

**EXPLORING EFFECTIVE PERFORMANCE OF METER READERS
IN SESCO REGIONAL OFFICE, BINTAWA:**

A Case Study Based on Action Learning

By

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ABSTRACT

This research was conducted in Sarawak Electricity Supply Corporation (SESCO) attempts to gain an insight to explore the effectiveness of performance of meter readers in SESCO Regional Office, Bintawa: A case study based on Action Learning.

Specifically, this study aims to determine: the effectiveness of performance of meter readers in accomplishing their daily work targets; the causes and effects that might delay the effectiveness of the performance of the meter readers; and whether action learning could be used to solve the problems and improve the performance of meter readers.

The main findings of this study revealed that the effectiveness of performance of meter readers is not quite satisfactory mainly due to factors which were beyond their control such as environmental situations, system and procedures of the work provided for them, and slow actions and lack of coordination between sections. The study also revealed that action learning was applicable for meter readers in the Meter Room Section of SESCO Regional Office, Bintawa.

It is recommended that monthly meeting should be held between meter readers, meter examiners, supervisors, and the engineer in-charge to discuss monthly progress or problems. Action learning methodology is appropriate for this purpose. Training or short courses pertaining to this methodology could be provided to equip them with skills and knowledge and as well as sharing experience among peers to enhance effective performance.

It is also suggested that more research be made to determine the overall effectiveness of organizational performance.

ABSTRAK

Kajisilidik ini dibuat di Pejabat Wilayah, Perbadanan Pembekalan Letrik Sarawak (PPLS), Bintawa dalam usaha mendapat kefahaman yang mendalam: atau pembelajaran lapangan.

Khususnya, kajisilidik ini bertujuan untuk mengenalpasti; keberkesanan prestasi pembaca meter dalam menyempurnakan sasaran kerja harian mereka; kemungkinan sebab-sebab dan kesan-kesan yang melambat keberkesanan prestasi pembaca meter; dan sama ada 'action learning' dapat dipergunakan untuk menyelesaikan masalah dan seterusnya memperbaiki prestasi pembaca meter.

Kesimpulan kajisilidik ini memdedahkan bahawa keberkesanan prestasi pembaca meter tidak begitu memuaskan atas sebab-sebab utamanya ialah faktor-faktor yang terdapat di luar kawalan mereka seperti, kaedah-kaedah dan procedur-prosedur kerja yang digunakan, kelambatan mengambil tindakan serta kurangnya kordinasi di antara pihak-pihak dan bahagian-bahagian tertentu dalam pejabat.

Kajisilidik ini mendedahkan juga bahawa kaedah 'action learning' adalah sesuai dipakaiguna dalam Bahagian Bilik Meter, Pejabat Wilayah, Perbadanan Pembekalan Letrik Sarawak, Bintawa.

Adalah dicadangkan mesyuarat bulanan patut diadakan secara berterusan di antara pembaca meter, pemeriksa meter, penyelia, dan jurutera yang berkenaan untuk membincangkan perkembangan bulanan seksyen ini. Kaedah 'action learning' didapati sesuai untuk tujuan ini. Latihan atau kursus-kursus jangka pendek berhubung dengan kaedah ini perlulah disediakan untuk melengkapkan pembaca meter dengan kemahiran dan pengetahuan serta berkongsi pengalaman demi memupuk keberkesanan prestasi.

Sayugia dicadangkan juga agar diadakan banyak lagi kajisilidik untuk mengenalpasti keberkesanan prestasi organisasi ini umumnya.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Organizational effectiveness is an increasingly popular topic in the management of Malaysian public and private sectors. Proponents argued that it is the key to gaining competitive advantage in today's high competitive business environment. "We can no longer work like we used to be. We must change to improve ourselves if we want to survive," said one CEOs of a big firm. Therefore today, the terms Kaizen, Total Quality Management (TQM), ISO 9000, Information Technology (IT), Effective Performance Management (EPM) and many more are familiar to almost every one in big organizations throughout the world. The terms TQM and ISO 9000 for example, gained increased prominence in Malaysia soon after the announcement of Look East Policy and Vision 2020 were made because of new economic realities that faced our business.

Another terms called Action Learning which was always associated with Reg Revans in the United States also increasingly popular lately in Asia and proven effective as management tool in problem-solving and performance improvement in the United States and Europe. The most intriguing suggestion about how to improve performance was that the organizations change their organization and management systems to be more participative by involving employees in problem solving, decision making, and introducing motivational efforts that are beneficial to both.

Statement of the Problem

Since early 1980s Sarawak Electricity Supply Corporation (SESCO) has been introducing various quality improvement programs for its staff within the organization throughout the State. One of the main objectives of these programs is to enhance the quality of service of its staff to satisfy its consumers. A Quality Management Division headed by a Manager was established and responsible to implement and to monitor the process and progress of the programs. Among the programs that have been used to achieve this objective are:

Total Quality Management (TQM)

TQM which is very popular among the Japanese is the process of quality management based on customer orientation and continuous improvement. It involves all aspect of the organization such as money, materials and human resources. TQM process is aimed towards a holistic changes which could create an excellent working culture within an organization. It is therefore a process of cultural transformation with the elements of acceptable characteristics which include behavior and values, system and procedure, operation practice and organization structure.

Quality Control Cycle (QCC)

QCC was launched and implemented in 1987 in SESCO. It is one of the mechanisms or management tools which allows the employees to participate in problem solving process to increase the quality and productivity of an organization. Its philosophy is

based on the management concept of participation and humanization of the workplace. Humanization of the workplace means where the management emphasizes on human needs and feelings towards the environment of the workplace. Therefore, active participation from the employees is needed, regardless of their educational background and position in terms of contributing ideas based on their knowledge, skills and experience.

