What makes good development management?

Alan Thomas

Introduction

In a previous paper (Thomas 1996) I asked 'What is development management?' I was looking for a counter to 'the idea that management principles are universal, so that, whatever the context, management can be taught using the same learning materials'. Arguing that 'the nature of the task determines the appropriate version of management', I found that the answer to my question depended on what view I took of development. If development is viewed as a long-term historical change process, then development management may be taken to mean the management of any type of task in the context of development. If, however, development is seen in terms of deliberate efforts at progress, then development management would be characterised as:

> the management of deliberate efforts at progress on the part of one of a number of agencies, the management of intervention in the process of social change in the context of conflicts of goals, values and interests. (Thomas 1996:106)

Thus the two approaches to the definition of development lead to different ideas of what is meant by development management, which might be summarised as *management in development* and *management of development*. I went on to list a number of conceptual and skill areas which would be important particularly for management of development, which, I argued, emphasised 'areas and approaches less well covered in traditional subjects like development administration', so that 'there is indeed a substantially new field here' (ibid.:109).

I have since begun to think that the arguments I put forward did not go far enough, on at least two counts. First, I may have demonstrated how to determine when it is development management rather than simply management which is taking place. However, this may not be enough for us to recognise when development management is being done *well*. Surely if development management really is distinctive, then *good* development management will be distinctively different from simply good management in a development context? It now appears to me that my 1996 paper was limited in that it did not address this question directly. In that paper I attempted to unite the 'command and control' and 'empowerment and enabling' views of management into 'the simple idea of management as *getting the work done by the best means available'* (ibid.:100). This in turn led me to define development management in terms of what is needed to carry out development tasks successfully. Since I engaged no further in discussion of *how* best to undertake development management, the implication was that good development management, like good management in general, simply means succeeding in the task at hand.

Second, I have become increasingly uncertain whether I really did succeed in making the case that there is something distinctive about development management. Let me emphasise that I have not changed my mind on this point. With others, I have spent the intervening period devising learning materials on development management aimed at helping students develop skills and competences in the areas listed. I have met many students, who are usually simultaneously practising development managers, both from Europe and from Southern Africa, who have found these materials both intellectually stimulating and of practical use. There is indeed something distinctive and substantially new here. Again, the limitation of my previous approach seems to lie in my excessive reliance on defining development management in relation to a view of development in terms of specific development interventions as a distinctive type of task. My uncertainty is over whether it is really the case that what is distinctive about development management derives entirely from the nature of the task.

In the 1996 paper I mentioned a somewhat different approach to defining development management in one or two places without really carrying the argument through. In this different approach, *development* management would signify a particular *style* of management rather than merely management of a particular kind of *activity*. I have come to think that this corresponds to a third approach to defining development itself,

and the view of development management entailed is at least as important as the other two. In this third approach, development is neither historical process nor a set of deliberate intervention tasks but a particular kind of *orientation*, an orientation towards progressive change. Ideally, this development orientation guides *all* the activities of development organisations, not just specific development interventions. This approach has several things in common with the idea of development management as the management of interventions, notably the importance of value-based conflicts. Whether one thinks of managing specific interventions aimed at positive change or an orientation towards progressive change which guides all the management of all activities, what is thought positive or progressive will clearly vary according to subjective beliefs, ideology, and interests, and thus give rise to such conflicts. However, the new approach has the potential to make development management more broadly applicable, and thus seems worth pursuing at least a little further.

Thus we can define development management as management undertaken with a development orientation, rather than management in the context of the development process or the management of development interventions or tasks. I will dub this third view of what is meant by development management: management *for* development, to add the previous two: management *in* development and management *of* development. This extends the matrix produced in my 1996 paper, as follows:

	Development as:	*Development management* as:
1	historical change process	management *in* development (management in the context of the development process)
2	deliberate efforts at progress	management *of* development (management of development efforts)
3	orientation towards progressive change	management *for* development (management with a development orientation).

I am not suggesting that my previous emphasis on the management of development tasks was wrong. However, I do suggest that a task-oriented approach has limitations. It does not help us to recognise the special characteristics of good development management, and it does not really provide the best counter to the notion that management principles are

universal. I would argue that a combination of all three approaches is needed. To this end I intend to develop further the idea of development management as a style of management, of 'management for development'.

