



Managing the Weather

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I have been working in PAGASA for 31 years now. I started in the Research Division after undergoing training as a forecaster. I was actually a Chemical Engineering graduate from the Mapua Institute of Technology. Eventually, I earned my masters and then doctorate degree in meteorology from the University of the Philippines.

At the time of the PAHRODF intervention, I was Acting Officer-in-Charge of the Weather Division for the National Capital Region. The Management Enhancement Training spanned a period of one year with eight sessions. It doubled as a strategic planning session for the executive team. We reviewed our vision-mission and core values, and we improved, refined, and strengthened them.

The training taught us leadership and management skills. During the sessions, we learned how to deal with our peers and staff better by improving our communication skills. I learned how to recognise the different personality types of my staff, and how to communicate with them and screen information. Before, I would get angry right away and talk to them in this state of anger. But now, I cool down first and as a result, am able to explain better. We were also taught proper listening techniques—how to not just hear the words but look for hidden meanings, and how to give your whole attention. Moreover, we were taught how to assess performance and how to motivate people to perform to the maximum. This is important because our bonus pay is performance-based.

Other sessions helped us in decision-making and problem solving—how to look for all possible ways to solve a problem. I was able to pick up strategies that can be applied in other areas of my life. I learned how to balance my time by scheduling properly.

This training plus my bosses' trust in me helped boost my own confidence in my abilities. One experience when I felt Dr. Malanong's trust in me was when he asked me to do our agency's presentation for a meeting of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) during Typhoon Glenda. I prepared the presentation but on the way, we found out that President Aquino himself was going to preside over the meeting. When a meeting is presided over by the President, it is the head of the agency who should do the presentation. Dr. Malanong told me to do it since I was already prepared.

I did the presentation without incident. But when the President asked another presenter a question that he could not answer, I was called upon to answer. It was a difficult question about the exact path the typhoon would take—north or south of Metro Manila? I explained that knowing the exact answer to that question did not really matter because either path would affect Metro Manila. If the typhoon passed north, Metro Manila would experience

strong winds; if it passed south, the capital would suffer from heavy rainfall. The President was satisfied with my answer.

My learning from the training was also put to good use during the recent visit of Pope Francis to the Philippines. We had to decide whether or not to raise the typhoon signal in Tacloban. There was a lot of pressure since the United States (US) and Japan had already raised the typhoon alert level. We could not do so without careful analysis because our decision would have a great impact on the visit. If we raised the signal to number 3, the visit would have been cancelled. But if we did not and the typhoon strengthened, we would be putting the Pope in danger. It was a tough decision and we put our jobs on the line when we decided not to raise the signal. We arrived at this decision after looking at the data and ascertaining that the typhoon was weakening and would divert away from its path.

My REAP was the Rainfall Warning System (RWS)—a colour-coded warning system developed for the LGUs, the NDRRMC, the Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA), the Office of Civil Defence, and the Department of the Interior and Local Government. The idea for this was born when President Aquino challenged us to come up with a warning system for rainfall and thunderstorms since we already have one for wind speed, which is the basis for typhoon signals.

We started developing the RWS in 2012 and completed it last year. Our end goal is to come up with a manual for this warning system. We have already trained people in the LGUs and the MMDA on how to utilise the system. This year, we plan to train the Visayas and Mindanao regional offices so that they can apply the RWS in their regions.

The Management Enhancement Training really helped me. I improved as a leader and built better working relationships with my staff. But for me, the best benefit, though unintended, was the bonding experienced by the members of the executive team. Before, department heads rarely communicated with each other. Almost all communication was written, resulting in a fragmented agency. Nowadays, communication lines are open. When I need something from the Engineering Department, for example, I pick up the phone and request for it personally. When I do this, they respond immediately. The rapport that has been established has made PAGASA a more effective agency. This may be one reason why the Makati Business Club ranked us fourth among the best-performing government agencies in 2014.