Practices of Good Housekeeping (5S)

5S was introduced in 1991 and its purposes were to produce high quality services, continuous productivity and quality improvement. This management tool was originated from Japan which represents five Japanese words, *Seiri*, *Seiton*, *Seiso*, *Seiketsu*, and *Shitsuke*. *Seiri* is focusing on taking out the unnecessary items and putting them away. *Seiton* emphasizes on arranging the necessary items in a proper order so that they can be easily picked up for use. *Seiso* is more towards cleaning and tidy up the workplace to avoid dust or anything that can spoil or damage the items and environment. *Seiketsu* on the other hand focuses on maintaining a high standard and procedure of housekeeping in the workplace. Finally, *Shitsuke* emphasizes on training people to follow good house keeping discipline independently. In SESCO 5S has been considered as the basis for continuous productivity and quality improvement. It is believed that good housekeeping and an organized workplace in an organization are directly linked to achieving discipline in the workplace.

I Suggest – Staff Suggestion Scheme (SS)

SS was launched in 1992 with the aim to enhance awareness of quality improvement by inculcating critical thinking and to understand the needs and feelings of all employees and their perceptions of SESCO. It is actually a process to encourage participation of all level of staff in SESCO to contribute their ideas to improve the productivity and efficiency at work. It is a two-way communication between the management from the top and the staff from the bottom level. The management encourages the staff to submit their ideas, opinions or suggestions pertaining to how to improve their work environment or any related problems that they are facing at their workplaces.

ISO 9000

ISO 9000 was introduced in late 1996 which is a written standard that specifies the basic elements of a quality system for an organization so as to enable it to provide services that will meet customers' needs. It is a quality system standard that establishes methods by which a management system, incorporating all the activities associated with quality should operate. The purpose is to ensure that all the special performance requirements and the needs of the customers are fully met and it also demands the organization to identify the needs of its customers, to plan and to control the process of fulfilling the customer needs.

This Division has received the support and the cooperation of all staff from various levels and stations in carrying out its responsibilities to achieving the organization's objectives towards quality awareness. Majority of the staff in SESCO are actively involved in any of the quality programs and this is among the main factors that contributes to the success of this organization in TQM activities in the State and in the National level competitions. In QCC for example, SESCO has won many prestigious awards. And to mention few they were, a Two-Star Award 1988; NPC

Overall Champion and two Three-Star Awards 1989; a Three-Star Award and a Two-Star Award 1990; two Three-Star Awards 1991; Best Cycle in Service Sector and two Three-Star Awards 1992; two Three-Star Award 1993; a Three-Star Award 1994; Best Cycle in Service Sector and two Three-Star Awards 1995; a Three-Star Award and a One-Star Award 1996; and a Three-Star Award 1997. The 5S quality program has also achieved a recognition from the State Quality Week Committee. SESCO Regional Office, Bintulu has won the best office environment during the launching of 1998 Quality Week in Bintulu recently.

In its efforts to seek for better performance results and continuous improvement in many areas of management, it is timely for the researcher to introduce new techniques. These new techniques known as Action Research and Action Learning which were formulated by Kurt Lewins(1944) and Reg Revans(1977) respectively. These techniques are getting popular among the Chief Executive Officers and Managers in Asia.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study consist of a general objective and three specific objectives.

General Objective

The main purpose of this study is to explore the effectiveness of performance of meter readers in SESCO Regional Office, Bintawa: A case study based on Action Learning.

Specific Objectives

The specific objectives are focussed to find out the answers to the following questions:

To what extent is the existing performance of meter readers effective in SESCO?

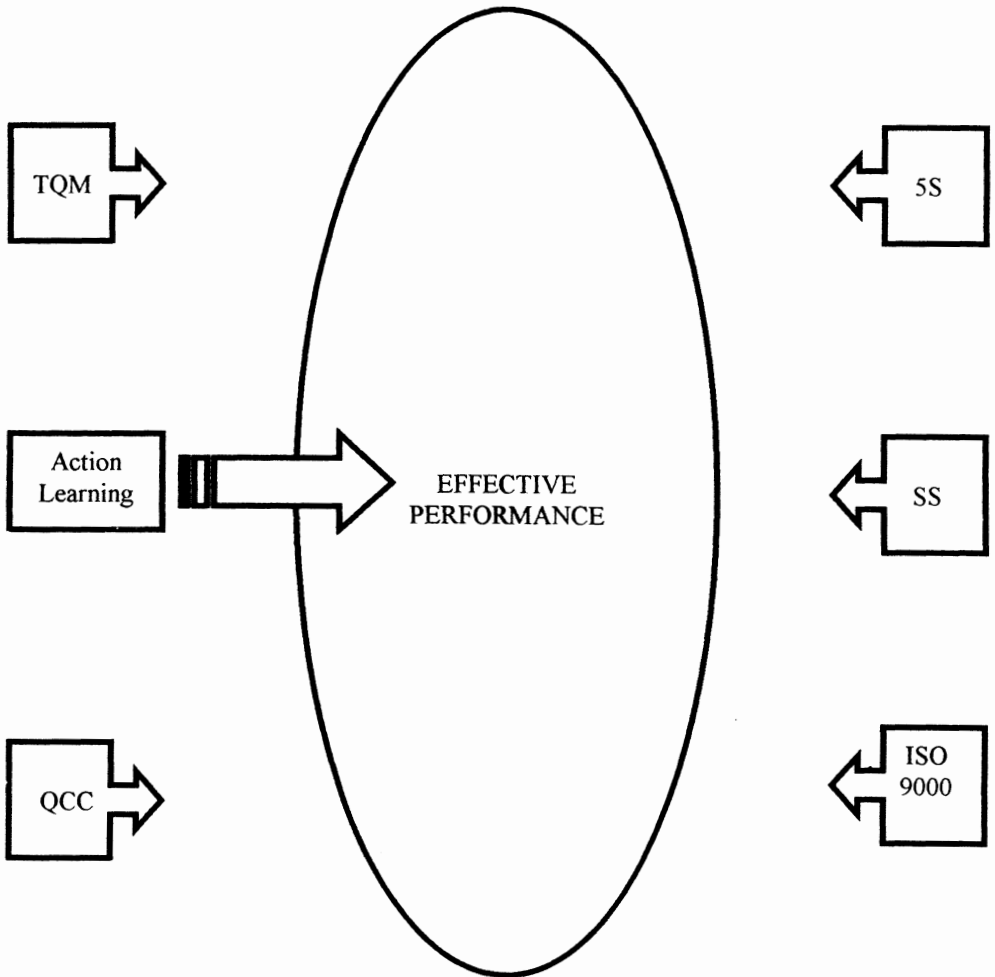
Could Action Learning be used to improve the performance of meter readers in SESCO?

