

# Video as an Assessment Tool in International Development

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## Introduction

Assessment of international development projects related to institution building and training can utilize videotaping as a powerful documentation tool to supplement written reports. Care must be taken, however, not to superimpose assessor cultural bias in what is recorded and how the recordings are made, in order to portray the culture of the institution with clarity.

## Enhancing the Assessment Process

In both formal and non-formal educational settings, the use of a portable video camera and recorder can greatly enhance the assessment process. Assessment, by definition, especially in regard to institutions and their effectiveness, relates to developing a framework in which the basic function and objectives of such an institution are weighed against performance criteria of some kind, such as process, product, context, and inputs (Worthen, 1973). In developing countries, trainers, evaluators, program directors, even researchers have been asked to become involved in assessments of one type or another. For instance, in Nigeria one might be asked to assess the effectiveness of programs which train women to become better farm managers. Or, in Pakistan, one might be asked to assist with the assessment of how textbooks are produced and utilized for primary schools. In such situations observational techniques will need to be employed whereby the (researcher) assessor "gathers his data by noting certain behaviors of his subjects in specific situations. The major problem in observation is in assuring that the behavior is recorded objectively and reliably" (Lehman, 1971).

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Videotaping what is going on in the target area of assessment is a powerful non-print and non-numerical record. Videotapes made of selected primary classroom social interaction patterns, for instance, which accompany a written report become concept refiners and referents for user audiences. Such new assessment tools are needed to improve the effectiveness of communication about what is actually occurring in institutional development in international projects (Bergsma, 1986).

**Concept refining is frequently a critical area of need in assessment reports.** It is difficult to use words to describe cultural contexts, human interaction patterns, and physical settings. Frequently, in written reports, appendices are used to provide additional conceptual glue for assessment reports. Videotapes, made on site, provide a very different, colorful communication means. In a day of interactive video and of highly sophisticated computer programs as learning devices, one should not view video pictures as an unusual means to develop concepts.

**Concept referent development is another use of video in assessment.** Referents, the mental images in which we couch our use of words, are frequently different for the assessor and the reader of the assessment report. Professional jargon is a fact of life for most disciplines and unfortunately beclouds the communication; becomes "fog," which makes hazy the intended meanings. Chinese and Japanese who are speaking together frequently draw "pictures," ideographs in the air or on an envelope, so they can be sure they are using a similar referent. The picture brings home the meaning.

Videotapes record process, physical settings, and people using equipment who interact in special ways. Videotapes become powerful means to communicate concepts and provide referent commonalities for all involved in the assessment process. Pictorial records also are memory joggers. Videos can be used as effective means to publicize projects and provide the "visual metaphor" to enhance acceptance for change (Tiene, 1986).

Videotapes can be used to show change—graphically! Flood damage assessment, for instance, can be enhanced dramatically by video presentations of the before-and-after scenes. Health assessment projects, forestry assessment, in fact, most areas of technical assistance in international settings, can utilize the video camera as a recording device. For instance, in the On Farm Water Management Program in Pakistan, supported by the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and USAID, assessments frequently took the form of written reports and much numerical documentation of gain and improvement of facili-

ties. Little or no field evidence was presented in video form until the Federal Directorate requested that a follow-up videotape be made showing the accomplishments of the project. *Post-hoc* video presentations such as this have value, but on-going assessment referents using video would have been even more helpful, particularly since assessment is related to possible change in both the structure and the process of the institution in question.

#### Cautionary Note

**A few words of caution.** Bias can creep into video assessment, particularly if the video is used to prove a particular point, before the fact. Assessment looks to what *is*. Video can be an excellent means for providing validation and documentation of program structures, and the unique culture of the organization. Trainers and those involved in organizational development must take care that their own bias does not creep into the video assessment process because of what is *not* recorded.

As Schein says: "Some OD practitioners espouse optimistic humanistic values, i.e., that individual and organizational goals can and should be integrated, that higher levels of involvement and participation will lead to higher levels of organizational performance, that if given a chance the individual will exercise self-control and work on behalf of the organization, that the work place can and must be physically and psychologically healthy, that decision processes work best under conditions of high trust, openness . . ." (Schein, 1986). This type of humanistic bias may "fog" the video presentations made for assessment purposes unless great care is taken to leave the lens open to the realities of the "organizational culture," to use Schein's term.

Despite the above words of caution, the use of videotapes as documentation devices in organizational assessment may prove to be a lively and compelling means of providing visual evidence to support written documentation. □

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