Capacity Building through Digital Transformation

It was a Tuesday morning and I had arranged a meeting with Janopakari Krishnappa and some other members of the Gram Panchayat. A friend of mine came to see me early in the morning. I was sitting talking to him. Meanwhile, Janopakari Krishnappa was seen coming. Along with him, Rangappa and Lakkamma were also coming to my house. Krishnappa was the Adhyaksha of a village panchayat, and Lakkamma and Rangappa were members of the same gram panchayat. As they got closer, it appeared like they were eager to discuss something with me. By now, I had seen their passion to bring change in their Gram Panchayat, so I was excited to see them.

"Good morning. Please come in." I invited them inside.

"Namaskara Shankranna" they greeted me back.

"Why did you come to my house early today?" I was surprised that they came to my house so early in the morning. It takes at least 3 hours to travel from their village to Bangalore.

"No Shankranna. We have been in Bangalore since yesterday. We came for some work" replied Rangappa.

"What brought you here so early? Please tell me" I asked.

"Shankranna, we were all called for training on Gram Panchayat. So, we attended the training last week. We want to talk a little bit about it with you", Krishnappa said.

"Is it? That is very good. To do outstanding work, training on Panchayat system is essential." I was happy that they were part of the training.

"The training was held for 4 days in the Taluk Panchayat. However, the training took place with lots of people in the class and too many

subjects to learn in four days. I have now forgotten what I learned there. You spoke earlier in the meeting about effective training. But we didn't get it there," Krishnappa told me about the training.

"As I have told you before, it was Gandhiji's dream that the villagers themselves should take the helm of the village administration if there is to be an all-round development of the village in the true sense. That is what he called Gram Swaraj. If Gandhiji's dream is to come true in today's fast changing times then you must be well aware of every aspect related to Panchayat. Then you can do effective management in the local governance system of your villages." I told Krishnappa how such understanding is important for good governance.

"You also have to become the digital Gandhi of the 21st century. You should also know how to use modern technologies to make your panchayat a top performing panchayat," I said.

"As an Adhyaksha, if you really want to develop your village, you have to be aware of the many responsibilities you have. But before you start developing your villages, you must become the digital Gandhi that everyone wants you to be. It is very important to build the capacities of elected members and your Gram Panchayat organization and update your knowledge and skills."

"Yes, capacity building is indeed very important. You might be wondering why it's essential to train and hone your skills. What does it mean to develop your capabilities, increase your management acumen, knowledge, and skills? It's a very natural question. To understand this, one must first become aware of the problems past elected representatives have faced or are currently facing. Let's consider an elected member like yourself who is eager to advance on the path of development. Let's also explore what you can do to achieve capacity building for yourself and your organization," I elaborated, explaining to him in detail what I had written in my book.

"See, I started focusing on Gram Panchayats 20 years ago. Back then, I wasn't entirely aware of how the villages were run, or what powers

the elected representatives held. I wasn't well-versed with the intricacies of Gram Panchayats or even the significance of the 73rd Amendment. However, my decades of experience with digital technology led me to comprehend the functioning of Gram Panchayats and ponder how I could contribute to their development, albeit in a small way. This interest kindled my understanding of the strength and significance of Gram Panchayats in India. This realization motivated me to consider how we could employ cutting-edge technologies, applicable in various sectors, to further improve our villages."

"When you become a president or an elected representative, you don't have to know everything about Gram Panchayats. However, receiving training at the onset of your tenure as an Adhyaksha will help bolster your capacity. Thus, it's vital to provide effective training that equips you with the necessary knowledge and skills for the next five years," I continued.

"Yes, you're right in saying that training is crucial to function effectively," acknowledged Rangappa.

"When you're elected as the Adhyaksha of a Gram Panchayat, it's natural for the citizens to expect you to act in their best interests. For the next five years, the fate of the villages depends on you and your team of Elected Representatives. Bearing this in mind, it's essential for you to be equipped with the requisite skills and knowledge to discharge your duties effectively," I expounded.

"Presently, the government provides training to elected representatives to enhance your capacity and ensure effective execution of your roles. These trainings are conducted in classrooms, where a trainer teaches around 30-40 selected members using books, satellite broadcasts, and videos, right?" I asked, to which all three nodded in agreement.

"We've seen how training has evolved over the years, but we're not entirely sure of the actual outcomes of these sessions. Classroom trainings have their limitations, one of which is the difficulty in catering to a broad range of learning abilities. An elected representative may struggle to cover the breadth of subjects within a limited 3–5-day period. We need a paradigm shift that empowers elected representatives through robust skill development and effective utilization of content capacity in local governance," I stated.