Limitations of task orientation

Previously, I had argued that 'there is something specific about those tasks which may be called development tasks' (ibid.:101). I identified four distinctive features of development tasks (ibid.:106):

- external social goals rather than internal organisational ones;
- influencing or intervening in social processes rather than using resources to meet goals directly;
- goals subject to value-based conflicts; and
- the importance of process.

In effect, these 'features' are aspects of the context in which development interventions are undertaken. In particular, they are mostly about the goals of development interventions. In practice, all kinds of tasks may be required to meet development goals. There are certain kinds of activities which are likely to be central to development management defined in this way, and which correspond to some of the conceptual and skill areas identified in the 1996 paper. These include, for example, negotiation and brokering, policy analysis, and the appraisal of the likely impact of proposed interventions. However, when broken down into detailed tasks these activities cannot be said to be specific to development management; similar tasks occur in any management context, although the goals may be quite different.

A task-oriented approach to development is reflected in the ubiquity of logical framework planning and its variants, in which development interventions are planned on the basis of devising a logic by which tasks or activities will lead to desired outcomes and thence to the achievement of set goals. The tasks tend to be evaluated by indicators which show simply how fully they have been carried out, while the achievement of outcomes and goals is evaluated by measuring pre-determined indicators specific to them; and if tasks are completed without achieving the goals this is attributed to deficiencies in the assumptions made about the logical connections between them (Gasper 1996).

Thus, with this approach, once it is decided what activities are needed, it is then simply a matter of getting the tasks completed. The management required appears not to differ from that required to get similar tasks done in any context. However, there are several limitations to an entirely task-

oriented approach. First, the concentration on defining what is required, and then getting the tasks completed by the best means available, appears to downplay the possibility that the *way* a task is performed may affect the outcomes and hence the achievement of goals. For example, a micro-finance institution may have fieldworkers whose tasks include regularly collecting repayments from women's groups. Completing this task could be done quite mechanically, with the fieldworkers themselves doing most of the calculations and organising the required meetings. If, however, the collection is done via a mechanism that involves active participation by the women themselves, it may be more likely both that the women gain confidence and self-esteem and that repayment levels remain high, even with less frequent contact from the fieldworkers, thus contributing better to long-term goals of empowering women and financial sustainability.

Of course, management theorists have already been debating limitations to task orientation in conventional management, so that this in itself is not distinctive to a discussion of development management. Indeed, in the 1996 paper I referred to the discussion by Paton (1991) of task orientation (which he calls the 'instrumental' aspect of management) and noted (ibid.:101) that:

> this *instrumental* aspect of management needs to be complemented with a realisation of the importance of the expressive aspect of management, in which values and ideas are promoted as part of how an organisation (and its members and managers) defines itself (and themselves), not just as one way of getting things done. (Emphasis in original)

This points to a second limitation of task orientation. Not only does it downplay the importance of how a task is done as opposed to just getting it done anyhow; it ignores the importance of acting consistently with the organisation's own values in order to reinforce those values and thus the organisation's culture and sense of its own worth. For example, an international NGO may undertake a campaign to raise funds from the public in the Northern country where it is based. Finding images to use on posters and television for its campaign may be undertaken as a task with just the images themselves and their effectiveness in mind. However, for many such NGOs it is important that images are chosen which show respect for those depicted in them and are used with their consent, since mutual respect and self-determination are among the development values adopted by the NGOs, and it is seen as crucial to their integrity as development agencies that they act consistently with their values.

There is a third limitation, which has similarities with the first two but goes beyond them. It relates to the two aspects of public action (Wuyts et al. 1992; Thomas 1997). Public action means not only acting to meet public need but promoting values which define what is regarded as public need and how it is regarded. Development management surely also includes promoting values, in particular what is to be regarded as development, in this way. Again, conventional management also includes promoting values. However, while business management promotes the values of business, I would argue that good development management should promote the values of development.

