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THE TRANSFER OF TECHNOLOGY TO DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

(Continued)

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HERE can be a great deal of misunderstanding between people working within the same factory and belonging to the same nation, but of different education or class. These misunderstandings can be worse still if the two people come from different parts of the same country. A southern Englishman working in Merseyside may find himself faced with a most unfamiliar set of attitudes about the amount of time that he should spend arguing with his shop stewards. Nor will he always find the local dialect easy to understand. The Paris-born graduate of one of the great French engineering schools plonked down in a new plant in the middle of a rural area in Brittany will need to be a considerable anthropologist to understand his work force.

Severe though these cultural difficulties can be, however, they are normally less than those which are encountered when one goes from a developed country to a developing country. People in the developing country are likely to have a different attitude to authority, a different understanding of the superior's obligations towards his subordinates, a different background of knowledge and a different educational training from those to which the manager who is teaching them is accustomed.

The Englishman going to Kenya has to get used to the idea that this is a more egalitarian society than his own, where no disrespect is intended when people do not call him 'sir' or the waiter greets him as a long lost friend. On the other hand, although India is a very much less deferential place than it was, more deference than is customary in England and certainly more than is customary in the U.S. is still required there by the rules of good manners. The teaching manager must not confuse this deference with agreement. He must wait till the preliminaries politeness lays down are over to discover whether the person to whom he is talking in fact agrees or not.

Even details of language give problems. The Dutch, who are very forthright, always complain that when an Englishman wishes to say 'no' he either says 'yes, but . . .' or 'perhaps'. We were told by a chief engineer recently that when he said 'that was a silly thing to do' to his Africans, they believed that he was saying that *they* were silly. The difference of meaning is important, though perhaps subtle. He is now in the difficulty that he can see that what was for him a standard form

of mild reproof is unsuitable, yet he does not know what form of words to use that would convey the same meaning without causing offence.

Teachers trying to transfer experience have the further problem that they have to order their experience before they can transfer it, and the ordering may require of them an analysis of what they do to which they are unaccustomed. Once again, this applies within a developed country as well as between a developed country and a developing country, though on average in less degree.

This is much more a problem for the practical man than for the academic. Those who write books have to order their facts, to induce some generalisations out of their raw data and to provide some theory, in order to produce anything the reader will remember. This is not easy, but the alternative is to be unreadable, so most academics at least try.

Those who are trying to convey experience do not always even realise they have a problem. They do not have the training in conceptualisation of the academic. They may never have worked out what part of what they do is fundamental to doing the job, and what is only a cultural convention. Indeed, they may well have spent their whole careers in an environment where certain forms of behaviour were taken for granted, and the reason for them was never made explicit.

Let us take as an example a Swedish engineer going at the age of 40 for the first time to a factory in a developing country with a work force fresh from the farm. He will have been accustomed in Sweden to a factory where good housekeeping is accepted as the duty of everyone. Everybody picks up pieces of paper, sees that the floor is swept, cleans up any spillage of oil. If anybody does not do so, it is generally accepted to be wrong behaviour, deserving of punishment. His new work force may be much sloppier, much more willing to tolerate poor housekeeping and general mess. He has to understand that this does not mean what it would mean in Sweden. They are not necessarily hopelessly lazy and undisciplined, they may merely not understand the importance of rigid cleanliness in many factory conditions, in a food factory for instance.

Moreover, they are unlikely to pursue cleanliness wholeheartedly until they do understand. Punishment may produce an outward conformity, but may also under modern conditions produce revolt, by strikes or sabotage or negligence whenever the worker thinks he can get away with it. Yet the Swede may find it hard to make them understand. He knows in his bones that cleanliness is of fundamental importance, but he may never have worked out in his mind exactly why; and even if he has worked it out, his answer may not be in terms which his work force will understand. If he talks about bacteria, for instance, they have to know what bacteria are. We once had a Mission-trained Indian ayah of scrupulous cleanliness. She always sterilised the baby's bottle and her clothes were spotless. But she did not take the baby off the floor when it was being swept; 'it's only dust', she argued.

