

TEACHING DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Administrative Training: Doublethink and Newspeak

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“. . . if all others accepted the lie which the Party imposed—if all records told the same tale—then the lie passed into history and became truth . . . All that was needed was an unending series of victories over your own memory. ‘Reality control’, they called it: in Newspeak, ‘Doublethink’.”

“Double-think means the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one’s mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them.”

George Orwell: 1984

What is generally referred to as ‘administrative training’ (a misnomer, since many things other than administration usually shelter under this particular umbrella) is recognised to be a growth industry. The expansion is rooted in a philosophy which has instant appeal to those with a practical interest in ‘development’. Commonly, underdevelopment is viewed as a ‘problem’; the solution to the problem is identified as the removal of a series of ‘obstacles to development’. A crucial obstacle is held to be the inability of bureaucracies to cope with ‘developmental’ roles; and the removal of this particular obstacle is to be accomplished by training the bureaucrats.

Such is the philosophy which appears to support the work of those people and institutes in Britain who are responsible for the training of officials from developing countries. I want to explore briefly the implications of the view that such a philosophy is wholly misconceived, because it is derived from inflexible and over-simplified ideas about the nature, causes and consequences of underdevelopment and from an idealised notion of what bureaucracies are or can be like. Moreover, even in its own terms, this philosophy of training is inefficiently practised because it relies explicitly on organisational scenarios far removed from the reality of administrative circumstances in most developing states.

This double failure of philosophy and practice produces—and partly derives from—a situation in which those involved in administrative training set public targets which privately they know cannot be achieved. They persist in doing so because their clients and their sponsors willingly join in the deception; and all are parties to this

deception because they are motivated less by an interest in development, however construed, than by interests which are organisational and personal. Administrative training is, in its ideological structure, a form of ‘doublethink’.

Bernard Schaffer, in his introduction to *Administrative Training and Development* (1974), called this phenomenon ‘trainingism’, and attributed it primarily to the entrepreneurial character of training institutions: “the training ideology must assist in disguising the sorts of exchanges going on.” The case for training, expressed typically in generalised terms not amenable to verification or falsification, rested principally on the statement of client need. This strategy usefully obscured the dependence of training institutions upon clients, and succeeded because neither the costs nor the outcomes were readily measurable. In general the case studies which Schaffer introduced gave strong support to his analysis; and also highlighted the proposition that the philosophy and practice of ‘trainingism’ in developing countries could be traced directly to the influence of the colonial bureaucracies as they gave way to administrative systems vulnerable to the suggestion that their need consisted in retaining the structural features and operating values of the colonial bureaucracy. ‘Administrative training’ was put up as a means to secure these ends; and the assumed link between development and an efficient, trained administration was then forged and continuously strengthened through the actual operation of training programmes.

Schaffer’s main concern is with the training situation in developing countries, but he broadens the scope of his argument by reference to the fashion for management training in British industry in the late 1960s and early 1970s. What he notably avoids is any application of his critique to institutions in Britain with a declared involvement in ‘training for development’. Yet to anyone familiar with these institutions, the relevance of Schaffer’s critique must be obvious (except that an equally obvious problem is that one part of the doublethink strategy is to avoid too close an examination of one’s own entrails). It is clear from the public professions of these institutions, as instanced by brochures, handbooks, and occa-

sional articles, that all the elements of 'training-ism' are present: either over-ambitious claims are made for training as an activity; or claims are carefully made in such general terms that they cannot be tested; or else no claims of any kind are made, with training assumed to be a good in itself. Examining these documents provokes reflection on the aptness of another Orwellian invention: Newspeak.

"The purpose of Newspeak was not only to provide a medium of expression for the World-View and mental habits proper to the devotees . . . but to make all other modes of thought impossible . . . Quite apart from the suppression of definitely heretical words, reduction of vocabulary was regarded as an end in itself, and no word that could be dispensed with was allowed to survive. Newspeak was designed not to extend but to *diminish* the range of thought, and this purpose was indirectly assisted by cutting the choice of words down to a minimum" (1984).

Explicit claims

"Study seminars are focused on broad issues of the development process and are designed to analyse these issues in a way that yields conclusions to the policymaker" (IDS).

