

Co-operative Education Materials Advisory Service.
International Co-operative Alliance.



FIELD EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT

Introductory Booklet

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***THE
WORK
PROCESS***

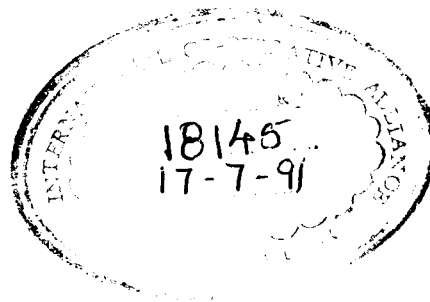
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CEMAS – what is it?

- CEMAS is a project within the International Co-operative Alliance working on the improvement of materials and methods for cooperative education and training in developing countries, with particular reference to the needs of members and committee members
- a clearing house for information and advice on education and training
- a production unit, producing prototype materials, manuals and reference booklets
- an ideas bank for the use of all cooperative educators and trainers



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Foreword

CEMAS has designed a package of materials to be used for instruction of cooperative field workers in *problem analysis techniques*, in other words the techniques of finding out – diagnosing – the nature and causes of problems affecting a cooperative.

This introductory booklet

- describes, briefly, the general principles of a methodic approach to the field work, of which the ‘diagnosing’ technique is a crucial part, and
- discusses the concepts of ‘problems’ and ‘causes of problems’. All the efforts of cooperative field work are, after all, aimed at preventing or solving problems which render cooperatives less effective in providing the benefits their members have a right to expect.

We have chosen to use the general term ‘Cooperative Field Worker’ in the description of the analysis technique, because it is a technique which can, and indeed ought to be used by all those who are working with cooperatives at the field level, whether in the capacity of generalists or in the more specialised role of ‘field educators’. The latter – the educators – are otherwise the main target group of our services, and the term ‘field educator’ may therefore also occur. Special resource materials for the field educators’ contribution to the implementation phase in the work process described in this booklet, are continuously being developed by CEMAS.

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Objective

The objective of this booklet is to enable the reader to obtain a good understanding of:

- the principles of a systematic approach to cooperative field work, referred to as a “work process”.
- the five phases of the work process.
- some concepts and terms, used in the analysis technique which is a central element in the work process.

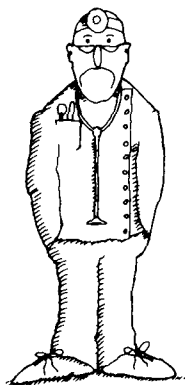
Contents

	Page
Two Scenarios	5
A Logical Work Process	6
Instructional Requirements	8
Resources and their Use	12
Problems and Causes of Problems	12
Are Cooperative Field Workers First of all Problem Solvers?	16
Some Important Concepts and Terms	17

Two scenarios

Say that you feel somewhat unwell, something is wrong with you, and you are anxious to get proper treatment, bringing you back to good health again. You therefore go to see a doctor.

Now, compare the following two scenarios:



The surgery of Doctor A

You enter. Doctor A casts a glance at you and says:

“Ah, here is another one! You seem to have some trouble and I think I can guess what it is. The usual, most likely. So many other people tend to have a bit of stomach upset, a headache and most of them suffer from a cold.

That’s what’s wrong with you as well, no doubt. Here, take these pills. Two of the pink ones, three times daily. One yellow pill after every meal. A white one, whenever you feel like it. If you don’t get well after that, it isn’t my fault.”



The surgery of Doctor B

You enter. Doctor B asks you to describe the symptoms that are troubling you. He listens, asks some questions, checks your pulse and blood pressure and takes careful notes. Then he says: “Well, some of your symptoms seem to indicate what is wrong. I could suggest medicine for that, but there might be other causes also. I would like to examine you carefully and take tests for analysis, so that we may establish precisely the causes of your trouble. I need to do that in order to prescribe the correct treatment. I am, as you know, a general practitioner, and if I discover anything beyond my own resources here, I will, of course, refer you to a specialist.”

Which one do you believe would be best able to prescribe the treatment you really need?