The expatriate may also have to rethink assumptions he has always

taken for granted. He may be accustomed, as in the Netherlands, to a situation where skilled men are reasonably easy to get and unskilled men have for years been difficult to get. He moves to a situation where good fitters, for example, are difficult to recruit and to keep, but unskilled men can be had by the hundred. He may need to change his methods to use fewer skilled and more unskilled workers. He will certainly have to change his ideas on pay to allow for a much wider differential between the two. He may also need to give time and attention to the training and supervision of his skilled men to which he is unaccustomed and which enforces on him a re-organisation of the whole way he does his work.

For many men, who in their own society have risen by hard work from a relatively junior position, from fitter or salesman or clerk perhaps, there can be yet another problem. Their experience includes the experience of learning on the job in a way which takes into account the habits and levels of prior knowledge customary in their society. They may have no experience of other ways of learning, and certainly no experience of distinguishing between that part of the lesson which relates to first principles and that part which is culturally conditioned. They will, therefore, tend to teach as they were taught. They will explain what was explained to them, they will let people make mistakes in the way they were allowed to make mistakes. There is a group of hand-loom weavers in South India who all throw the shuttle with the left hand, which requires a different loom, because their ancestors were taught by a left-handed Scotsman.

This can work quite well. Many of the problems of a salesman, say, are exactly the same in Nigeria and in Lancashire. But it can also go very wrong. The people he is teaching may need to have points explained to them which in his youth he knew before he started work at all. When people handle delicate machines roughly, it is not because of some innate cultural defect, but because they do not know that the machine is delicate and what is rough treatment for it. Again, wholesalers in Africa often behave like a European cash and carry rather than like a European traditional wholesaler; the salesman has to understand the consequences for his own business which flow from this. Secretaries in India are often men. One cannot assume they know how to arrange flowers or that they will show quite the patience that women do in dealing with tiresome telephone calls.

Some people respond with enthusiasm to these challenges. One always finds some managers in developing countries who are superb trainers. Other people find those challenges intimidating. They find the work too much and their subordinates untrainable, at least by them. So they blame the country and its people. The locals naturally react to this contempt and disapproval. Soon one has a vicious circle of decreasing efficiency.

The problems are often made worse by government policy.

Developing countries, like developed countries, want to preserve their

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jobs for their own people. There is, therefore, normally no possibility of a lifetime career for the man with knowledge from a developed country as he used to have when he went out to Malaya as a planter or to India as a public works engineer. His work permit probably lasts for two or three years and may be renewed for another two or three. That is all. He must, therefore, think in terms of going back in due course to a career in his own country.

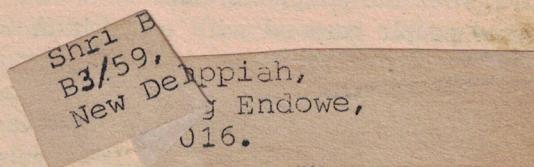
This necessity presents him with a series of problems.

First, in countries where it is not the habit to send children to boarding school (which means everywhere except England) a time of duty abroad may disrupt his children's education very seriously; and it is, on the whole, the man with children that developing countries need. The man whose children are grown up is usually unsuitable; he is often either not very good or too senior. The man with no children may not yet have had a chance to acquire enough experience to pass on.

Secondly, it is more and more true that the men in their 30s and 40s, whom the developing countries need, have wives with careers of their own. They may be teachers or nurses or civil servants or computer programmers. In the developing country they may not be allowed to work at all. They may be happy to accept that position if the children are small and they can get domestic help in the developing country, but at most other ages they are increasingly unprepared to spend their lives at coffee-mornings. The attractions of idleness, considerable for their mothers, are negligible for them. Therefore suitable men are not available in large numbers. It would be an unwise firm which pushed one of its better men to go abroad if his wife did not want to go, or would be unhappy when she got there. A strained marriage makes a poor manager; and a senior who exerts pressure at the expense of a marriage commits a sin.

Thirdly, even if the wife is willing to go it is desirable to consider whether she is suitable. Many women who are successful wives and mothers in their own society are unsuccessful in an unfamiliar environment. They may have to deal with servants they do not understand, they may miss their families, the food may be different from that to which they are accustomed. Life out of one's own country can be soul searing, especially for those who have no inner resources.

(To be continued)



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