". . . to provide some experience in the application of methods of analysis which will assist in the better formulation of policy" (IDS).

"Public administration throughout the world has increasingly turned to the principles of modern management and experimented with new techniques in the search for ways of meeting the growing complexity of government and development work . . . the core common to all courses is a study of the use of modern management principles in development" (Institute of Local Government Studies, Birmingham).

Explicit claims are fairly infrequent, reflecting the preference of some institutions for more cautious formulations which are less vulnerable to disproof. Even explicitness of the kind demonstrated above is at a high level of generality. But the claims are clear enough: that conclusions will be yielded, that improved policymaking will be assisted, that people will be made aware of modern principles which are being or can be applied. Such claims are, in truth, no more than speculation, because no institution has tested or appears to have the intention of testing them. No doubt they represent genuine purposes, but they are highly optimistic, and it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the primary intention in making such purposes explicit is to produce a package attractive to consumers of the product,

whether sponsors or customers. Once established, of course, it is quite likely that a more realistic atmosphere prevails as exchanges between trainers and trainees heighten consciousness of the gulf between the training situation and the real world from which the trainees have temporarily been translated. But that consciousness is unlikely to affect next year's brochure, in which marketing considerations once again become paramount.

Deliberate generality

"offers a preparation for responsible posts at a policymaking level" (Swansea).

"designed for maximum relevance to the students' own concerns" (IDS).

"created to serve a demand from overseas for practical courses in Public Administration" (DAS).

"designed to meet the needs of government officers who have responsibilities at a senior level" (DAS).

"designed to meet the needs of . . . Government officials . . . who are responsible for the formulation and execution of development policies" (Cambridge).

Schaffer noted that it pays the training institution to be as imprecise as possible about the claims it makes, while nonetheless generating an atmosphere of relevance, usefulness, even urgency. It is common to refer to the "needs" or "requirements" of trainees without ever defining in detail what these are. Indeed, any realistic appreciation of the administrative systems of developing countries would lead to the conclusion that no detailed exposition of the actual 'needs' of bureaucrats is possible. Quite simply, there has been so little research into these systems that attempts to say what either the systems or their members require must be extremely speculative and certainly subjective. Those who define the training needs operate in the dark, with occasional flashes of understanding derived from individual experiences of individual systems. The temptation then, which few are able to resist, is to generalise from those individual experiences in a manner which *may* produce a correspondence between provision and need, but is equally likely not to. Sometimes, the formula is turned around: provision is made according to demand, with the implicit suggestion that the countries which send officials for training in Britain have made some sort of rational assessment of training needs. Experience suggests that this is little more than a pious hope. In most developing countries training is accorded a relatively low priority: training personnel are often relatively low level.

Frequently, the training game is played according to rules which nowhere find official expression or acknowledgment. For example, one motive in nominating trainees is the wish to take advantage of technical assistance offers which otherwise might be reduced. Again, the selection of those to benefit from these awards in many countries owes more to personal or political relationships and influence than to a rational comparison of the nominees' skills and deficiencies with what courses are offered. Moreover, there is rarely any connection between the training received by an official, and his personal career development. This is often quite deliberate: those who have not yet had the opportunity to be trained might complain if, for instance, having qualifications led to promotion. The easily perceived gap between the content of training and the reality of the role and tasks to which the trainee returns militates against any attempt to make practical use of the training. This would in any case be difficult, since, as we have seen, training institutions frequently are not explicit about the precise consequences which training can be expected to have. Then, poor personnel control and administration is a marked characteristic of most administrative systems in developing countries, so that it would be unwise to expect career development to be linked to a coherent and precise training policy. Deliberate generality is, therefore, not only in the interests of those who provide training, but those who respond to that provision. For both sides, the advantage is that the actual effects (or 'success') of training cannot be evaluated against precise claims or objectives.

Tautology

"provides training in public administration and management for senior civil servants" (DAS).

"designed to meet the growing need for advanced training" (Swansea).

"to assist the provision and development of management training" (Technical Education and Training Organisation for Overseas Countries, London).