It would not be very far-fetched to compare a cooperative field worker with a doctor. Cooperatives suffer, as we all know, from minor or major ‘health problems’, and an important aspect of a field worker’s responsibilities is to examine and diagnose. He should, in many cases, be able to prescribe treatment as well, although it is likely that quite often he would first have to present his diagnosis to other people who are concerned with the matter and discuss it with them. Refer the patient to specialists, as it were. Finally he would also himself administer such treatment as is within his competence and appropriate to the illness.

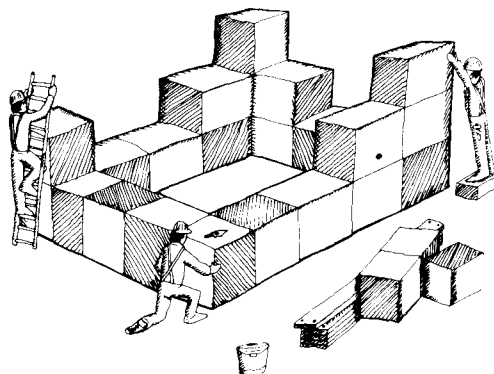
Could there be any doubt that we would like the cooperative field workers to resemble Doctor B rather than Doctor A: that it is desirable that they not only have the ambition to diagnose problems and causes of problems accurately, but also possess the skills to do just that? For healthy and strong cooperatives are what we want, and that requires the proper type of treatment when something is wrong. That, again, requires methodic examination and diagnosis.

But is it realistic to believe that the average cooperative field worker could acquire adequate skill in this area? The answer is “yes”, if the word “adequate” is underlined. Much praise has been given in recent years to the itinerant ‘barefoot doctors’, who have contributed so admirably to raising the general standard of health in many areas in many countries. The point demonstrated by that success is that there is a middleway between the two alternatives of either relying on high level experts, or doing nothing at all if such are not available. Cooperative field workers can be trained to play the role of ‘barefoot doctors’; to make a first diagnosis; to apply such remedial treatment as is within their competence; and to decide whether or not it is necessary to call in the specialist.

A logical work process – the foundation of effective field work!

In any job the best results are achieved if the job is approached in a systematic and logical way. One action following another, step by step, each step in its right order. Not too early, before other preparatory steps have been taken. Not too late either, for each action is usually supporting other actions, and if an action does not come in its appropriate place that support will be lost.

If you are building a house, you must begin with the foundation. Then you raise the walls and finally you construct the roof on top of it. You cannot mess about with the logical steps of house-building. As in many jobs, the logical order of actions to take is obvious. But unfortunately this is not always the case. For example, the job of dealing with problems in cooperatives belongs to those where various actions might be taken, with a considerable input of effort, time and money, but with a poor result because the actions are not taken in a systematic order. And it may be that some fundamental actions are not taken at all. Sometimes one may find that cooperative field work attempts to build a roof, long before the walls are in place, and quite often it is done on very weak or non-existing foundations.



So what, then, are the logical steps to be taken when working with the problems of a cooperative, if one wants to achieve the best results? Briefly, it can be described as a *work process* in five phases, with systematically organised steps within each phase:

Phase 1

SITUATION STUDY

Carry out a simple but effective study of the situation in the cooperative, for the purpose of identifying problems which need to be remedied.

Phase 2

PERFORMANCE PROBLEM ANALYSIS

Guided by the results of the situation study, carry out a detailed analysis of those problems which seem to be caused by inadequate performance of people – members, committee members, employed personnel, as the case may be.

Phase 3

ACTION PLAN

Having identified the actual causes of the performance problems, consider what the appropriate remedial actions are, and structure these into an Action Plan, along with actions to remedy other problems.

Phase 4

IMPLEMENTATION

Implement the Action Plan.

Phase 5

EVALUATION

Monitor the implementation and evaluate the effect of the actions. Amend the plan as necessary.

The first two phases should be undertaken by the cooperative field worker, although, of course, in extensive consultation with a broad range of people from whom he would seek information and opinions. In the third phase he would be the one to initiate discussions, and serve the decision-makers with well structured reports on the findings of his analytical work, as well as assisting in preparing co-ordinated Action Plans. In the fourth phase, when the plan is to be implemented, he would play the part and do the job allocated to him, while other people would play their respective parts. He is probably also the person in the best position to take the responsibility for the fifth phase; monitoring and observing results.