"In any industry, human resources are the key contributors to organizational development and success. Comprehensive development is crucial for our Gram Panchayats to mature and function according to people's expectations. To achieve this, leaders like you need appropriate knowledge and skills," I said.

"So, how are we going to achieve effective training for capacity building?" Janopakari Krishnappa asked.

"That's an excellent question, Krishnappa. I will soon explain to you about the technology that will help enhance your capacity, and why this technology will be beneficial to you," I assured Krishnappa, promising that there are modern technologies that can assist him.

5.1. Trainings Today:

Are They Equipping You to Face Challenges Successfully?

"When elected representatives like you succeed in Gram Panchayat elections, the government takes steps to provide you with training. This is an essential time for the newly elected. During this period, trainers aim to build your capacity, enhance your competence, and equip you to effectively govern rural India. However, no matter how commendable the training objectives are, the degree to which they

are achieved is of paramount importance. There are many grievances regarding this."

Before I could continue, Lakkamma interjected, "When we attended training during our tenure, the classrooms and accommodations were not up to the mark. We had to practice things ourselves, as the trainers rushed through the lessons."

"Indeed, it seems the challenges faced by the elected members during the training were greater than the benefits gained. Furthermore, the pace of the training is also a significant hurdle, especially considering the varying literacy levels of the attendees," I said, recalling the conversations I had with elected members in Karnataka and several other Indian states.

"They introduced a lot of concepts, but I found little relevance when it came to applying them in my work. Maybe I need to understand more," Krishnappa admitted.

"Your point is valid. There are several issues with the current training that need to be addressed to enhance its effectiveness," I went on to detail some of the other challenges that elected members encountered during their training:

- The training typically lasts only 3-5 days. This short duration prevents trainers from effectively imparting knowledge, and it's even more challenging for trainees to keep pace.
- The lack of proper facilities, such as suitable training and boarding infrastructure, creates inconveniences for both trainers and Elected Representatives.
- The materials provided by the government adopt a "supply-based" approach, which may not address the diverse priorities and issues that Elected Representatives face, rendering the information less relevant.

- The lack of interaction or two-way communication between trainers and trainees contributes to the limited effectiveness of these training sessions.
- The quality and variety of learning materials are deficient. Currently, trainings are conducted using books, satellite broadcasts, and videos.
- The same training methodology is applied to all Elected Representatives, regardless of their literacy levels.
- The focus of the training leans more toward the "Training" approach rather than the learning outcome.

"These are some of the obstacles that elected representatives encountered during their training. So, how do we overcome these? The government bears the responsibility of ensuring that services like training, provided to elected representatives, are available and beneficial to every participant. There should be equity in learning as it will enhance the performance of each elected member and the institution as a whole," I declared.

"So, where should we focus more during training?" Rangappa asked.

"Here, we must consider two crucial factors that determine the success of your Gram Panchayat: They are people's capacity and organizational capacity," I continued.

5.2. Capacity Building: The First Step to Success

"In any organization, two critical components can either limit or propel an organization's success – human resources and the organization itself."

Figure 5.1 illustrates Training and Support for the Elected Representatives for Organizational Development [9].

5.2.1. Human Resources

"Capacity building implies continually enhancing the human resource of an institution so that the institution can function at its best potential. For example, if you are unaware of the various taxes that you can collect from your citizens, your Gram Panchayat will never be self-sufficient. You will continue to rely on government funds for everything. Or if you can't operate a computer or a mobile phone, you won't be able to work efficiently because everything must be accomplished manually," I explained.

"So, how can an elected representative build their capacity?" Krishnappa inquired.

"It's vital to build the capacity of Elected Representatives, which involves enhancing knowledge, skills, abilities, including attitude and behaviour. The governing body of a Gram Panchayat consists of Elected Representatives and functionaries. Therefore, it's essential for the Adhyaksha or Elected Representatives like yourself to

comprehend your role and effectively execute what's expected of you. You must understand what you'll deal with regularly, ensure that the service is effective, use your decision-making power for the benefit of citizens, and seize the opportunity to empower rural India. Also, you should be willing to continuously learn and upgrade your skills to adapt to new developments and processes without needing external assistance. When you consistently enhance the resources of your people, you will witness the efficiency and effectiveness of your Gram Panchayat," I detailed.

5.2.2. Institutional Capacity Building

"Is it enough for an elected member to improve their personal capacity? Do you think institutional capacity should also be increased?" Lakumipura Lakkamma asked.

"Indeed, Lakkamma, Institutional Capacity is another aspect. When we talk about institutional capacity, it refers to the institution's readiness to embrace change. It could be as simple as having the necessary infrastructure to support change, such as an office, computers, broadband connection, clearly defined roles and responsibilities, and goals and strategies, which are all instrumental in determining whether an initiative will succeed. Even if you are proficient with digital systems, if your Gram Panchayat lacks computers or internet, the outcome gets compromised," I responded.