Schaffer noted that a characteristic of training is its expansionist philosophy. It is regarded as a self-evident good, an unquestionable need. If bureaucrats seem inept, or inefficient, an answer is to be found by training them, preferably in 'administration' (usually undefined) or 'management' (also undefined). The expression of a precise content is not necessary: the mere provision of 'training' is a sufficient response to a problem which by implication, holds no terrors.

The more well-established is this philosophy, or the institutions embracing it, the less need is felt to spell out what training is intended to do. The mere promise to provide training is a sufficient statement in itself. Such tautology (i.e. "by training we mean training") has the advantage for all in the industry that the painful business of coming to grips with realities can be avoided, at least in any public sense. This reflects a concern that there should be no hesitancy, no lack of confidence in the tone with which claims are made. A confident posture is necessary on at least three points: in relation to the governments who will send the raw material for processing; in relation to the intermediary paymasters who finance the transaction and must not be allowed to suppose that an institution has any doubts about its capacity to fulfil its promises, explicit or implicit; and in relation to the trainees themselves, who will expect to receive answers to questions, solutions to problems, preferably a panacea for all ills. Tautological claims are the safest of all claims, because no one can deny that you are in the business of training, and if you have claimed no more than that, what basis is there for challenge?

It is possible, though this is no more than one of those intuitive flashes, that the nature of an institution can be measured by the type of claim it predominantly makes. The greater the self-confidence and self-respect of an institution, the more likely it is to make its claims explicit. Where an institution is insecure, or unsure of purpose, or is unaccustomed even to debate privately the distinction between professed purposes and real purposes, the more likely it is to make tautological claims. It is likely that all institutions from time to time occupy the middle ground, ever a safe place to be.

The characteristics discussed above are to be explained mainly in terms of the fact that the institutions involved in training are and must be entrepreneurial. Their financial basis is usually short-term, their future uncertain. They must sell themselves, and their activities, in order to survive, and even more so in order to expand. To win finance, they must appear to be successful. It follows that the temptation is to claim success in their objectives whether or not their objectives have in practice been realised; (it is unsurprising in these terms, that normally no real attempt at objective evaluation is made or wanted). Finance means jobs, research funds, consultancies, travel, even power or authority: those who enjoy these benefits will naturally be reluctant to jeopardise the supply of benefits; that

is, the personal interests of trainers will often be in conflict with their professional standards.

This is not to say that trainers will never criticise their own activities: to adopt this position would be damaging to their own self-respect. But it is common for a convention to grow up whereby 'real' appreciation of courses, achievement, benefit, etc., is carried on internally, but never allowed to make any kind of external appearance. This institutional convention then extends into a 'network' convention embracing all institutions in the field, including the sponsoring agencies, who regard the expansion of a network of training institutions as in itself a positive measure of achievement, and so do not want to know too much about any doubts that institutions may have about the effectiveness of their activities. Finally, this half-conscious conspiracy of silence extends to the clients—both governments and trainees—who again have real motivations which at best come into conflict with 'real' training motivations, and at worst are disguised by manifest but 'un-real' training motivations.

The intention behind this article, if to be provocative, is not to be cynical, nor to sound morally outraged. It is rather to breach the public convention which operates in the 'training industry' in the belief that it is a dangerous one. It is danger-

ous, quite simply, because it allows to go unchallenged the assumption that administrative training is an active agency for the relief of the condition of underdevelopment. That assumption has never been tested in any empirical way; it is extremely doubtful whether even a logical case can be made out for it. The assumption rests on a quite crude notion of what underdevelopment is and how it can be affected. It rests also on an unthinking faith in the administrative system blind to the complexity of interacting social, economic and political structures and processes. More recently it has become embedded in a technocratic world-view which is politically and socially illiterate. Most dangerous of all, the operation of 'doublethink' strategy, reinforced by 'newspeak' terminology significantly reduces the possibilities for conscious and honest debate about the difficult, perplexing, irritating and *real* world of development and underdevelopment. Only in such debate, however painful; only in honest self-appraisal, however embarrassing; only by a determination to be realistic, however damaging realism might be to personal and institutional interests; only with *these* conventions is there any hope that the training industry might become productive rather than parasitic. I offer a final thought from 1984: "Orthodoxy means not thinking—not needing to think. Orthodoxy is unconsciousness".