A consideration of these five phases will reveal that they are actually as obvious as the phases of building a house. A satisfactory result of any one phase depends on the preceding phase, and each phase builds the support for the next phase. It provides a more solid structure for cooperative field work. Another important aspect is that of how systematic work methods help in the allocation of resources.

Instructional requirements

A cooperative field worker (referred to as a CFW in the following) will require some special knowledge and skills at the various phases of the work process. He consequently requires instruction in these skills. These requirements are indicated in the following detailed overview of the work process.

The Work Process

PHASE 1 – THE SITUATION STUDY

The aim is to get a clear idea of what problems, if any, there are in a specific cooperative and to assess how serious they might be. Also to arrive at a first conclusion of what is causing each problem, and to prepare a summary report.

The steps to take are:

- Gather information.
- Structure the findings in a methodic way, facilitating discussions and decisions on action to be taken.

PHASE 2 – PERFORMANCE PROBLEM ANALYSIS

Some problems will be clearly seen to be brought about by inadequate performance of people. These problems should be exposed to a more refined analysis, aimed at finding out the causes of the inadequate performance, so that appropriate actions can be taken to remedy the situation.

The steps to take are:

- Identify the desired levels of performance, and formulate these in 'Performance Objectives'.
 - Evaluate the present actual levels of performance.
 - Compare the actual levels with the desired levels of performance in order to identify the degree and nature of the discrepancy.
 - Analyse cases of performance discrepancies in order to find out the likely causes.
 - Categorise the causes in order to facilitate consideration of remedying actions.
 - Write down the findings of this special analysis in a systematic way.
-

Your attention is drawn to page 17, "Some Important Concepts and Terms". You will need the explanations before you read the overview.

Skill Requirements

= INSTRUCTIONAL REQUIREMENTS

The CFW should understand the basic principle of the work process concept, and be able to apply it to his own work situation.

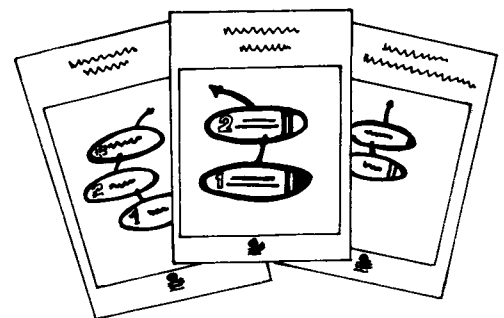
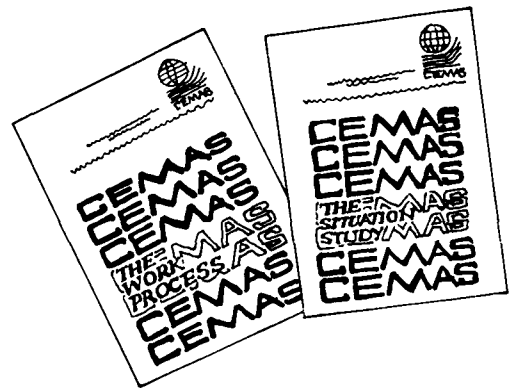
Technique of gathering and checking relevant information.

Technique of structuring findings and conclusions.
Preparation of appropriate reports.

The CFW should be familiar with certain basic concepts on which the analysis technique is built up.

Ability to use a systematic technique for the purpose.

INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS



The Work Process (cont.)

PHASE 3 – CONSIDERATION OF REMEDIAL ACTIONS – PREPARING ACTION PLANS

The preceding studies of problems have the sole aim of helping the people concerned to draw the right conclusions about what to do about the problems. This phase is important because it will determine the actual actions to follow.

The steps to take are:

- On the basis of the summary reports arising from the Situation Study, and the Performance Problem Analysis, write down the first action proposal for discussion.
- Report in an effective way and initiate effective discussions.
- After discussions and decisions, prepare the actual Action Plans.

PHASE 4 – IMPLEMENTATION OF REMEDIAL ACTIONS

This is the phase the others have been leading up to; the phase which will produce the result of eliminated or reduced problems and improved performance.