"Alongside a competent human resource, it's equally crucial to have a capable institution to achieve your organizational goals. For instance, a Gram Panchayat with workflow automation technology will be more efficient and productive, because stakeholders no longer need to concern themselves with every step of the process. Instead, the software automates each step, saving both citizens and Gram Panchayat functionaries time, which can be invested in more productive activities," I added.

5.3. Little Knowledge Can Be Dangerous

"We don't know much about the issues you've raised. How can we learn?" Krishnappa asked.

"In the trainings, the literacy levels of our Elected Representatives within the same classroom varies greatly. Some Elected Representatives are illiterate, some are partially literate, and others are graduates. This vast range of learning capabilities makes the knowledge transfer process ineffective for a group of Elected Representatives. However, with the help of technology, we now have powerful tools that can be used to help Elected Representatives like you learn at your own pace, rather than sitting in a classroom or attending training. For instance, Navigated Learning Technology (NLT) can teach Elected Representatives like Rangappa about Gram Panchayat using Artificial Intelligence," I explained.

"You're correct in pointing out the challenges we face due to the sheer size and diversity of our country," I explained. "When training our Elected Representatives, we must be mindful of the varied backgrounds and linguistic proficiencies they bring to the table. That means we need to provide training materials that are both accessible and easy to understand. This might involve creating resources in multiple vernacular languages or leveraging modern technologies.

For instance, in the 21st century, we have Natural Language Processing (NLP) that could be used to generate training materials in the native languages of the learners. There are countless possibilities for how we can harness these technologies to make training more effective for our Elected Representatives."

Krishnappa, eager to grasp what I was explaining, ventured, "So, we could employ these technologies like Natural Language Translation

(NLT) and NLP to facilitate more effective learning, even for those who are illiterate?"

"Exactly, Krishnappa," I reassured him. "These technologies could prove invaluable in making knowledge more accessible to everyone, regardless of their literacy level."

5.4. Achieving Capacity Building for Our Elected Representatives and Gram Panchayats

"So, what else can we use to enhance our capacity?" Rangappa queried. "To truly become a Digital Gandhi, it's crucial to recognize the technologies that can substantially impact the development of your Gram Panchayat, understand how they can be harnessed to your advantage, and ensure equitability in the use of these resources. An Adhyaksha like you, with the power to transform rural India, must comprehend that integrating software solutions in planning, management, education, healthcare, and resource management can initiate the creation of smart villages. I compiled a list of digital solutions that can be utilized by representatives of the Gram Panchayat, bolstering the organization's capacity when elected representatives adopt the Digital Gandhi approach:

> • **Navigated Learning Technology (NLT)** - To fulfil training objectives, you can implement NLT for yourself and your team of Elected Representatives. This offers the flexibility of learning at your own pace through a personalized learning journey. Navigated Learning Technology can also be employed to educate children and any citizen on a variety of subjects, not limited to Gram Panchayats. Importantly, Elected Representatives like Rangappa or Lakkamma can contribute effectively to the development of your villages.

• **Natural Language Processing (NLP)** – To achieve equitable learning and information access, we need solutions that cater to varying information consumption capabilities. While some can read and write, not everyone is proficient in these skills. NLP is a technology that can be introduced to your villages so that your citizens can learn effectively through a speech-to-speech feature. NLP can provide information in the vernacular using a voice feature.

• **Workflow Automation Technology** – This is one technology that can significantly streamline the processes of your Gram Panchayat by reducing manual tasks, thus saving your Panchayat considerable time and resources. Workflow automation ensures that processes are systematically executed, with roles and responsibilities clearly defined among the members of your Panchayat. This approach enhances the institutional capability to support more developmental projects while ensuring a higher success rate for these undertakings.

• **Blockchain Technology** – Blockchain Technology fosters trust in the system by implementing strong encryption for every transaction within an enterprise. With this technology, all transactions within your Gram Panchayat will be recorded, enhancing accountability and transparency. As an Adhyaksha, understanding the significance of technologies like Blockchain will make your institution run more efficiently, while making each member more accountable for their contributions to the development of your Gram Panchayat.

• **Internet of Things (IoT)** – In the 21st century, we have progressively transitioned from manual systems to online ones. An IoT device allows you to track live data remotely. For example, you can assign ASHA workers to perform timely

health checks on citizens using special sensors like ECGs that provide real-time health data such as blood pressure, oxygen levels, and heart rate. Medical professionals can then access this data remotely and recommend medications or treatments if necessary. Similarly, smart devices can be used in various fields such as agriculture, education, weather forecasting, home management, and power supply, significantly advancing developments in all these domains.