To what extent did Action Learning contribute to improvement of the performance of meter readers in SESCO?

Conceptual Framework

Based on the research objectives and the knowledge obtained through literature reviews, a conceptual framework for this research showing examples of some management tools which are contributing to effective performance in SESCO is shown in Figure 1 below:

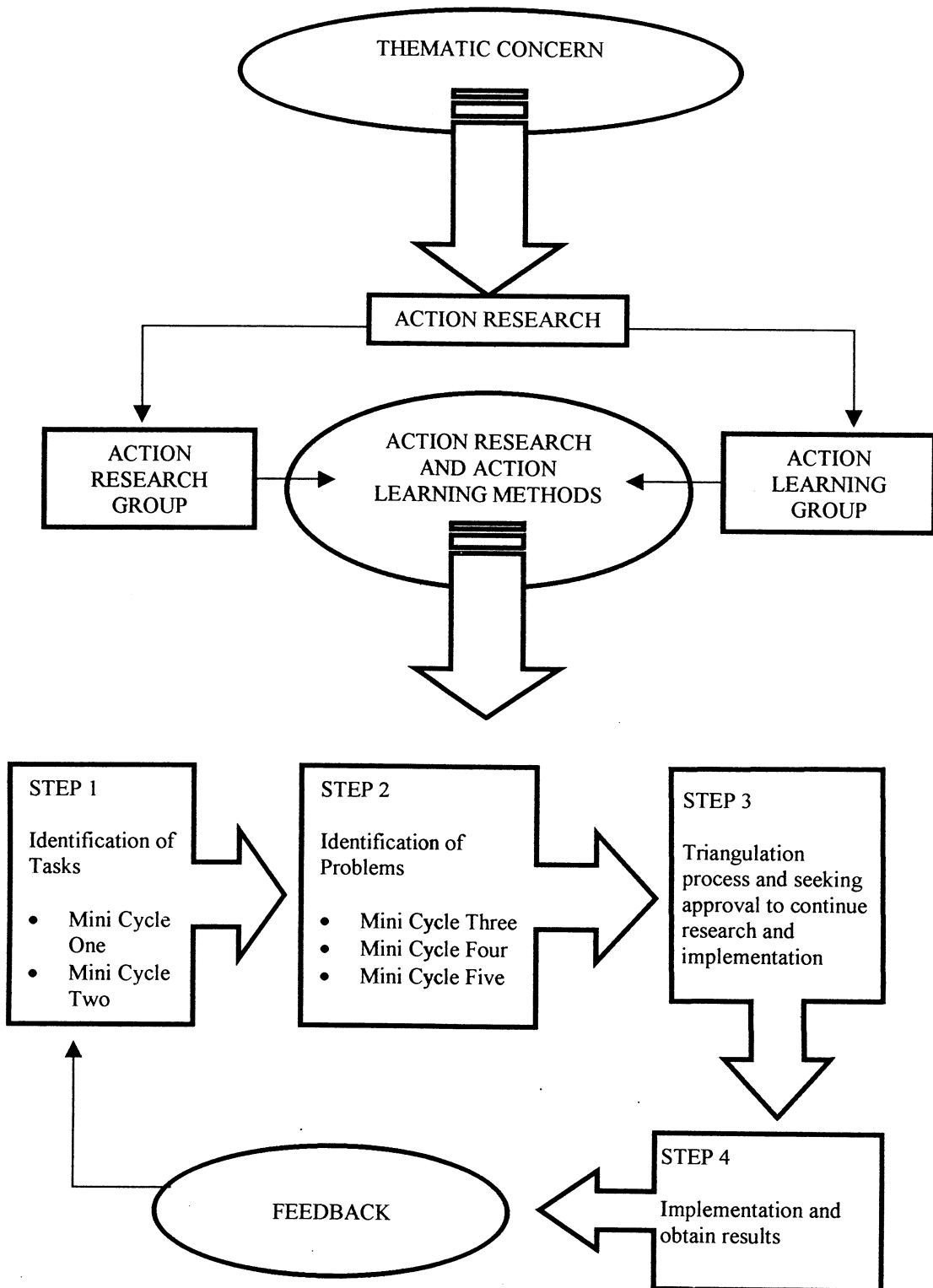
Figure 1: Management Tools That Contribute to Effective Performance



Significance of Study

This study will contribute a new management tool in problem-solving and performance improvement in SESCO. Firstly, the findings from this study will be beneficial not only to the organizations but also to its employees. The standard of performance of the employees must be determined and what is expected of them. Secondly, information on employees' standard performance or bench mark is vital for developing a suitable training program on problem-solving and continuous performance improvement. These would help the management to design human resource development programs. Lastly, this study serves as reference to SESCO on management tool of problem-solving and performance improvement. It is however, as an opportunity to apply 'action learning' and 'action research' to find out whether they are applicable or not in this context. The conceptual framework on action research process is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 : Conceptual Frame Work



Limitation of the Study

This study investigated the application of action research and action learning methodologies in exploring the effectiveness of performance of meter readers in SESCO Regional Office, Bintawa: A case study based on Action Learning.