What actions to take, in what order, and who should take them would be decided in Phase 3, and written down in the Action Plan. The CFW would presumably be allocated the responsibility for some of the actions. If he is a field education officer he would tackle the identified education and training actions in the Action Plan.

PHASE 5 – MONITORING AND EVALUATING THE EFFECT

There must be some control to ensure that the decided necessary actions are actually taken. The effect of the actions on the problems should be evaluated as well.

The performance problem analysis will produce measurable objectives making quite accurate evaluation possible. When necessary, actions may have to be reconsidered.

Skill Requirements (cont.)

= INSTRUCTIONAL REQUIREMENTS

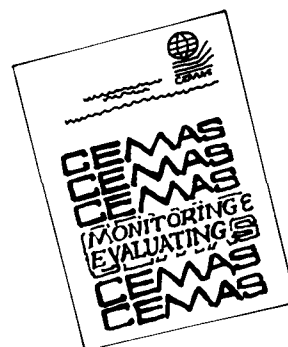
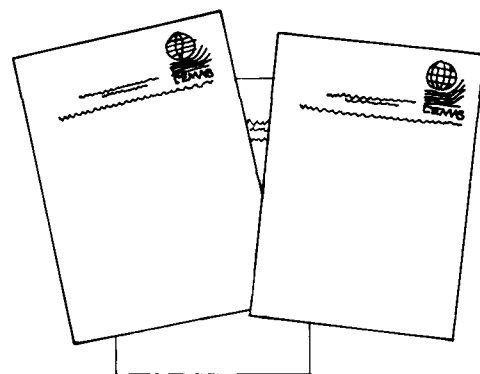
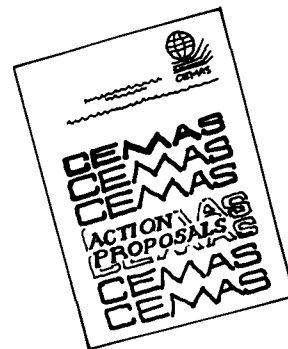
THE CFW should be aware of different types of possible actions, and of the necessity of linking problems, causes and remedial actions to each other in a correct combination.

Ability to use a systematic way of doing so.

Skill requirements, and hence instructional requirements, depend on the type of action a person is supposed to take. Instructional materials are usually available, in one form or another.

General awareness of need and principles of result evaluation, as well as of related techniques.

INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS



Write to CEMAS (address on back cover) for information about the materials.

Resources and their use

Input of many kinds of resources is necessary in the work of promoting cooperative development at the field level. The time, skill and energy of the field workers is one set of resources; and so is the time and experience of other people who become involved in the work, for example, by being requested to participate in educational activities. Money is another obvious resource. All resources are usually limited and scarce. With this in mind, one can easily realise that the phases of the work process in fact are guiding scarce resources towards actions where they will be effectively used. Application of the logical work process saves time and money.

But what resources are required for the suggested studies and analyses themselves? Are we not suggesting here that the cooperative field workers should spend a lot of their valuable time on a kind of research work, which would add to their normal duties? The answers to that are:

- If well prepared, this 'research work' need not take more than, say, a couple of days in any one cooperative.
- Once done for the first time, and the findings kept on file, the updating of the information will become part of the ordinary field work routine, and hardly need any extra time at all.
- The time spent on the analytical work is minimal, compared to the time – and all other resources – saved in the long run, through a more effective and result-orientated work programme.

Indeed, a main objective of this approach to field work is to secure a more effective use of resources by ensuring that the resources which are available are not wasted.

Problems and causes of problems

The term 'problem', used so frequently in this booklet, may sound simple, especially in the light of the definition given on page 17:

“Something which is negatively affecting the efficiency of a cooperative organisation.”

But there are problems and problems! They appear in different forms and degrees. And more so when we turn our attention to causes of problems. There are so many varieties of problems and causes, it is easy to fall into the trap of confusing them, and to get into a muddle when trying to sort them out. At the stage of the first phase of the work process, the Situation Study, it is especially good to be aware of some of the aspects of the complexities hidden behind the simple word 'problem'. Let us have a look at a few of them.