• **Internet** – The availability of internet is a fundamental requirement for running a digital system. As a Digital Gandhi, prioritizing the establishment of internet infrastructure is crucial, as this enables the functioning of other technologies. The internet has simplified numerous aspects of life, such as accessing facts and figures, acquiring knowledge, staying connected, and working remotely. Understanding the importance of the internet and implementing it will help your Gram Panchayat reach a larger audience and enable services that can reach your citizens. You can even take the initiative of bringing internet to your villages through partnerships outside of the government to build smart villages.

"These are some of the frontier technologies to consider while developing your Gram Panchayats. As an Adhyaksha, it's also important for you to identify the latest technologies like these to add even more value to your system. The outcomes of using these technologies will dramatically enhance your processes, along with increasing your institution's readiness to initiate change. We will delve into these technologies in more detail as we progress, where you will understand their importance and how to apply these frontier technologies in your Gram Panchayats," I explained.

5.5. The Need for Strengthening People and Institutions

"If you combine all of the technologies mentioned above, the Gram Panchayats could perhaps do a phenomenal job, I believe," Janopakari Krishnappa observed.

"Yes, Krishnappa, at the village level, an Adhyaksha or an Elected Representative like you has the power and the capability to make the most significant impact in establishing effective local governance. We have discussed the importance of strong local governance and how you can drive this initiative. From my experiences interacting with Adhyakshas and Elected Representatives of Gram Panchayats across the country, the consensus is that empowering our leaders with the right knowledge, achieved through effective training or capacity building, is essential. We need a change in training methodology that will be enabled through the effective use of frontier technologies," I responded.

"An institution incorporating the correct policies, framework, leadership, knowledge, and accountability is the kind of organization you aspire to build. As an Adhyaksha or an Elected Representative of a Gram Panchayat, you're not only improving the lives of rural Indian citizens but also shaping the future for the next generation. Your motivation and initiative to scrutinize these issues and propose alternative solutions will provide your Gram Panchayat with the momentum to achieve sustainable and equitable development."

5.6. Your Role as a Digital Gandhi in Building People and Institutional Capacity

"As an Adhyaksha or a Digital Gandhi for your Gram Panchayat, it is essential to understand how rapidly the world is evolving through digital technology. For instance, during the pandemic, students in villages, or students who had to return to their villages, were most affected due to the lack of infrastructure to support online classes," I elaborated.

"Yes, sir, you're correct. Those who didn't know how to use mobile phones suffered a lot because vaccination registration required using a mobile phone," Rangappa interjected.

"Indeed, the digitally illiterate population faced significant disadvantages when Covid-19 vaccination registration could only be done through a mobile phone application. As we can see, future developments will mostly rely on digital platforms. In a few years, most transactions will be online, like the DBT transfers we already see now. For all these reasons, today's Adhyakshas need to be aware of these advancements and take the initiative to bring these powerful tools to rural India," I said.

"To facilitate these changes, basic infrastructure like computers is necessary. How can we acquire them?" Lakkamma inquired.

"Yes, infrastructure such as computers is indeed necessary. The governance of your Gram Panchayat can improve significantly if you're able to integrate digital management systems. Even with a capable workforce possessing the right knowledge and skills, infrastructure is still essential for work. Even if you have knowledge, you'll still need a computer and broadband to transact with your citizens online. Therefore, it's equally important for you and your team of Elected Representatives to continually enhance your knowledge and skills, alongside improving your institutional infrastructure to boost your productivity. Today, you can use digital technology for people and institutional capacity building," I explained.

"Back in the day, when Mahatma Gandhi advocated the concept of non-violence to gain independence from the British, he garnered a large number of followers because they believed that non-violence was the superior approach. Gandhi's followers essentially embodied his beliefs. Similarly, if you believe that digital transformation can enhance the capacity of both people and institutions in your gram panchayat, then you are a Digital Gandhi. A Digital Gandhi with the power to influence thousands to lead a digital transformation in the 21st century," I said.

"Now is the time to elevate your Gram Panchayat through digital transformation. It's time to plan your roadmap for the digital transformation of your gram panchayats using the Theory of Change.

I ended my talk with a quote from the French writer Antoine de Saint-Exupery: 'A goal without a plan is just a wish.'

Krishnappa, Lakkamma, and Rangappa, who came to share their experiences from the training period, discussed how this conversation enlightened them on the importance of training and how they aimed to improve their own competencies. "Now that you understand how to implement digital transformation in your villages, we'll explore a systematic approach to plan and achieve your gram panchayat's goals. This systematic approach is called the Theory of Change."

I sent them home, leaving them with a hint about the topic I would address in our future discussions.

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