

People and development

Book review

Dovey, K & de Jong, T (1990) **Developing people: A guide for educational, business and community organizations**. Grahamstown: Institute for social and individual development in Africa.

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The development imperatives facing South African society make this book, **Developing people** welcome for a range of people and organizations engaged in or contemplating development projects. It is written in an easy and accessible style and is designed to be a practical guide or development manual.

For a Social or Community Psychologist however, reading the book **Developing people** stimulates a storm of ideas, arguments and critiques. Already the title is provocative. Can people be developed, like they can be fed or housed? The authors of the book seem to think so since they mention in their INTRODUCTION their "experience over the past twenty years in the field of developing people", in particular "in the field of people development in South Africa." Let's hope it is just an unfortunate expression, and that we do share the same understanding that only people can develop themselves and that, from outside, one can at most provide them with a better opportunity,

better tools and a more conducive situation for self- development. Not more than that. Development is an inside job.

Chapters 1 and 2 seek to establish the theoretical framework for development work and offer a strategic plan for the management of development programmes. The remaining chapters 3 - 9 attempt to offer applications of the basic theory and strategy in a range of settings which include, organizations, work settings, sport, peer-tutoring, leadership and exchange programmes.

It is primarily the first two chapters, the theoretical base for the book, that require a critical focus. For what is development? Although, in Chapter 2, the authors emphasize the importance of evaluating and measuring, no definition of development, indicators and criteria to evaluate or measure the level of "development" can be found in their book. This of course leaves the reader somewhat perplexed. There are so many ways of looking at "development": of whom, for whom, decided by whom, with which aim and what result?

Later in the text, some of these questions are implicitly, but only partially answered. The authors consider " the creation of a just society, and the development of individuals within the society ... as a human responsibility." They have a vision of a society where " ... individuals should be encouraged to consider the nature of the work and its benefit to humankind rather than the privileges and status (or lack of these) that the "work identity" will give them for example, rubbish removers are as much a part of a total health service as are medical staff" (p.3).

The diffuse liberal ideology of the authors impregnates the whole book where a more scientific approach would have been more profitable. They identify for instance "four life tasks that individuals in any society must accomplish in order to feel satisfied with their lives" (p.2, our emphasis). These are the tasks of survival, of community, of identity and of meaning in life. Each task is vaguely described and one must question the relevance of such sweeping generalizations. The authors in general, fail to take into account the impact of culture on expectations, priorities, life style and content, development motivation, and so on, and this becomes apparent each time a list of strategies to achieve development is presented. In general, the authors use an unqualified system of values ("just society", "destructive values") and fail to give clear definitions of the key concepts on which the book is based.

The first chapter introducing the Theoretical Framework thus constitutes the weakest part of the book through its lack of precision, its superficiality and subjectivity. However, important concepts and principles are introduced and

these are deepened in the following chapters. Here again though, concepts and their relationships could have been much more clearly and simply presented and explained if the most essential concept in the field of community work, the group, would have been introduced. Here attention could profitably have been given to the individual as a member of a group and their dialectic relationship; group identity and cohesion; group status and role and group goal (all concepts of primary importance in studying issues of power and leadership, as attempted in Chapter 7); as well as processes of social responsibility; social facilitation and social loafing which have prime relevance for work efficiency and motivation.

The second chapter introduces the strategic management of people: development programmes. Essentially, this chapter gives simple and precise tools of analysis and procedure referred to as COSE, an acronym for Context, Objectives, Strategies, and Evaluation. Each step is then presented with a finer procedure and in relation with the other steps. For instance, the analysis of context can be done with aid of swot (analysis of internal Strengths and Weaknesses, as well as of external Opportunities and Threats). The development of adequate strategies could be facilitated by sessions of brainstorming, buzz group discussions, simulated discussions, role playing, and so on. The notion of action-research is introduced and the necessity to evaluate the degree of success by measuring some indicators is emphasized.

A notable omission from the first two chapters is any consideration of theories of and strategies for empowerment. This appears to be quite serious in a book devoted to contemporary development theory and initiatives. There is clearly a wealth of literature available on which these authors could have drawn.

The following chapters 3 to 9 present the application of the methods and principles discussed in chapter 2 in various fields as described above. The very detailed and practical treatments given here will be of great help for organizers in these fields. One could only have suggested that every chapter be followed by a short discussion of similar projects in the same field and how the programme could have been adapted. For instance, many communities might have been interested in adapting the peer-tutoring programme to an adult education programme, be it a literacy programme or a primary health programme. The importance of such programmes is undeniable and one has only to recall the attempts made in countries like Mozambique and Nicaragua to raise the level of functional literacy among adults through the tutoring of young pupils.

Many developing countries hold high on their agenda the development of leaders at all levels of society. In this sense, the topic of chapter 7,

"Leadership and its development", seems very well selected, yet appears to be significantly flawed. The understanding of what is power, and what is leadership requires greater thought than that given. The relation between these two concepts presupposes some understanding of firstly, the nature of power as related to the group (coercive, legitimate, expert, informational, referent, and so on). And secondly, of the function of leadership as related to the group of which the leader is a member; and thirdly, some characteristics of the group itself such as the properties of its members, its aim and the task for which a leader is necessary. As theory and research on leadership has shown (eg Fiedler, 1978), the properties of the optimal leader (thus also the formation or development of such a leader) are essentially and intimately related with all these characteristics. The presentation of this issue in the present book does not take this into serious consideration. For instance, it would have been valuable to contextualize the reinforcement of leadership qualities in terms of group process. This is evident in considering the fact that the best leader of a group is indeed a member of that group and thus has integrated (through his/her membership) the goals, interests, norms and values of that group, and moreover, that s/he is her/himself subjected to the pressure of the group, cohesion and demands on role and status. The status of leader of a particular group is based on her/his motivation to fulfill the goal of that group as well as on her/his individual characteristics which facilitate reaching the goal. A lot of the explanations and examples given in this chapter would have been much clearer if presented in the context of this type of background information. It would also have been helpful to develop methods for the identification and selection for further training and development of some people in a target community.

Because of its undeniable strength in guiding people involved in development projects, giving them a framework and good tools of analysis, and because also the variety of fields of application illustrated by the case studies, and finally the ease with which this book can be adapted to various aims, **Developing people** will undoubtedly be very welcome in a society like South Africa, blooming with development projects and expectations of democratic changes.

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