Developing Leaders for Good Governance



PAHRODF Philippines Australia Human Resource and Organisational Development Facility

In a small portion of Pasig City lies Sapang Liwanag, a creek often unnoticed, but extremely important to the health of Manila Bay, Pasig River and Marikina River as the creek flows to these big bodies of water. For a long time, however, Sapang Liwanag had been clogged with garbage. To address this, the local government of Pasig collaborated with three big commercial establishments to rehabilitate the creek. It was publicprivate partnership at its best: men and women from government and private sectors pooled together manpower, supplies, money, dump trucks, rubber boots, and cleaning tools to de-clog the creek and keep it clean.

Behind the success of this initiative is DILG Cluster Leader Merce Tuico – a petite and soft-spoken lady who stood out from the crowd for her big and creative ideas. Never in her life did Merce imagine that she would lead a pack of men – the Pasig city director and heads of businesses – to do an invaluable water rehabilitation project. She recalled how she used to be reserved, preferring to keep ideas to herself: "Before I am very quiet and shy...I rarely share what's on my mind. In fact, I was the type of person who always says 'okay' because I prefer to simply agree to avoid confrontations." The great thing about the training is that it's all about discovering who you are and what you can do.

CASE STUDY

MERCEDES TUICO Department of the Interior and Local Government



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Merce's transformation was something she did not plan or expect. The turning point in her life came during the cluster leaders' leadership training program, an intervention conducted by the Philippines Australia Human Resource and Organisational Development Facility for DILG.

Life-changing

"Because of the leadership training, my perspective on work changed. I became braver and more confident," said Merce.

Merce, a cluster leader of Pasig City, was one of the participants of the Leadership Development Program, an HR/OD intervention aimed to enhance the leadership competencies of cluster leaders in DILG's provincial offices, enabling them to deliver services more effectively to local government units (LGUs). The program, which ran for 6 days, featured adult learning methodologies such as self-reflection exercises, group sensing sessions, lectures and focus group discussions. Through the training, Merce and the other cluster leaders were able to reflect on their personal leadership journey and gain a better perspective of their leadership competencies and contributions to DILG.

"The great thing about the training is that it's all about discovering who you are and what you can do. I discovered a lot of things about myself through the training – competencies that I can enhance, dreams that I can still pursue. I really came out of my shell because of the program. I think it was the best training I've ever attended!" said Merce.

"Challenges are there to make us grow"

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Applying her learnings

When the city director asked Merce to develop a project for their cooperative arrangement and collaborative undertakings (CACU), she found the opportunity to put her newly acquired knowledge and skills to good use. That's how she started the project on Sapang Liwanag. "We have regular clean-up drives in the barangays and I saw Sapang Liwanag, which was already a dying creek back then. I pitched the idea of engaging the support of nearby companies to my director and he liked the idea. But, of course, it was tricky to get the support of the companies. In fact, they refused to cooperate at first. So we dialogued with them to show them that DILG was serious for a partnership to rehabilitate the creek," she said.

Aside from the challenge to get support from the local community, Merce also discovered that the local government lacked funds for the program. But despite the difficulties, Merce gamely accepted the challenge, regularly reflecting on the learnings she gained from the leadership program: "Before when I have a problem I react to it. But now, thanks to the leadership training, I respond to it. When you react to problems you tend to focus on the negative so you complain and question things. But when you respond to problems, you think of solutions ... so the negative becomes positive."

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After much prodding, Merce's initiative to regularly dialogue with the stakeholders paved the way to gain the trust of the companies. This resulted to a memorandum of agreement (MOA) for the rehabilitation of Sapang Liwanag. The companies provided all the resources needed to restore and maintain the cleanliness of the creek.

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No rush

Merce's solution for Sapang Liwanag was proof of how she was able to unleash her creativity and potentials using the concepts she learned from the training. According to her, one of her favorite topics in the training was "presencing" where she learned that leaders who are always rushing things – beating deadlines or doing tasks in a hurry – lack creativity because they always feel they have no time to think.

Merce admittedly that she used to be "always rushing": "Before that's how I work...I rush things. Because of that I lost my passion for work because I was always tired ... and the quality of my work suffered. After the training, I regained my commitment to my work because I was able to internalise my situation. I learned that I shouldn't rush my work...I shouldn't hurry in coming up with decisions. I realised the importance of meditation, of pausing once in a while to come up with brand new ideas," she said

I realised the importance of meditation, of pausing once in a while to come up with brand new ideas, One of the things that Merce now enjoys doing is the 5-minute quiet time exercise, which she learned from the training. "When I feel stressed or burdened, I recharge myself with silence."

Aside from meditation exercises, Merce applies her learnings on a daily basis such as dealing with clients (anger management), dealing with different personalities, managing time, prioritising tasks, giving feedback, and confronting difficult situations.

By regularly applying what she has learned in dealing with her tasks, Merce has surpassed her daily challenges as a cluster leader, allowing her to grow both personally and professionally. And because of her stellar performance as Pasig city's cluster head, she was given bigger responsibilities and was recently appointed SUPRA cluster head. This time around, she will manage, not just one, but four cities in the South Metro: Makati, Manila, Taguig and Pateros.

Merce accepted the challenge with her game face on: "Challenges are there to make us grow," she said.