Priority problems

Having identified a number of problems, one is faced with a choice of where to start applying one's time and other resources. Some problems are serious and require immediate attention. They are priority problems. Other ones could be left for a short while, while the priority problems are being dealt with. It is therefore important to make clear where the real priorities are. Sometimes a problem may appear to be very serious, because it happens to be of the type which arouses a lot of emotions and noise, and so the interest and the resources are directed to it. Yet the actual effect of it on the efficiency of the cooperative might be marginal, which means that the priority order has been upset. The seriousness of problems, and hence the priority order, should be judged on the short or long-term harmful effect they actually have on a cooperative. Always try to make an accurate assessment of that.

Easy-to-solve and hard-to-solve problems

A serious problem may turn out to be quite easy to solve once its cause has been accurately diagnosed. Some small but important matter might have been overlooked, and it takes little effort to rectify the situation. The same could be the case with less serious problems. Other problems, however, could be extremely difficult to solve, even impossible, at the field level, because the causes are located outside the area of reach.

A ranking of how easily problems might be solved helps in the preparation of the final Action Plan. Get the easier ones out of the way first. Do not exhaust your resources at the field level on trying to solve very difficult problems, having their roots elsewhere. Get other forces and resources moving against them. These are some of the practical conclusions to draw in this context.

Perception of problems

Some problems are recognised as such by all people. Everybody is aware of them and would like to see them removed. A lot of will to solve them is at hand. Some other problems may be identified by the 'experts', for example, by a cooperative field worker, but are not recognised by the people in the cooperative, perhaps because of:

- **IGNORANCE** The people do not have enough technical or economic knowledge to realise that certain circumstances are harmful in one way or another. They do not see any reasons for actions, particularly if they themselves would be affected by this. Such a situation is immediately more difficult to handle.
- **DIFFERING VALUES OF OPINIONS** Sometimes it is not just a matter of ignorance and indifference. People might have some firmly rooted values and opinions, which occasionally are in conflict with technical and economic reality. This is still more difficult, and the handling of the situation could become quite complex.

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Sometimes it is the other way around. Members feel strongly that there is a problem, because they have not been properly informed and have misunderstood some technically very correct procedures. It is not a problem from the technical point of view, but it becomes a 'human problem' for the field worker to solve, nevertheless.

The above is just an indication of how perception of problems can be a very important factor to look into. The more the views on a certain problem are reconciled among the people who are involved in it, the better are the preconditions for a solution.

Chains of problems

One particular problem is rarely an isolated case. One single problem and one single cause. Most problems occur in chains where one problem is the cause of another, which in its turn generates another, new problem. The findings of an analysis of one major problem could, for example, turn out to be as follows:

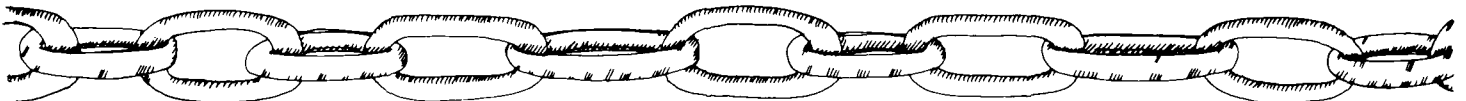
THE MAJOR PROBLEM OBSERVED: "A marketing cooperative is making losses on its operations because not enough produce is being received".

ITS CAUSE, WHICH IS A PROBLEM IN ITSELF: "Members turn to other buyers, instead of delivering to the cooperative".

CAUSE/PROBLEM: "Produce collection reports, necessary for release of cash from the bank, are frequently submitted late from the cooperative, and often returned by the bank because there are errors in them. The result is that the cash is delayed, and consequently the payment. The members are in need of money, and hence deliver where they are paid immediately".

CAUSE/PROBLEM: "The reports themselves are unnecessarily complicated and time consuming to fill in, demanding a lot of irrelevant information. Delays and errors are caused by this fact".