A case study was used and considered as most appropriate in this area of social science research (Smith 1998; Yin 1989). A group of six meter readers in this study was selected from Meter Room Section of SESCO Regional Office, Bintawa. The result of this study therefore apply to that particular time (1988) and its specific locations. It may later on be tested or implemented to other groups in similar trade and location if applicable.

The success of the study is very much depending on first, the management support. As this study would involve specific organization and its staff it therefore must obtain full support of the management. The researcher essentially must obtain the letter of approval to enable him to conduct the study. The approval letter is indicated as Appendix A. Meanwhile the Head of the Corporate Services of SESCO issued a circular to other head of departments and they are, Head of Distribution and Marketing, Head of Finance, Head of Generation, Head of Logistics, and Head of Engineering Services to inform them of the project and to seek their cooperation and assistance when required by the researcher. This project requires the involvement of the staff of Meter Room Section and they are issued individually by letters which is considered as an approval for the staff and the researcher to act in the context of this study. The letter is indicated as Appendices B-1 to B-3.

Second, in normal cases it takes about six to twelve months to complete a project. It took the researcher quite sometimes to prepare and plan this project before he could proceed with it. Other than seeking approval he has to train the action research and the action learning groups on the concepts, procedures and tools of action research and action learning processes.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter presents a review of performance theories and provides opinions from previous writers on effective performance. The researcher, in this chapter, divided the review of related literature into five sections, namely; the concept of effective performance; importance of effective performance; theories of effective performance; performance contract and work-targets; limitations and previous study.

The definition of effective performance.

Numerous books and articles have been written on the area of organizational performance such as Quality Management Manual, Managing World Class Performance Through Total Quality, Managing People, Managing for High Performance, Making It Happen – Managing Performance at Work, and so on. These books and articles introduce various methods, techniques and approaches on how to manage effective and efficient organizational performance to help meet its visions, missions and objectives. In spite of plethora of books and articles on this subject, this study is focussed on what the authors say about effective performance and to relate it to this study.

Robbins (1991:38) defines effective as when a person successfully meets the needs of his or her customer or achieves a specified target or score on standardized procedures. While effective performance management he said is the key of success to most organizations today. Therefore in order to be effective, organizations need to have a clear mission and good management of performance to ensure that the mission is achieved.

Ainsworth and Smith (1993: 3) define performance as,

Basically, it means outcomes, a result. It is the end point of people, resources and certain environment being brought together, with the intention of producing certain things, whether tangible or less tangible service.

According to them again performance management is, to some, refers to the performance of the organization. In such cases, it covers the planning concepts of vision, mission specification, development strategies and specification of goals and objectives. It also includes the concept of measuring the achievements of the organization against the stated objectives. And to others, performance management refers to individuals or small teams at work. In such cases, it involves planning, but planning for the person or the group. These plans are of course, part of the larger organizational plan.

Moore (1996:5) defines performance management as

a method of connecting your organization's objectives to the people who are there to carry them out. It makes use of the procedures and communication drills you already havePerformance management will help bring quality to the level at which a continuous improvement can really take place.

As in this study, effective is defined as doing the right things and it relates to the achievement of objectives of a certain group of people or of an organization. It does not concern about the costs, time and efforts, but as long as the objectives are met to satisfy the customers. Thus performance management is the process to ensure that the organization has an effective performance to enhance the desired results as stated in its vision, mission and objectives.

Importance of effective performance

According to Armstrong (1994:11) effective performance management of an organization can broadly be defined as one that makes the best use of its resources to attain high levels of performance, thus successfully achieving its purpose and objectives to its stakeholders.

Lockett (1992:15) has listed out five groups of people benefits from effective performance management:

Top management – it should be enable them to get on with their job of setting objectives for the organization whilst managing relationships with external bodies – customers, politicians, regulatory bodies, shareholders – and translating their requirements into objectives for the organization;

Managers – it will help them to gain full understanding of the organization's mission, set targets and standard for their team and delegate work, freeing them to concentrate on strategic planning and continuous improvement and development of their operations and work team;

People within the organization – improved management of performance should result in clearer targets, and the freedom to work autonomously to achieve these targets, with the right level of support from their management, ie improved personal self development;

Support functions – objectives which come from a centrally agreed business plan are more likely to give support functions an alternative *raison d'être* rather than the pursuit of their own specialized agenda. Most line/staff conflicts can be traced to lack of shared objectives. These relationships need to be managed by a form of performance contract, so that professional competence can be focused on agreed business objectives and not dissipated on other issues;

Consumers – clear performance management should enable the organization to deliver its consumer promise more consistently by converting customer needs into workable plans of action.

Theories of effective performance

There are numerous theories developed to create effective performance or to improve performance of individuals, groups, sections and organizations. Most common theories are TQM concepts which emphasize on continuous improvement; staff development programs; performance appraisal; participative management and employee or group involvement, and many more.

The terms TQM has gained increased prominence in the 1980s because of the new economic realities that faced businesses. To succeed, many companies had to increase their performance significantly. The most intriguing suggestion about how to improve performance was that organizations change their organization and development systems to be more participative by involving employees in problem solving, decision making through TQM.

