to talk to you.
Health worker	Yes, you did well to come and talk, Diarrhoea can be dangerous if left for a long time. For how long has John have diarrhoea?
Gogo :	Eeh!, It started a day before her Aunty from Clemont came to visit.That was about one month ago? It was not so bad but Aunty brought with her some milk and amaas. John drunk a lot of it and that day it become worse. So I stopped him from taking any milk.
Health worker	Really, so did the diarrhoea stop?
Gogo :	Eeh! I thought he was feeling really better but it was only for one night. Her Aunty made them some imifino before she left, and that night we did not sleep and I stopped him from eating vegetables too.
Health worker	Did it stop this then?
Gogo :	No and that's why I am here, I do not know what else to do?
Health worker	Anything else troubling you about John?
Gogo :	He is very weak and has no energy to play as other children?
Health worker	I see from her clinic card that from the doctor, his weight is dropping down?
Gogo :	I noticed that too, I can even lift him with one hand I could not do that before
	Describe what John has been eating?
	John enjoys Mealie meal porridge in the morning

	Yes, porridge is good and will give John strength, I am glad that he likes it, what else does he eat?
Gogo:	It is hard for John to eat sometime during the day. Since he stopped breastfeeding at 4 months when her mummy was very ill he has always had poor appetite. He sometimes takes only 1 slice of bread with Rama. When we have money we buy meat which he really enjoys.
Health worker	Meat is a good to enable John to grow properly, How often are you able to buy meat
Gogo	It is not very easy for us to buy meat. We have other 4 children we are taking care of and it is a lot of money to buy meat for 7 people. With the pension money may be two times a week or some weeks we do not eat meat.
Health worker	You find buying the meat very expensive and this worry you that you are not giving the family enough meat as you should?
Gogo	Yes, this is worrying me because the children loves meat and fruits like bananas and oranges but I cannot buy them regularly (Gogo takes an apple from the bag and gives it to John. The apple drops down and Gogo picks it wipes it on her cloth and give it to John again)
Health worker	Please give me the apple so that I can wash it for you. John come and wash your hands
Gogo	(Laughing) ooh! Thanks, at home we do not wash the fruits. We have problems with water. We get it from so far and sometimes I am just too tied to go and bring water. The children waste a lot of water!
Health worker	(Walking back) Water is life without enough water life can be very difficult
Gogo	Yes, I find it very difficult without running water near by and electricity. I always prepare enough sugar beans for few days which the children like eating with pap but sometime I have problems keeping it for long. So sometimes I end up throwing most of it.
Health worker	Must be difficult. Does John enjoy pap and sugar beans
Gogo	He takes very small portion for dinner and drink a glass of water before going to bed
Health worker	Thanks for bringing John with you. Now lets talk about few things that you can do to help John gain back his weight and to stop diarrhoea
Gogo	Ok, that will be very useful for us