

# Best Practices in Managing Resource-Limited Research: The Case of Comprehensive Analysis of the Poverty Situation in the Southern Tagalog Island Provinces<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

*The paper presents the researcher's experience in managing and completing a qualitative research on the comprehensive analysis of the poverty situations in Region IV-B known as the MIMAROPA Region under very limited time and budget. Constrained with the issues, the researchers employed various strategies to complete the research study. Along the process, best practices were discovered. These experiences gave birth to a new R&D management framework the "Community In Vitro and In Vivo Development Approach", the novelty of this study. The Key Informant Interview (KII) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) are the main tool used in gathering data to draw the real picture of the poverty situations in the five island provinces (Mindoro Occidental, Mindoro Oriental, Marinduque, Romblon and Palawan) in region IV-B. The respondents of the study were from two least progressive municipalities in each province which were identified based on the National Economic and Development Authority classification and that of the Peace and Equity Foundation poverty mapping in 2006. Eleven (11) Key Informants were purposely identified to gather sufficient data. Three Focus Group Discussions were conducted in each municipality from multi-sector groups, and with special groups like; the inmates, rebel returnees, indigenous people and the women's organization. The whole new approach yielded very interesting and relevant results thus showing the efficiency and effectiveness of the new R&D management framework.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Challenged to come up with sensitized and credible data, the Deming's PDSA cycle was employed to ensure continuous quality improvement using the logical sequence of four repetitive steps such as; Plan, Do, Study (Check) and Act. Consistently, Deming's principle on Total Quality Management (TQM) which is synonymous to excellence has been applied in the processes as well.

Aware of the limited time, budget and resources, the researchers were motivated to link with State Universities and Colleges Administrators and Research Managers (VP's and Directors) to provide transportation and accommodation assistance. The researchers did reconnect with friends and relatives in each province for logistics and the PHILARM members served as KII enumerators and FGD facilitators and documenters. The RSU strategy was devised to efficiently manage a resource limited research.

## OBJECTIVES

The study aimed to validate the efficiency of the PDSA cycle as R&D management approach, elucidate the TQM principle as a requisite to R&D project study, show the important qualities of R&D managers and device a paradigm that suits the identified gap in the R&D management.

## SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study focused on the evaluation of the best practices learned in managing a research project with limited time and financial resources, particularly the case of the comprehensive analysis of the poverty situation in the Southern Tagalong island provinces in the Philippines which consistently belong to the top 40 poorest provinces in the country. The respondents were purposively chosen from the two least progressive municipalities identified in each of the five provinces in the region.

This study aims to identify the three major concerns that have direct impact on the poverty situation that need to be addressed immediately and its causes and effects to community development. The study examined the

implications of the current programs as well as planned projects of various institutions relative to poverty issue. The available resources of the selected municipalities were evaluated and the possible areas of intervention for State Colleges and Universities were identified.

## MATERIALS AND PROCEDURE

The study uses a comprehensive framework for assessing top three issues in the ten (10) selected municipalities. It uses quantitative (trend in poverty and related indicators) and qualitative analysis (Key Informant Interview) to assess the poverty situations as it relates to the overall development of the municipality and province. A Focus Group Discussion was organized to confirm the findings in the Key Informant Interviews and gather feedback from key stakeholders, and to identify present programs that address the local poverty situation. An institutional plotting analysis was undertaken to assess the current responses to the state of poverty in the region.

Moreover, the KII & FGD considered as a framework, the use of PDSA teaming with the Total Quality Management (TQM) principle brought the hybrid idea of Community *In Vitro* and *In Vivo* Development Approach in R&D Management.

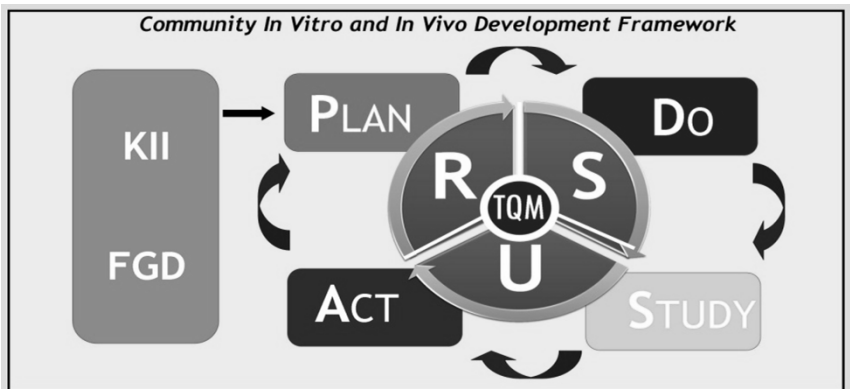


Figure 1. Community In Vitro and In Vivo Development Framework

## MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

The researchers gathered data in the two least progressive municipalities in Romblon and completed the task after ten days. The team

convened to evaluate the first phase of the project implementation using the PDSA cycle as the master guide of the project management. The strengths and weaknesses, and the problems encountered by the researchers were identified and discussed. Possible solutions were pointed out. Later, the research team agreed to repackage the strategy by considering the lessons learned in the previous activity. The feed-backing mechanism was consistently done to improve the system of project management all throughout the data gathering.

The project leader opted to tap local research assistants from each province during data gathering to save on travel costs. The situation prompted the researcher to reconnect with friends, relatives and old acquaintances to facilitate the data gathering. Aware that the budget is limited for the region wide study, the proponent opted to request for logistical support from administrators and R & D managers among the SUC's in Region IV-B.