TQM programs place a strong emphasis on employee involvement in addition to calling for series of specific practices that are aimed at improving quality. Particularly with respect to their use of terms and the open sharing of performance data, there is substantial overlap with most employee involvement efforts. Thus although it can be looked at separately, TQM is closely related to employee involvement and needs to be studied as a related, and in the same case as an integrated efforts.

Total quality management

Total quality concept as an approach to doing business began to gain wide acceptance in the United States in the late 1980s and early 1990s. However, individual elements of the concepts – such as the use of statistical data, team work, and employee involvement – have been used by visionary organizations for years (Goetsch, D.L. and Davis, S. 1994:101).

Koehler and Pankowski (1996:15) define TQM as,

a management system embracing a set of beliefs and principles designed to empower all associates to continually improve organizational process with the goal of meeting or exceeding customer expectations. TQM is a way of managing the organization at all levels, from top to bottom. The focus is on the customer, but the process is driven by the data collected. Organization members work in teams to continually improve process.

Staff development

Horner (1995:6) defines staff development as,

a planned and organized process of learning within an employment setting, designed to update or increase knowledge and/or skills or for personal growth and development, to improve performance or to meet advances or changes in direction or focus of a position or of an organization.

He has identified three key areas of staff development needs:

The needs for knowledge and skills for specific position – according to Horner all jobs require skills and knowledge, sometimes expressed as

qualifications and expertise or experience. Employer who plans for growth and development will recognize that staff will need different knowledge and skills as the organization or service changes;

The need for job satisfaction – is an essential factor for both the organization and the employee, as this factor makes a difference to the employee on how he or she feels about a job. Employees who enjoy their jobs most likely to stay longer in one organization and produce better results or outputs;

The need for positive interpersonal relationship – interpersonal relationship is an art of how people interact with each other. The need for positive interpersonal relationship in any organization is vital as it helps people within it to coordinate and create the expected quality of work life.

The group participation

In defining the concept of a group in work and social terms, a number of different approaches have been adopted.

Homans (1950:146) considered that:

We mean by a group, a number of persons who communicate with one another, often over a span of time, and who are few enough so that each person is able to communicate with all the others, not at second hand through others, but face to face”.

Cartwright (1993:100) commented that this definition was rather tight as it excluded groups such as teachers, police officers, or the staff of a large company by virtue of size. Fiedler (1964) however said, he saw group in terms of interdependency. By the term group, Fiedler generally meant a set of individuals who share a common fate, who were interdependent in the sense that an event that affects one member was likely to affect all others. Group to him is a collection of people who interact with each other, are aware of each other, are working toward some common purpose, and perceive themselves to be a group.

Further he stresses that there are differences between formal and informal groups. A formal group is one deliberately formed by the organization to accomplish specific tasks and achieve objectives. The most common type of formal group is a work unit or department such as quality control, and action learning group as found in this project. The informal group however, group that evolve naturally in an organization to take care of the desire for friendship and companionship.

Zander ,A. (1994.1) defines a group as,

a set of persons who interact with and depend on each other – who collaborate and behave in ways that suit mutual expectationsa collection of persons is a weak group if members are primarily interested in their own accomplishments within that assembly, are not concerned with the activities of fellow members, see others as rivals, and often absent from meetings.

To elaborate what Zander had said, there are four main qualities that attribute to the formation of a strong group in this study:

Free interaction among members: In most groups, members exchange ideas or collaborate in group tasks in order to accomplish what they should. Such interaction is necessary for members to define and understand their group's mission, set immediate goals, develop and assign roles, make decisions, plan implementation of the group's decisions, support and evaluate the group's performance, and devise better procedures. The researcher forms and uses Action Learning and Action Research groups in this study which comprise of twelve persons. When a small number share activities of the group, each person is likely to have more responsibilities, which heightens their interests in the programs of the group. Smaller groups, compared to larger ones, are less inhibiting to members because the listeners are fewer, closer at hand, and easier to know well. A simple way to increase inter-member interaction during a meeting is to leave time on the agenda for discussion and to call for and welcome it. Interaction is further enhanced by giving members a chance to gather ideas in subgroups where the main issue is discussed, assigning several persons to be question askers, allowing them to reflect, and to give response.

Interdependence among members: In order for members to count on one another's actions, they need to understand what each other is saying or doing within the group and why. Such understandings are fostered by creating a cooperative relationship among the group members. Members cooperate when many of their problems and goals are similar. Individual members may be alike, for example, in wanting to find skills, develop confidence, and to find effective solutions to overcome problems and improve performance. When members are in a cooperative relationship, they trust one another's action because they understand what each is trying to accomplish and recognize that the moves of one person help all since their goals are alike. Members who work to benefit themselves in a cooperative group benefit others as well. Colleagues welcome actions of colleagues as they are for the good of each and the group as well.

Members want to remain as members: If a group provides a reasonable amount of satisfaction to members, they are attracted to that body and want to remain in it. If membership is not satisfying, they leave or become inactive in all sort of group activities. The more members wish to remain because they are attracted to the group, the greater of their cohesiveness are. Cohesiveness increases among associates when needs they hope to satisfy together become more valuable to them and they believe that the chances of fulfilling them are good.

The group has necessary social power: In most groups, whether they serve the good of the members or nonmembers, are subject to social pressure exerted by external agents or to restrain created by superiors or law-makers. If an active group is to be effective, it must have sufficient social power to influence others or to respond appropriately to others' demand. A group is more able to win a favorable response among those it wishes to influence if it is legitimate – it has the right to make requests, even demands, that listeners (the management) have the duty to consider.