One might try to reconcile this with a task orientation by arguing that political activity devoted to contesting the definition of public need in a particular arena is also a kind of task to be undertaken, noting that 'the importance of process' is one of the features of development tasks. However, such 'tasks' are so contingent on the activities of others and their interrelationships that it becomes virtually impossible to analyse them in terms of whether they have been fully completed and evaluating their outcomes by pre-set indicators. For example, there are many areas of public concern now accepted as such largely because of the efforts of NGOs and other development organisations, including the rights of indigenous communities, the need to combat environmental degradation, child rights, and many others. These are not accepted because of specific interventions undertaken by the organisations concerned to make them so, but because they consistently built those concerns into the way they reacted to events and took opportunities, over a long period. Development management must include managing values within and between organisations so that they are promoted over a period in cases like this.

Management for development

Thus, while accepting that development management often means managing deliberately designed development interventions and hence ensuring that the required tasks are done 'by the best means available', I have also noted some important limitations of relying entirely on a task-oriented approach.

Management *for* (rather than *of*) development implies a style of management in which any and every activity is undertaken in such a way as to enhance development. It applies both to activities which are designed as a deliberate development intervention and to other

activities. Thus, for planned development tasks, it implies considering the way they are done, not just getting immediate results. The 1996 paper mentioned empowerment as a value which might be expressed in the choice of how activities are carried out: 'in some circumstances, to empower members of an organisation or community is more important in its own right than getting any particular job done' (ibid.:103–4). If empowerment is taken as part of a particular value-based definition of development, then managing in such a way as to empower would be an example of managing for development. In the example of the micro-finance institution given above, this could be a justification for using participatory mechanisms, even if there were no benefit in terms of improved repayment rates.

There are also plenty of tasks undertaken by a development organisation which are not specifically part of a development intervention. On the one hand there are tasks of organisational maintenance and day-to-day administration. On the other, there are occasions when the organisation's developmental values are called more clearly into question by unexpected changes in circumstances or by the actions of other organisations, so that a reaction is required which entails new tasks. Once again it is the way in which an organisation reacts to such opportunities and unforeseen challenges that demonstrates the extent to which its management can be termed *development* management in the sense of management which is always *for* development.

An extreme example here is furnished by a development organisation in a complex emergency. Providing relief in a quickly changing situation exacerbated by violent conflict makes it almost impossible to work for development when there is so much to be done in terms of response to immediate need. Nevertheless, it may be possible to maintain values such as mutual respect and a belief in people's right to and potential for self-determination, and to take what opportunities exist to put these values into practice. A less extreme example would be how an organisation undertaking an awareness-raising campaign responds to an unexpected opportunity for publicity. Once again, management *for* development would ensure the same care was taken about values of mutual respect and so on as with carefully planned elements of the campaign.

It may help here to conceive development at several levels, with a degree of linkage between them. First there is the level of individual human development, often thought of rather mechanistically in terms of training, but also including notions such as empowerment which can apply both to staff and to 'clients', or members of communities with

which an organisation is working. There is organisational development, which incorporates the more specific discipline of organisation development (OD) with its emphasis on learning, reflection, and processes of intervention and change at the group and organisation levels (see, for example, Schein 1969; Argyris 1971). Then institutional development is distinguished from organisational development by involving directed change which takes place outside any one organisation (Cooke 1997; Fowler 1997), particularly when progressive change in institutions in the sense of norms and values accompanies change in the organisations and organisational forms which carry those norms and values. Finally, development at the societal level may be thought of as resulting from the combination or accumulation of changes or development at lower levels. In proposing that development management is a style of management which embodies particular development values, one is suggesting that the values which would underpin one's vision or model of a well developed society should also underpin one's actions at the lower levels. Thus, for example, an ideal developed society may be seen as one where every human being's potential can be fulfilled, as in the suggestion by Dudley Seers that 'the realisation of the potential of human personality ... is a universally acceptable aim', in his celebrated article 'The meaning of development' (Seers 1979, first published 1969). The implication is that development management means managing, as far as possible, in such a way as to enhance the potential of those one is working with directly, and developing organisations that carry similar values, even if this is not the most straightforward way of getting a particular job done.