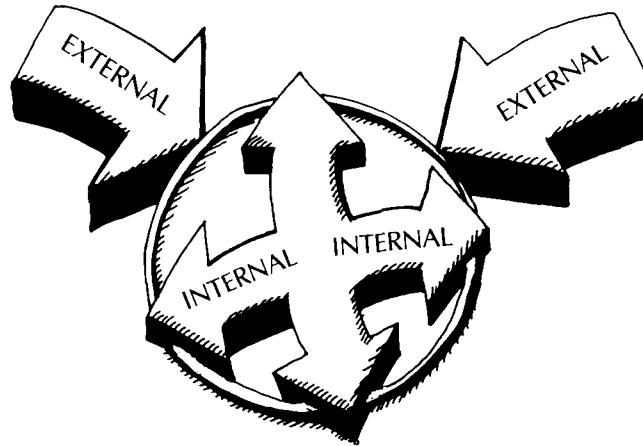
CAUSE/PROBLEM: "The whole crop financing procedure is outdated and has not changed along with circumstances".



It is important to follow such chains, link by link, because the efforts to solve the problems one has identified at the end of the chain, would not be very successful, as long as the other problems causing it remain unattended. One really has to try to get to the very beginning of the problem chain.

Internal and external causes

Causes of problems are often to be found within the cooperative suffering from them. (Quite often performance problems which are causes of other problems). But almost equally often the causes are to be found elsewhere, outside the cooperative itself. (In our example of a chain, the first three causes/problems are internal, then we find the chain taking us to the bank – an external cause). So we have to be clear about which causes are internal, existing within the cooperative and possible to remedy by internal actions, and which causes are external, resting outside the cooperative and requiring such actions that can influence them where they are. The latter ones might be trickier to solve. The field worker cannot often do it on his own.



The human factor – performance discrepancies as problem causes

The look at some of the aspects of the concept of 'problem' we have made here is far from exhaustive. It is meant to demonstrate that there are so many sides to it. One always has to ask oneself a number of questions and to try to find the right answers to them when facing a certain problem:

- Is this a priority problem?
- Is it easy to solve?
- How do the people affected by it perceive the problem?
- Is it a link in a chain of problems?
- Is it caused by some other problem?
- Does it in itself cause other problems?
- Are the causes internal or external or both?
- What are the performance problems involved?

In the final analysis it will be seen that most problems are caused by inadequate performance of people – by performance discrepancies. Even problems which, for practical reasons, we would deem to be caused by some technical factors, often have a ‘human factor’ somewhere in the extension of the chain.

When a cooperative field worker has done his analysis, and the distribution of responsibilities and actions arising from it has been decided, it will be his main task to tackle the performance problems of the people in the cooperative – members, committee members and employed staff.

Are cooperative field workers first of all problem solvers?

The work process described in this booklet is problem orientated. How to diagnose problems in a better way, and how to try to solve them more effectively. That could give the impression that we look upon cooperative field workers, including those who are concerned with education and training, as predominantly concerned with solving problems in cooperatives. But that is not the case. A field worker’s task falls into three categories:

1. Development and promotion. Building up as good a standard of knowledge as possible in the cooperative he is working with.
2. Maintaining a standard achieved, and not let it slip downwards.
3. Help solving problems affecting the cooperative.

The two first task categories need not be related to specific problems, although they could be. On the other hand, while actually concentrating on existing problems, a field worker would in most cases be building up and maintaining the standard of knowledge because that would be part of the solution.

The CEMAS package of instructional materials in analysis techniques is aimed at helping the cooperative field worker cum field educator in this problem-solving role. Other CEMAS materials are concerned with the general “building up” and “maintaining” of responsibilities.

Some important concepts and terms

You have noted that we have been using certain terms in our description of the work process. These terms, or the concepts they stand for, are very important elements of the analysis technique a cooperative field worker should use. All the people he will be reporting to, and discussing problems and remedial actions with, should also be familiar with the concepts. The more important ones are explained here:

SITUATION STUDY

The first rough, but methodically carried out and structured review of the state of affairs in a cooperative, with the aim of finding out if it has got any problems affecting its efficiency.

PROBLEM

In this context a “problem” might be defined as “something which is negatively affecting the efficiency of a cooperative organisation”.

If the business of a cooperative is suffering because members do not trade with it, that is a problem. If books of accounts are badly kept so that the financial control gets out of hand, that is a problem. If the Management Committee takes an unwise decision on investment of money so that losses are incurred, that is a problem.