According to Zander, A. (1994:37) again there are at least four circumstances exist and when these are not present a group is not likely to form. First, conditions in the

environment or in the lives of potential joiners are unsatisfactory or suggest an opportunity for desirable change. It means that, if the management of SESCO as in this case, realizes that a situation of output in the Meter Room Section is not what it might be and that something could be done to improve it. An unfavorable situation often encourages the management to bring people together so they can respond to the circumstance. Second, management conceive of a more satisfactory state of affairs. Recognition that something should be changed is not enough to inspire persons toward organizing and as such the management of SESCO must also have ideas about what could be done and how conditions could be different and beneficial. For example;

it must provide an incentive for members, ie once the tasks or goals achieved, it provides satisfaction to those who value it;

the objective of the group, when attained, must furnish a true change from the state of affairs that lead to formation of that body;

the chosen mission must appear to be attainable because members have necessary resources, ability, and experience for the group's activities as well as sound procedures to follow;

the group must specify who will benefit from the unit's activities.

Third, members believe they can achieve a more satisfactory state of affairs through activities of a group. In order to give members confidence that their group can accomplish its aims, responsible persons make sure that participants know the group's purpose and elaborate on this knowledge over time through speeches, mottoes, meetings, memoranda and so on. They make sure that movement towards those ends is visible to all and publicly praise those who take steps toward attainment of joint goals. They identify forces that could prevent achievement of desired ends and describe what needs to be done to counter these pressures. And fourth, surrounding conditions encourage the persons to establish a group and to take part in its activities. People are more likely to form a group if circumstances in their surroundings help rather than hinder its creation. The way of life among those people makes them more or less likely to join a group. For example, the meter readers in the Meter Room Section more often help create an entity because they have frequent and easy contact with one another, belong to the same social network, and work in the same office. They are also willing to join the group if they are similar to other members in such matters as age, aspirations, hopes, socioeconomic status, interest values and sex. Members are best sought among people who like to work in a group. It also helps to find members among persons who are interested in trying something new – such as action learning method if they find it helpful and beneficial.

Performance appraisal

Mondy and Noe (1996:326) define performance appraisal as a formal system periodic review and evaluation of an individual's job performance, and for many organizations, the primary goal of an appraisal system is to improve performance.

Performance is always associated with work targets as cited by Hale (1993:64),

Targets are often known by other names such as objectives and goals but really these terms all describe the same thing. Targets explain what should be achieved at the end of an activity – a point to be hit or a desired.

Hale (1993: 29) said, traditionally the process of appraisal entailed the manager completing relevant documentation, often under pressure from the personnel department, behind closed doors. The appraisal interview consisted of, at best, a run through of the judgements made with no room for input or discussion by the appraisee and some advice on 'how to do better next time.' In even outmoded examples of performance appraisal the appraisee would not even see or discuss the judgements made with the appraiser and no discussion would take place on areas of success or how to improve.

Hunsaker and Alessandra (1988: 122) stated that to help solve a problem, the manager needs to understand it from the employee's point of view and to figure out how it prevents the person from adequately accomplishing desirable goals.

Werther and Davis (1989:303), talk about the benefit of performance appraisal. According to them it is the process by which organizations evaluate job performance. When done correctly, employees, their supervisors, the personnel department and, ultimately, the organization all benefit. Employees seek feedback on their performance as a guide to future behavior so that they can improve their performance. In doing so their actual performance is compared with implicitly or explicitly set standards, prompting the leader to reinforce desired outcomes and take corrective action for poor performance.

Hale (1993:24) is concerned about how performance appraisal is implemented. He said, properly implemented performance appraisal should open up the opportunity for a healthy two-way discussion between manager and subordinate of performance over a recent period, and make plans for improving performance and developing individual in the future.

Among other numerous purpose of TQM is to solve problems.

Hunsaker and Alessandra (1986:223) cited that,

To help solve a problem, the manager needs to understand it from the employee's point of view and to figure out how it prevents the person from adequately accomplishing desirable goals. Both the manager and the employee must have a clear understanding of the problem if it is to be solved.

Lockett, J (1992:19) stated that lack of competence is a barrier which may prevent people from achieving higher performance. Obviously, people cannot perform well in areas where they have little ability but they can do so where they have higher levels of skills and knowledge. Competence therefore, forms the boundary of individual or groups' capacity to perform. Effective performance management in this aspect should focus on two objectives:

Ensuring that people are motivated to perform effectively to the boundaries of their ability;

Stretching those boundaries by an effective program of personal development.

Previous study

There could be studies conducted on effective performance but the researcher was only able to find one article specifically written on electricity meter readers performance by Riordan and Teresa published in The New York Times of February 16, 1998 (Sec:D P;2 Col:1): The core of Professor Roos's new technology is not a new computer chip or operating system. Rather, it is a new type of electricity meter. This newly invented device would get rid of traditional meter readers, who walk from house to house checking monthly electricity use on mechanical meters. The computer chips are installed inside the meter and these chip would 'read' electricity usage continuously.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter will first focus on the purpose of the study. Then it moves on to give a brief description of the site, background and to outline the purpose of the study and research questions to be answered. The justification on the use of the action research and action learning methods are also mentioned after the reviewing of action research and action learning literature. The chapter will conclude by giving a justification of the action research method adopted in this study.

Purpose of the Project

In the past there were not much efforts to find out how efficient were meter readers in solving their problems and performing their routine jobs in SESCO. The researcher in his attempt to explore the efficiencies and the effectiveness of meter readers in carrying out tasks using existing method has chosen action learning and action research techniques in his study. This study is centered to answer the following research questions:

To what extent is the existing performance of meter readers effective in SESCO?
Could action learning be used to improve performance of meter readers in SESCO?

To what extent did action learning contribute to improvement of the performance of meter readers in SESCO?

