

Attitudinal orientation of first level managers for improvement of municipal service delivery: Experience of training intervention in Kolkata

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1. Introduction

This paper discusses a program of attitudinal orientation courses provided for functionaries of a large municipal corporation in India. Almost 450 Assistant Managers from the Kolkata Municipal Corporation took part in the training, which was held at the Administrative Training Institute (ATI) of the Government of West Bengal, India.

Under the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, Indian Municipalities/Corporations (Urban Local Bodies) are empowered and entrusted to perform planning, development and governance for the city/ town and to provide services to the citizens. The change in outlook towards the local government reflected in the Act has highlighted the need for

greater awareness and a better attitude amongst municipal staff as well as elected representatives towards service delivery. Good governance can be achieved through the overall performance of officials of an organization, provided they possess the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes and competencies. For historical reasons, knowledge, skills and attitudes amongst officials of Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) in India have been traditionally of a low standard. Willingness to perform better in the role of municipal service delivery is not common. Therein lies the need for training for improvement in service delivery, especially for organizations like large municipal corporations and municipalities.

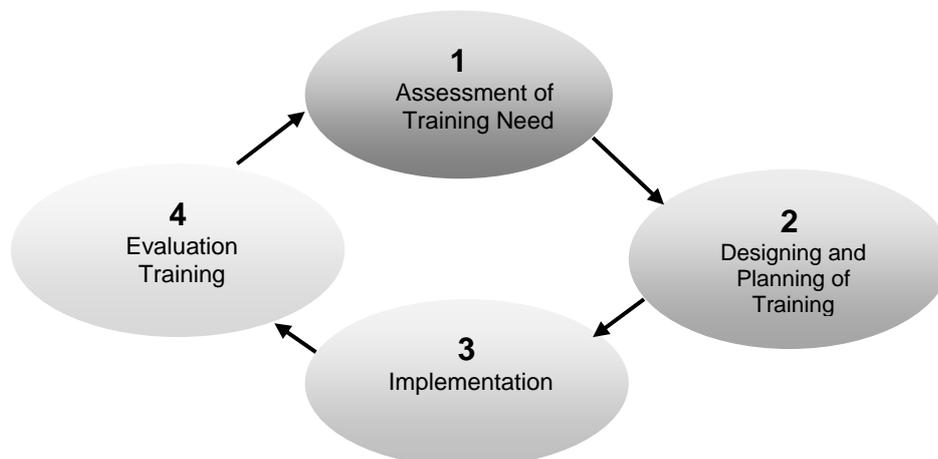
ATI is the apex-training institute of Government of West Bengal, India. It has been imparting quality training for more than two decades to various officials of West Bengal and other states. Its Urban Management Centre (UMC) provides training to a broad cross section of employees of the ULBs. Until 2004, the Government of India or the state government funded most of the courses, but from 2004-05



Main Building – ATI, Kolkata

major changes took in delivery of training. Now most courses are provided to meet specific demands emerging from the ULBs or their apex department (the Municipal Affairs Department of the Government of West Bengal). Courses are conducted at the institute itself as well as at the ULBs. A systematic approach to training has been adopted (taken from Ghosh, 2004), as shown below:

Figure 1: A systematic approach to training as adopted at UMC, ATI



2. Capacity Building Programme for Kolkata Municipal Corporation

Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) is one of the largest municipal authorities in the country. Approximately 5 million people live in the KMC area. KMC is a large organization and has around 37,000 employees working in 141 wards and 15 borough offices. To apply the changed perspective of citizen-centric governance, the whole organization needed reform. Internal communication among functionaries and external communication with citizens have been given much emphasis in improving the service delivery and capacity of the corporation (KMC 2006).

In 2006, KMC received major funding for training and capacity building from the UK Department for International Development (DFID). It approached ATI to provide training to its Assistant Managers, who play significant roles in the service-delivery system. The Corporation also has its own training cell named the Institute of Urban Management (IUM), which trains both staff and elected members. IUM collaborated with UMC, ATI to deliver the training and capacity building programs reported in this paper.

3. Profile of Participants

Almost 450 Assistant Managers were identified for training. All of them had been promoted from the clerical grade. Most were in the age group of 45 to 55 years, and had graduate or higher secondary qualifications. They had experience of various functions and in different urban zones through lateral transfers at 3-4 yearly intervals between departments such as water supply, assessment-collection, building, licensing, advertising, establishment, library, accounts, general administration, pension, conservancy, electricity etc. Assistant Managers are the first-level managerial layer of KMC. They are supposed to lead a team consisting of 5-30 subordinates to execute service delivery in the various fields. They needed to be oriented in leadership, team building and communication skills to facilitate service delivery to citizens.