PERFORMANCE

A performance is something which is actually being done. An action which can be observed and which can usually, without too much difficulty, be assessed by such value judgements as ‘bad’, ‘satisfactory’, ‘good’, etc. Ability to do something is not a performance, only the act of doing it is.

‘Repaying loans’, ‘commenting on a financial report at a committee meeting’, ‘writing books of accounts’, are examples of performances.

PERFORMANCE PROBLEM

The term Performance Problem is used with reference to a performance discrepancy (see below), and the causes of it. For the discrepancy itself is the result of something else being out of order. It is a symptom rather than the real problem, as a stomach ache, painful as it might be, is not the real illness, which could be an ulcer or food poisoning.

PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE

A statement of a desired performance, i.e. describing a standard of performance to be aimed at, in order to ensure smooth and efficient work in a cooperative. Here are some examples:

- ‘Members, having received loans, should always make repayment of the amounts and on the dates agreed upon’.
- ‘Committee Members should intelligently discuss and comment upon financial reports presented to them’.
- ‘Secretary/Managers should keep the Books of Accounts accurately and up-to-date’.

A Performance Objective could also state something which should not be done. Very clear examples of that would be:

- 'A Secretary/Manager should never take part in any act of dishonesty or unequal treatment of members'.
- 'Committee Members should never seek personal favour or advantage from the cooperative'.

Observe that these 'negative' objectives also state observable actions.

PERFORMANCE DISCREPANCIES

When the actual performance is not up to the standard of the Performance Objective, or when a desired performance does not take place at all, then there is a discrepancy. By first establishing the objective, it is possible to identify more easily where something is wrong and begin looking into why it is so, and what could be done about it.

PERFORMANCE PROBLEM ANALYSIS

This is the procedure of looking systematically into a Performance Problem (see above) to find out exactly what is out of order. The comparison with a doctor, we made initially, is very appropriate here and helps to make the purpose clear:

- A proper diagnosis of the symptoms is essential, so that the proper medicine can be prescribed.

The Performance Problem Analysis is a constructive and effective way of diagnosing a cooperative when symptoms of problems have been identified in the first rough situation study. It comes in Phase 2 of the Work Process, and the instructional requirements of the cooperative field worker are met in the package of specially designed training material, developed by CEMAS.

The principle is, in fact, quite simple. When a performance discrepancy has been identified, the field worker will seek to find the answers to a series of questions which act as a 'net' which will 'catch' the likely cause or causes, of the problem. The nature of the cause then provides a clue to the sort of actions that should be taken. *The aim of Phase 2 is achieved. Links are being established between symptoms and actual problems, the real causes of the problems, and the kind of action to take.*

Without the methodic approach of this technique, there is a great risk that all these elements of the problem complex would be mixed up. The wrong cause could be thought to be creating a certain problem, and an entirely wrong, and therefore ineffective, action could be taken in an attempt to solve it. Many causes of serious problems quite often remain undetected and are left to continue being harmful, because they were never properly understood or even realised. Performance Problem Analysis is an instrument to lift them out in the daylight so that something can be done about them.

REMEDIAL ACTION

Any action taken for this purpose of remedying a problem situation; in other words, to eliminate the problem or reduce its harmful effects (The term 'solution' is frequently used in the instructional material on Performance Problem Analysis Techniques with reference to 'remedial actions').

ACTION PLAN

When problems have been identified and analysed through Situation Studies and Performance Problem Analysis, there will be discussions and decisions on appropriate remedial actions. For an organised and effective implementation of these, it is necessary to draw up an integrated plan, including all the actions and distributing the responsibility for them, while stating the order in which they should be taken. That is an Action Plan.

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What can you do for CEMAS?

One of the main tasks of CEMAS is to stimulate and facilitate the exchange of ideas and experience among cooperative educators throughout the world.

That can only be achieved through real cooperation among cooperators.

You will make a vital contribution by sending us specimen copies or details of education and training materials that you have seen or successfully used yourself: books, manuals, exercises, handouts, posters, leaflets, brochures, materials for general member education, for committee members or for staff training at different levels.

Please send us a copy of any new production of yours. It will help us to build up and further develop the world-wide reference library, which is a basis for our information service.

You will find CEMAS address on the back cover.



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