Included in the study were the following areas:

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Management Problems Encountered**

The main problem that plagued the researchers were limited time and budget. Hence the researchers devised the RSU strategy to address the problems. The researchers Ride On Official Travels (ROOT), every time there was a scheduled R & D related seminar in the region, the project leader volunteered to represent the university and take the opportunity to gather data together with the pre-contacted team members. The Shop for the Lowest Price in Everything (SLOPE) was a rule observed all throughout in buying all the needs relative to the implementation of the project. Transportation, lodging and accommodation, supplies and materials were reused and services were shopped (the lowest price is taken). The Use of Austerity Measures (AUM) was the mantra of everyone involved in the project.

With the insurgency threat in Mindoro, a clearance from the officials of the Philippine Army was secured before proceeding to Bulalacao and Mansalay. In the same way the researchers sought clearance from the rebel returnee group.

The "culture of silence" was one of the most challenging issues encountered by the researchers. Nonetheless, the group made their way to

win the trust and confidence of the target respondents by discovering the least common denominator that existed between and among them, may it be a driver, an employee, an LGU official, a teacher, a Barangay Official, and the like. Commonalities like "Coming from the same province or region", "Having met in previous conferences", "having gone through the same experience" and many other situation that would relate them or anything that can make a connection with the other person to be interviewed. The data gathering ran smoothly on the second day until it was completed.

Dealing with the IP's is another interesting experience, the researchers requested assistance from the Occidental Mindoro State College to secure pass from the elders and gatekeepers of the tribe. Orientation on the culture of the tribe was done prior to the conduct of FGD and KII sessions.

The issues on poor road network and long travel hours were beyond the control of the researchers. The team addressed these issues by developing the values of humility, patience and cheerfulness while doing the job. The safety of the researchers while on travel and visit to far flung areas was another major issue, yet it did not stop the team to successfully complete the study.

It was found out that the use of the PDSA cycle as the guiding principle in the management of the project was effective. As the Total Quality Management principle was highly emphasized to all team members in the entire duration of the study the data were reliable and authentic. With the devised RSU strategy, the project was completed even with limited time, budget and resources. The network and linkages established strengthened the Research Development and Extension resources of the university.

Despite the limitations in conducting research at the local context, different management strategies and principles categorically explained the pragmatic application in qualitative research. These approaches hastened the overall process of planning up to obtaining the sets of objectives stated in the particular study. The devised being formed at the culminating part of the study summarized the desire to answer the perennial problem for an ideal framework and working systems that could possibly address the present situation. The flexibility lies on the role playing aspects of completing the different components of study to be made. This management study reflects the different possibilities of capturing the research managers imagination for assuming the appropriate answers for the given case analyses.

### **Consequences of the Management Decisions and Actions**

The use of the PDSA cycle guaranteed that the data generated were sensitized and credible. It led to an improved approach of the KII and FGD processes from one province to another. Thus, the research procedures consistently improved. The RSU strategy was a major factor that made the completion of the project possible. The Researchers took the risk of crossing rough seas and rugged mountains to meet the respondents and gather the data. They widen their linkages and network that opened new avenues for bigger projects and programs to the university.

Precisely the decision to adapt the *In Vitro In Vivo* Development Framework in RD management perfectly suited the issues and concerns that confronted the researchers. The decisions made through consensus hinging from constant feed-backing mechanism participated by the team work well all the way to the project completion.

### **Implications on Management Decisions and Actions**

The unconventional approach in managing a research project constrained with limited time and budget resulted in several insights; enriched the existing body of knowledge on the methodology and possibly lay down the foundation on doing such approach and using the same principles in future R&D Management studies. The strategies undertaken helped attain the objectives of the study effectively and efficiently to the optimum with the least resource input. Additional funds for new projects and potential extension programs were unveiled. Finally the concept of the "Community *In Vitro* and *In Vivo* Development Framework and the Convergence Web Approach" in R & D Management proved to be an effective strategy.

### **CONCLUSION**

The findings confirmed that PDSA cycle as R&D management approach is an efficient tool that facilitates the fast and accurate level of data collection. While the TQM principle illustrates the different steps to which this R&D project had undergone proved to be an effective manner of filtering the gathered data for the specific purpose of study. Furthermore, the role of the RSU strategy showed how the R&D managers enhanced the facility of the holistic management of the study and its completion.

Moreover, the KII & FGD considered as a framework, the use of PDSA teaming with the Total Quality Management (TQM) principle brought the hybrid idea of Community *In Vitro* and *In Vivo* Development Approach in

R&D Management. The whole process resulted to a sensitized data that guaranteed the integrity of research output. Results led the researchers to conclude that the use of the In Vitro, In Vivo Development framework in RD project implementation and management is indeed effective.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Research Managers are encouraged to use a combination or multi strategies and approaches in the R&D Management Studies. The Community *In Vitro* and *In Vivo* Development Approach be tried out by other research managers in other research projects. R & D Managers should try using a combination of different framework or methodology using multi-agency program application similar to the Convergence Web Approach that the researchers used in the project management. The regular feedback mechanism is recommended to be adapted by RD managers. Research Managers and Research Institutions should come up with a unified policy on fund management from funding agencies, to institutions and to the proponent so as not to hamper the implementation of any project.

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