When development management is thought of as management *of* development, that formulation contrasts it, implicitly at least, with the management of other types of activity (the production of goods and services, organisational maintenance, administration, public relations, etc.). However, if we conceive it as management *for* development, the implicit contrast is with management for other purposes, notably with management for profit. And just as the idea of profit as a 'bottom line' can guide any and all activities and regulate the linkages between levels, so too the idea of development as an ultimate good can potentially be applied at all levels and be used to relate good practice at one level to the others. Thus, management for profit implies linking the way people are managed in terms of 'human resource' to managing organisations in such a way as to generate maximum dividends to owners, and eventually to a view of society in which output and added value are the ultimate

measures of good. Similarly, management for development relates managing people to bring out their potential, to organisational development aimed at the regeneration of positive values and to a view of society in which development values such as maximising the potential of all individuals and groups are upheld in their own right.

One may ask if management for profit and management for development can be combined. I would answer that this may be possible in some circumstances. Indeed, a development orientation may be a positive benefit to business organisations, in terms of developing both their staff on the one hand and their relations with governments and development organisations on the other. However, there will also be circumstances where the two will clash, and where the way management is carried out will depend critically on what values are given precedence.

The notion of development management as management which aims at development consistently at all levels does not do away with disagreement over the meaning of development. The values to be incorporated into development may differ markedly between development organisations even when they are involved in similar areas of development work. For example, some organisations supporting micro-finance initiatives do so by promoting western-style entrepreneurialism, while others specifically promote women's empowerment. In both cases, the organisations concerned might reasonably claim to be performing what I have called 'management for development' by building the values of, on the one hand, entrepreneurialism, and, on the other, empowerment, into the way they conduct their activities at all levels.

While there is not likely to be agreement in detail on one particular version of development and its underlying values, there may be some general principles in common between them. One is the notion of *progressive* change, which I take to mean not just change towards one's particular ideal but change which builds on previous development and in turn lays the basis for further development. Capacity building and organisational learning are both very important concepts within this type of view of development. Development management, then, is not just a question of getting the task at hand completed by the best means available. It also means simultaneously building the capacity to undertake future tasks, and learning how to be able to cope with what at present are unspecified tasks.

A normative definition of development management

I can now come back to the new question which I posed in the title of this paper: what makes *good* development management? Thinking in terms of management *for* development allows us to evaluate development management in its own terms. In other words, the more it lives up to the essential idea of being *for* development, the better it is.

This is tantamount to a normative definition of development management. Development management *should* be management *for* development, that is, oriented towards development, and, one might argue, it only really deserves the name if it lives up to this ideal.

By contrast, think how we have to evaluate management *of* development. This implies assessing how well development tasks have been done. On the whole, there are two possibilities. One is that the criteria are internally determined, in the sense that the development intervention was designed with its own objectives and pre-stated means of verification, as in the classic use of logical framework planning. The drawback here is that apparently simply being less ambitious makes it easier for development management to be done well. Alternatively, the criteria by which the achievement of development tasks are judged may be externally determined, as when standards of efficiency are applied which might apply to the same or similar tasks in any management context. For example, fundraising, or the delivery of relief services, may be evaluated by criteria such as the amount of money raised per unit of resource spent, and the cost of supplying a defined service in a particular location. Such criteria may appear to give an objective basis for assessing how well development management is carried out by one development organisation compared to another, but the values underlying the criteria are not specific to development and could apply just as well to fundraising for an élitist university or to relief supplied by the military. However, such an approach certainly has its appeal, as witness the spread of contracting for the delivery of services in the development field, which clearly implies that the criteria for the satisfactory completion of the development tasks concerned can be defined even before the organisation which takes on the tasks becomes involved.

Using the normative definition of development management, as management which should be oriented towards development, certainly ensures that good development management is not the same as just good management. But doing this has its own limitations and dangers. One

limitation is that development management in this sense is not always possible. For example, supplying food or rebuilding infrastructure after a natural disaster, or reacting to adverse publicity or to a proposal which you believe will cause environmental damage, are cases where an immediate focus on a task may be called for which does not allow for specific promotion of a development orientation. I argued above that in a similar case, such as a development organisation working in a complex emergency, it may, nevertheless, be possible to bring developmental principles to bear on the work being done, so that what I have called 'management for development' may still be attempted. However, although this is an ideal, it seems necessary to admit that it cannot always be realised in such situations.