Site/Background

This study was conducted in SESCO Regional Office, Bintawa. The reason for choosing this organization is because the management concerns about the quality of organization performance and to ensure that the high reliability and efficient services it gives would always meet the consumers' expectations. It must develop and maintain a component highly motivate, results oriented organization founded on a culture of team work where people work together synergistically in a spirit of cooperation and harmony. SESCO seeks to attract, develop, motivate and retain people who demonstrate competence and integrity in performing their jobs.

Justification of Action Research Methodology

Introduction

In this study the researcher used Action Research method which was founded by Kurt Lewin (1944). Kurt Lewin developed the approach and used the term around 1944 and helped to establish the Commission for Community Interrelations as an action research organization. Although the definition of action research did not appear from his work, he did refine the concept of action research as a method of planned social change (McNiff, J. 1988:9). Since then action research has been

recognized by many writers in education, industries, business and management, nursing, the community development projects for social change through a form of collaboration between social scientists. Abraham (1997:18) for example, had stated five fundamental features of Lewin's action research method emerged from his published articles:

Action research should be focused on real problems in the everyday world, as distinct from theoretical problems;

It involves actually taking action to redress the problems;

This action should be part of spirals of steps comprised of planning, action and evaluation;

Professional researchers should collaborate with members of the groups or organizations that are the subject of the research;

Action research is a scientific process which, in addition to solving particular problems, can provide insights into the laws which determine social behavior.

Definition

There are as many definitions as there are writers on action research. Cunningham (1993:4) defines action research as a term to describe a wide range of activities that focus on research, theorizing, learning and development. It describes a continuous process of research and learning in the researcher's long-term relationship with a problem. It is an application of fact-finding to practical problem-solving in a social situation with a purpose of improving the quality of action within it. He further emphasizes what important features that make it different from traditional research is that it involves the collaboration and the cooperation of researchers, practitioners and the laymen. This has been agreed by Carr and Kemmis (1986:21) and they saw it as 'upon awareness and empowerment and upon finding ways researchers and practitioners to work collaboratively and for practitioners to become researchers in their own rights'. However Mc Taggart's (1991:84) view on action research as 'planning, observing and reflecting' seems to be similar to the spiral of steps as mentioned by Kurt Lewin. Winter (1996:14) refers action research as:

ways of which investigating professional experience which link practice and the analysis of practice into a single productive and continuously developing sequence, and which link researchers and research participants into a single community of interested colleagues. It is about the nature of the learning process, about the link between practice and reflection, about the process of attempting to have new thoughts about familiar experiences, and about the relationship between experience and general ideas.

Zuber-Skerritt (1991:83) emphasizes the importance of action research is that it brings about practical improvement, innovation, change or development of social practice, and the practitioners' better understanding of their practices and these views is shared by Cunningham (1993:9). He said that other than a process of systematically collecting research data about on going system it is also a process of developing and discovering the aspects of the system's operation which can contribute to improvement and change. The process involves understanding the

system, defining solutions or discoveries, applying and modifying these solutions, and assessing the results of the actions.

The intention of the researcher is to bring about the improvement and the change in his organization through action research so that his colleagues will learn and share the experience. Through the process they will discover the problems faced by the individual meter readers in carrying out their routine jobs and discover the solutions.

Characteristics

Abraham and Burns have cited similar characteristics of Lewin's action research. But the former included the spiral action which is part of a spiral steps comprised of planning and evaluation. It is action spiral because it consists of activities to plan, to act and to observe, to act and to revise plan, to act and to observe and to reflect (Kemmis and Mc Taggart (1988:11). According to them there are four characteristics of action research and it is situational, diagnosing a problem in a specific context and attempt to solve in the context;

It is collaborative, with teams of researchers and practitioners working together

It is participatory, as team members take part directly in implementing the research; and

It is self evaluation, modifications are continuously evaluated within the ongoing situation to improve.

Abraham (1997:23) however has come up with twelve general characteristics which are as follows:

Problem focus – action research has to be focused on real problems in the everyday world rather than on theoretical issues. As in the case of this study this characteristic is applied whereby the Action Learning Group (ALG) members would discuss issues that concern about their daily tasks. It would cover the problems they face inside and outside office pertaining to their jobs and their relationships with their superiors, peers, consumers and many others. The problem focus factors therefore would enable them to identify what type of problems exactly they are encountered with. And this would further lead them to determine the symptoms or causes of the problems so that it is possible to find solutions;

Action orientation – Once the ALG members have identified the causes of the problems, action orientation would enable them to develop plans or strategies to solve them. The diagnosis of a problem or the development of a plan can only be considered to be action oriented if it becomes part of a process to implement the plan. This brings an action element to the solving of an immediate problem of the organization;

Cyclical process: Spiral of steps – action research method involves cycles of planning, action, observation and reflection. In this study it allows Action Research Group (ARG) members to develop a plan, to act, to observe and to reflect on this plan and to modify this plan based on the needs of the group members and the requirements of the organization and the situation. The

researcher plans to conduct the research through meetings, observation and interviews. A record of the process of each meeting would form a cycle, and if this study requires five meetings therefore it would have five mini cycles. Triangulation process is not considered as part of the mini cycles.

Collaborative – in action research collaboration refers to the effort of many people in gathering opinion and ideas to make decision and with it action can be taken. To change the culture, for example, the group must change themselves, with others, through changing the substance, forms and patterns of language, activities and social relationships which characterize groups and interaction among ALG members. Action research is not individualistic and the researcher aims to do this collaboratively. Collaboration is a fundamental ingredient of the action research method, because without this group effort to solve problems in the environment of participation, there would be no action research existed. In this research the facilitators who are also the ARG members collaborate with the ALG members and other people involve in it in their attempt to facilitate the group learning and problem solving processes.