A group photo of a mix group of KMC managers

Most Assistant Managers had received previous training at IUM for short periods while at clerical grades in subjects like assessment-collection, licensing etc, but some had not received any training before. Also some, who were on the verge of retirement, were initially apathetic towards training.

4. Strategy and Approach

Identified training needs included knowledge inputs in urban planning, principles of management, municipal governance and service delivery, as well as organization development, leadership, communication and soft skills for self-development.

The following topics had been identified by KMC:

- Management of municipal bodies - an overview
- Fiscal and financial management
- Infrastructure planning and development
- Tax administration
- Contract and logistic management
- Management of human resources
- Managerial leadership and team building
- Communication and interpersonal relationships
- Citizen servicing and responsiveness
- Values and ethical issues
- Stress management
- Managerial and organization excellence-related issues

Considering the diverse group and age profile, it was decided that the course should be residential and conducted in the UMC in order to benefit from the ambience of the training institute. Further, methodologies such as group discussions and presentations, case studies and guided exercises would be used in abundance in addition to lecture mode. Emphasis was placed on promoting attitudinal change. Management experts and professionals would conduct the training.



Participants in a typical lecture session

The course was designed to be for one week (six days), with of a maximum of 25 participants in each group. To assess and to reinforce learning, a ‘vertical interactive’ session was proposed on the concluding day, bringing in senior representatives of KMC. After assessing the training need analysis, the training was divided into four learning units with inputs as detailed below. The second half of the course focused principally on attitudinal issues.



Participants during group exercise



Participant presenting after group exercise

Table 1: Module of Training adopted

Learning Unit (LU)	Subjects	Contact Hours	Method	Faculty
(I) Urban planning, management and governance	Introduction to Urbanization	Total 5 hrs	Lecture, discussion, demonstration	UMC
	History of Kolkata Municipal Corporation			KMC
	Legislative and Constitutional Framework of ULBs			UMC
	Urban planning, management and governance			
(II) Municipal service delivery	Right to Information Act and Citizens Charter	Total 7 hrs	Lecture, discussion, guided exercise	UMC
	JNNURM: Reforms and concepts			Management Expert
	Servicing the customer			
	Managing change in municipal service delivery			
(III) Organisation development,	Motivational leadership and teambuilding	Total 8 hrs	Discussion, demonstration, case study, guided	Management Expert
	Organization and personnel management			Do

leadership and management	Values in administration		exercise	UMC
	Working philosophy in public administration			KMC
(IV) Personal effectiveness	Communication skills in improving interpersonal relationship	Total 9 hrs	Discussion, guided exercise, case study	Management Expert
	Stress management			UMC
	Time management			Management Expert
	Problem solving and decision making			UMC
	Leadership competencies			UMC
(V)	Vertical interactive session and course evaluation	3-4 hrs	Open discussion and question-answer	All faculties and KMC representative
Total		32 hrs		

A total of 22 courses were conducted and 426 Assistant Managers were covered. Priority was given to good coordination between the teaching faculties to assess daily progress, and each day began with a recapitulation presentation by the participants to help consolidate learning. Some other key elements were as follows:

- Since the courses were residential, the group was offered morning yoga-cum-exercise session, for a refreshing start to the day.
- Knowledge inputs were concentrated in the first half of the day.
- Extending the afternoon session up to 5.30 pm was challenging for the 45-55 age group. A small break of tea and snacks worked nicely in the evening, and a few of the sessions on motivational and attitudinal inputs extended until 6.30 pm.
- Seating arrangements were ‘U’ shaped to ensure eye contact and unobstructed interaction amongst participants and trainers.
- It was suggested that KMC form mixed groups of male and female (13%) participants.



Panel of faculty in a typical interactive session
(author 4 far left, author 1 far right)

5. Overcoming Learning Barriers

Learning barriers as identified by Bhattacharya (1983) were addressed using various methods and with good results, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Method and Impacts of overcoming learning barriers

Barriers	Example	Method Used	Impact/Status
Perceptual	Trainees can't understand citizens' perception about service delivery	Visual exercise on perception followed by group discussion on differences in interpretation	Good
Cultural	Municipal service provision perceived predominantly as 'favours' or 'gratis' not 'service', bureaucratic culture	Deliberate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion using example from individual's experiences as citizen. • Role play • Case studies on service delivery 	Good
Emotional	Emotional attachment with the organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture session on history of KMC. • Best practices of organizations evolved, highlighted and appreciated 	Good
Intellectual	Discomfort with exercises and instruments in English language	Translated and explained in vernacular language by trainers	Good. Bengali version of material is being prepared.
Expressive	Lack of participation due to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apathy towards training • Poor communication ability • Poor listening • Low motivation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interactive participative session • Practice of presentation skill in recap session made mandatory • Personalised feedback by trainer on behavioural instruments data 	Good
Environmental	Scepticism on implementation of learning at KMC	Issue addressed throughout sessions (but need also for non-training interventions)	Positive attitudinal change confirmed through post-training evaluation

6. Form and impact of 'vertical interactive' session



A typical vertical interactive session

The basic form of the vertical interactive session an open unstructured discussion. Tea and snacks were provided during what was a long session. Coordination and preparedness among senior KMC officials taking part and teaching faculty members was a pre-requisite.