As for dangers, one is similar to the problem just mentioned, with internally determined criteria for assessing development management, when thought of in terms of tasks to be completed. What count as being oriented towards development is relative to how the particular organisation conceives development, and a weak definition may make it relatively easy to appear to meet the criteria. Perhaps more importantly, there is the danger of a completely relativistic approach, where development management in a particular organisation is good if it succeeds in promoting the developmental values of the organisation concerned, even if those values are contested or even abhorrent to others.

There is a clear need for some external validation of what is done in the name of development management. At the same time, unlike the concept of profit where arguments are mostly about how to measure it or how it is created rather than about what it is, there is no universal definition of development and the debates about it readily take the form of value-based conflicts. As noted above, development management includes managing activities aimed at contesting the definition of development and at promoting particular values. In my case, I would promote the ideal of enabling all human beings to realise their full capacity, though even with such a broad definition there is still plenty of room for disagreement about priorities and about ways and means of achieving even part of the ideal. Nevertheless, as a version of 'people-centred' development (Korten 1990), this fits with my suggestion above that development management should be thought of in terms of positive linkages between development, capacity building, and learning at individual, organisational, institutional, and societal levels.

Finally, no discussion of development management is complete without some mention of power. The 1996 paper differentiated between

development management carried out on behalf of those in positions of power and on behalf of the relatively powerless. In the former case either the 'command and control' or the 'empowerment and enabling' mode of management might be employed, depending on the nature of the task, whereas in the latter case 'empowerment and enabling' was preferred because of the particular need of the powerless for empowerment before they could take part in development. This paper has argued for a view of development management as management *for* development, where development links personal development of individuals with a broader view, which includes the ideal of enabling all human beings to realise their full capacity. Thus, I have effectively been arguing that the empowerment and enabling mode of management is particularly appropriate for development management, irrespective of the particular task at hand, something which the 1996 paper put forward only for the special case of development management on behalf of the powerless.

Does this imply that the normative definition of development management gives precedence to development management on behalf of the powerless? I stop short of giving an unequivocal 'yes' to this question. On the one hand, those with power are not the most likely to support the equitable, people-centred view of development I put forward above. Thus, managing development interventions which they might promote might not be managing for development in the sense put forward in this paper. On the other hand, no management can achieve much, however strong its orientation towards development, without some access to power to carry out at least some activities.

In conclusion, it seems most useful to consider development management as including both the management of the specific tasks involved in development interventions (management *of* development) and the normative idea of management oriented towards development ideals (management *for* development), as well as the more straightforward notion of management in a development context (management *in* development). The clearest examples of *good* development management will be those which use the enabling and empowerment mode of management to achieve development goals for the relatively powerless. However, the majority of cases will be more ambiguous, with value-based conflicts, contestation over the definition of development itself, and power struggles. Development management will often remain an ideal rather than a description of what takes place.

References

Argyris, C. (1971) *Management and Organization Development*, New York: McGraw-Hill.

Cooke, B. (1997) 'The theory of ID and OD: a comparative review for practitioners', mimeo, Manchester: IDPM, University of Manchester.

Fowler, A. (1997) *Striking a Balance: A Guide to Enhancing the Effectiveness of Non-Governmental Organisations in International Development*, London: Earthscan.

Gasper, D. (1996) 'Analysing Policy Arguments' in R. Apthorpe and D. Gasper (eds.) *Arguing Development Policy: Frames and Discourses*, London: Frank Cass in association with EADI.

Korten, D. (1990) *Getting to the 21st Century: Voluntary Action and the Global Agenda*, West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press.

Paton, R. (1991) *Managing with a Purpose* (Book 1 of OU course B789 *Managing Voluntary and Nonprofit Enterprises)*, Milton Keynes: The Open University.

Schein, E. (1969) *Process Consultation: Its Role in Organization Development*, Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley.

Seers, D. (1969; 1979) 'The meaning of development' in D. Lehmann (ed.) *Development Theory: Four Critical Studies*, London: Frank Cass.

Thomas, A. (1996) 'What is development management?', *Journal of International Development* (8)1: 95–110.

Thomas, A. (1997) 'The role of NGOs in development management: a public action approach', Paper for International Conference on Public Sector Management for the Next Century, University of Manchester.

Wuyts, M., M. Mackintosh and T. Hewitt (1992) *Development Policy and Public Action*, Oxford: OUP.