The course coordinator, after giving an introduction, remained almost silent and only facilitated the process. A senior officer from KMC would start the discussion by taking feedback about the course and its applicability in the job situation once participants returned to their departments. During the response from a given participant, faculty present in the session would ask questions and elaborate on issues raised to reinforce learning. Other participants were also allowed to participate in the exchange, and discussions were open-minded, transparent and candid. Figures 2 and 3 depict the process of the session and the roles of those involved.



Faculties addressing in a vertical interactive session

Figure 2: Morphology of 'vertical interactive' session

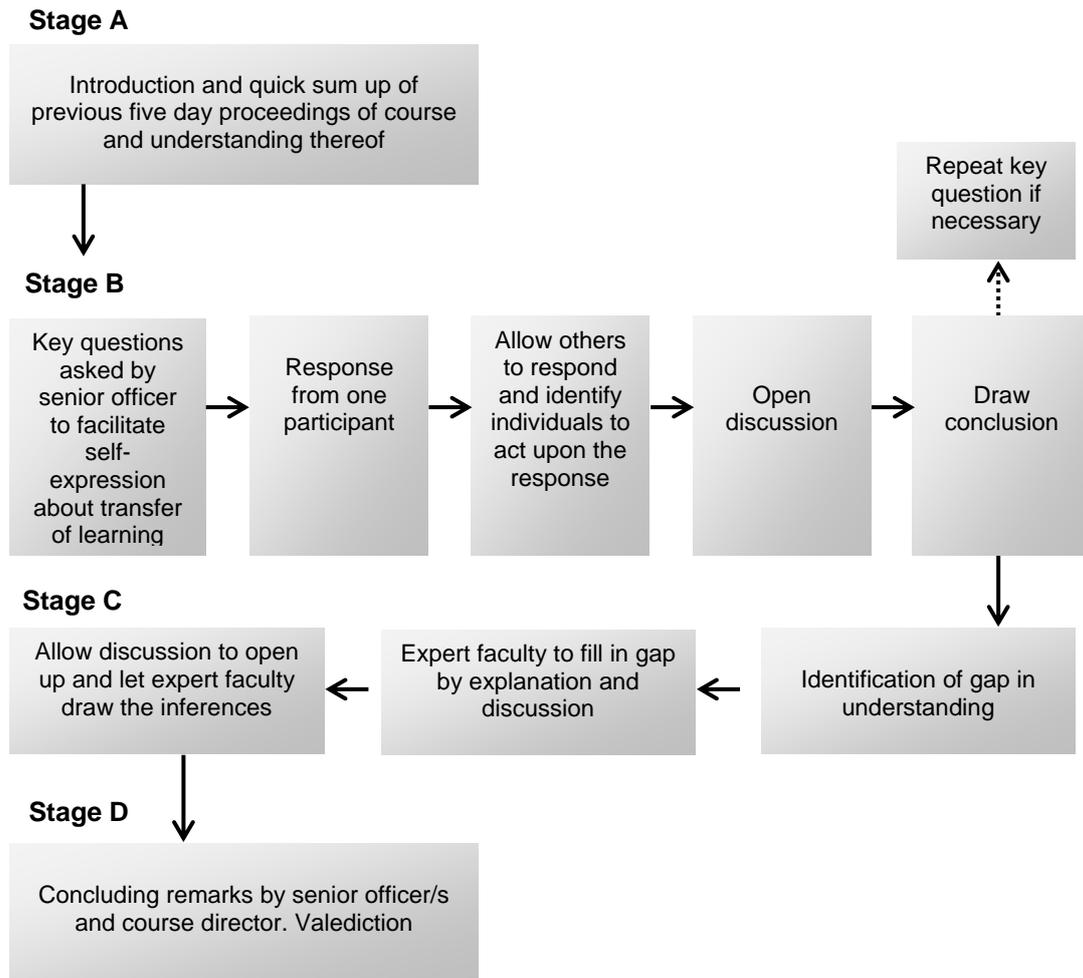


Figure 3: Roles of those involved

	Key role		Optional role	
Time	15 min	60 min	30 min	15 min
Activity of:	Introduction (Stage A)	Open discussion and identification of learning gaps (Stage B)	Reinforcement of learning by faculty (Stage C)	Conclusion (Stage D)
Course Director				
KMC senior officer				
Expert faculty 1				
Expert faculty 2				
Participants				

7. Evaluation of the course

An evaluation of the course was conducted, as is usual, by a questionnaire survey on the final day as well as by verbal interaction (see Table 3). It appears that in-service trainees awarded higher scores than those for induction courses. This may be due to their greater understanding of managerial skills required for situations faced in job situations. It also appears that behavioural subjects and faculty had greater impact than technical subjects. Most participants were of the opinion that they could have performed better at work if they had undergone this course in the early years of their career.

Table 3: Extracts from course evaluation

No. of courses: 22 No. of participants: 372(M)+54(F) Total 426	Average score for in-service courses (scale 1-4)	Average score for induction course (scale 1-4)
Structural organization of the course	3.46	3.37
Usefulness of the training for future jobs	3.33	3.29
Benefits from interaction between participants	3.12	2.91
Overall impression	3.37	3.20
Interaction with faculty	3.75	3.68
Evaluation of Faculty (both visiting and in-house)		
Technical topics LU I & II	3.02	2.94
Behavioural topics LU III & IV	3.20	3.19

Source: Urban Management Centre 2006-08

At the end of the week-long course, which reminded them of their own student life, participants talked about their failures, successes and frustrations in the job situation and even personal lives. Many environmental constraints surfaced which needed to be addressed by organisational interventions other than training. This made it a challenge to reorient them to a positive attitude towards service delivery.

Subsequent feedback from KMC was that after the course participants were very eager to do better in their new leadership role, and that their performance was much improved, but organisational constraints remained a hindrance to capacity building.

8. Validation of Training



Participants during group exercise

Post-training self assessments as well as peer group assessments were sought after one and six months. Post-training evaluation cum transfer-of-learning questionnaires were given to participants, who were asked to submit the completed forms at IUM after two months. Supervising officers were asked separately about the performance of Assistant

Managers later on. Primary findings of these assessments are as follows.

- 55% of participants specifically indicated that they could improve their work efficiency in managerial roles after the training.
- 44% mentioned that the training helped them in the work.
- 62% stated that after the training they could form a good team at their workplace.
- Almost all noted that their interface with citizens was improved and 58% were emphatic that the training improved their outlook towards citizens and helped a lot in interaction with citizens at large, resulting in good service delivery.
- All identified improvements in time management, and 31% specifically mentioned this element.
- Participants indicated that all subjects included in the training had helped them to improve their efficiency. However, subjects like team building, communication and interpersonal relationships, values in administration, stress management, the Right to Information Act and Citizens' Charter were seen as most effective.
- Supervising officers identified a significant improvement in participants' approach towards service delivery. It was reported that the Assistant Managers expressed much eagerness for better performance on the part of departmental heads.

One to two years after this program, a series of follow-up and review workshops is proposed to be conducted by KMC.

9. Discussion and conclusion

For effective service delivery, a sound combination of working knowledge, skills and appropriate attitudes towards customer service is essential for functionaries of all municipalities/corporations and other public utility providers. Both training and non-training interventions can facilitate improved performance. This study has identified the following pre-requisites for training intervention to bring about attitudinal change.

1. The client authority must be convinced of the need for attitudinal change to achieve organizational excellence.
2. The authority must identify the right group of staff, the right training needs and the right institute to deliver the training intervention. In addition, there must be a committed senior-level coordinating officer, who will steer the whole process in a systematic manner and establish good relations with other departments and staff.
3. Committed and accountable service from the training institute is essential. There must be a dedicated staff member who can understand the training need, suggest suitable modules in a consultative way, monitor the implementation of those modules and make changes if necessary.
4. Effective teaching faculty are required, who can deal with adult psychology well. Faculty who are effective in human relationships and possess excellent communication skills as well as in depth knowledge in the relevant subjects can do wonders. The success of learning sessions depends on the situational understanding of a particular group and their entry behaviour, and fine-tuning of teaching accordingly. Use of appropriate adult training methodologies and trainee-based experiential learning is necessary.
5. Close coordination and strong relations between the client authority, training provider institute, and faculty (internal and visiting) is very important. To bring about attitudinal change this has to go beyond a normal client-consultant relationship.
6. Logistics such as residential accommodation, meal service etc. must be of good quality to provide a catalytic input for training interventions to improve service delivery – learning by seeing and experiencing.
7. Periodic and appropriate follow-up action combined with complementary non-training interventions must be in place, and post-training assessment and validation is strongly suggested for this type of program.

The basic learning as well as experience from this series of courses is that attitudinal change is possible for existing functionaries of an organization, provided the proper ambience for training is created; expert faculty, committed and accountable, are engaged; and the positive support as well as involvement of the senior management of the client organisation is ensured.



Prof. Som of UMC, ATI giving the certificates

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