Ethical basis – the ethical basis of action research is an important characteristic to consider because it involves a group of people in an organization with limited power who are open to exploitation and their problems are ignored. Thus the researchers carry a special burden of responsibility to address an issue that the inefficiency of meter readers performance may be caused by various factors which he is going to explore.

Experimental – experimental action research involves controlled experiments that compare the effectiveness of various methods of action. This action research uses a case study consisting of six meter readers who were introduced with a new method, Action Learning, as a tool in problem-solving process.

Scientific – the action research method does have a scientific basis which a number of authors (Kemmis 1981; Susman and Evered 1978; Winter 1987) took considerable pains to justify this assertion. In this study the researcher claimed that it has a scientific characteristics based on the selection of a specific problem and the formulation of a prediction that implies a goal and a procedure for reaching it.

Re-educative – re-education implies more than just learning. It involves a change in the way a situation is viewed. Reeducation occurred in this study with learning takes place by the ALG and ARG members through group processes, team work, and practical experience in building confidence and commitment, and developing decision making and problem solving skills. Members of ARG and ALG would benefit and gained knowledge about the work culture of the meter readers and a greater understanding of the nature of the action research and action learning processes.

Emancipatory - Emancipatory aims to improve situations or to change it for the better. The action research method in this study is emancipatory as it

aims, through a case study, to produce an improvement of the meter readers' schedule and as well as the Meter Room Section's performance as a whole.

Naturalistic – This study for example, is naturalistic at it was a case in which qualitative and descriptive data were collected in a real world setting. To do this the researcher has to record all important points discussed during each meeting, interview meter readers and meter examiners in Kuching who are not included in the ALG and ARG, and as well as the opinions of other staff in order to obtain views directly from them.

Normative – Action research aims to bring about change within groups and the forces (group norms) that control a group's behavior need to be well understood.

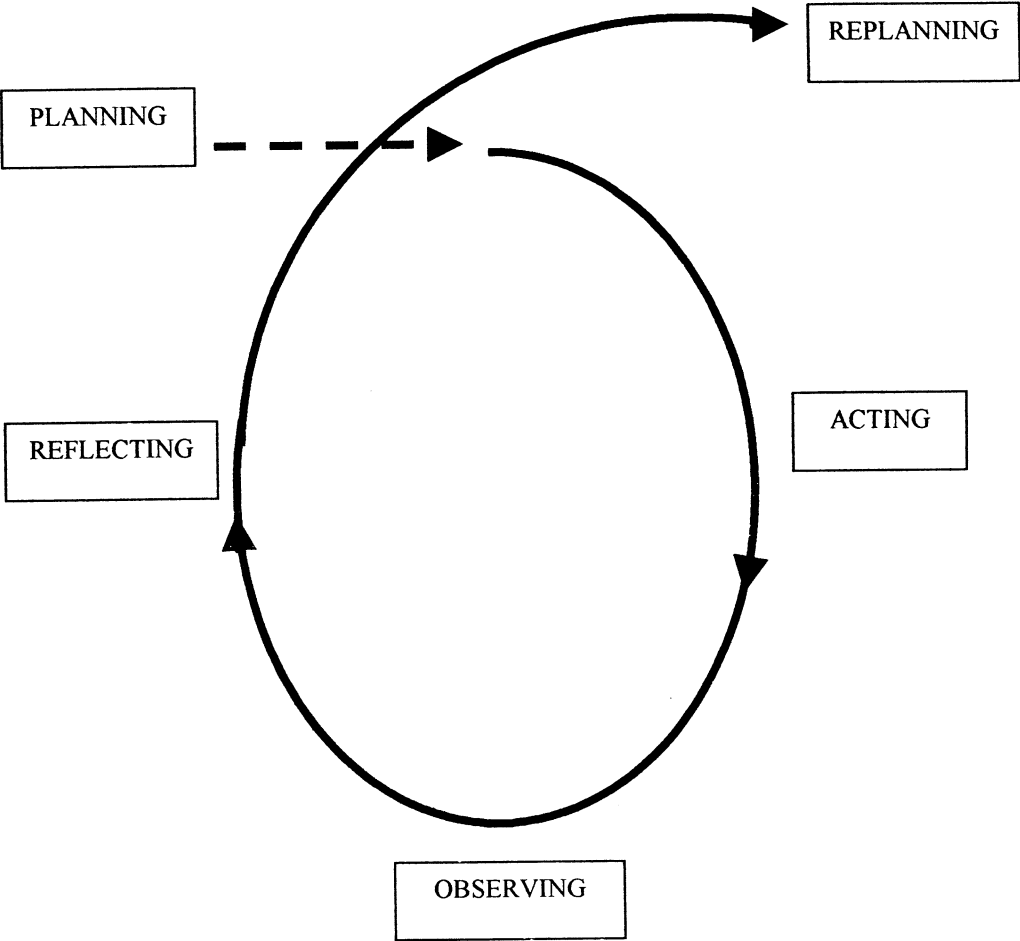
Group dynamic –the success of action research method will depend on how well the group can operate as a team. This indicates the understanding of the importance of group dynamic.

Action Research Methods and Process as used in this Study

Action research consists of specific processes and methods. The first step is the identification of thematic concern. The term thematic concern means the substantive area in which the action research group decides to focus its improvement strategies (Kemmis and Mc Taggart (1988:19). In this study the thematic concern is to explore if action learning could be used as an effective tool to improve performance. This is done after an action research group consisting of six or seven people who must have similar interests is formed.

According to Lewin (1946) action research should involve a series of steps that are repeated to form a spiral while Zuber-Skerritt (1991) referred to 'cycles of action and research' consisting of planning; acting; observing and reflecting. The flow of action research circle in this project is shown in Figure 3:

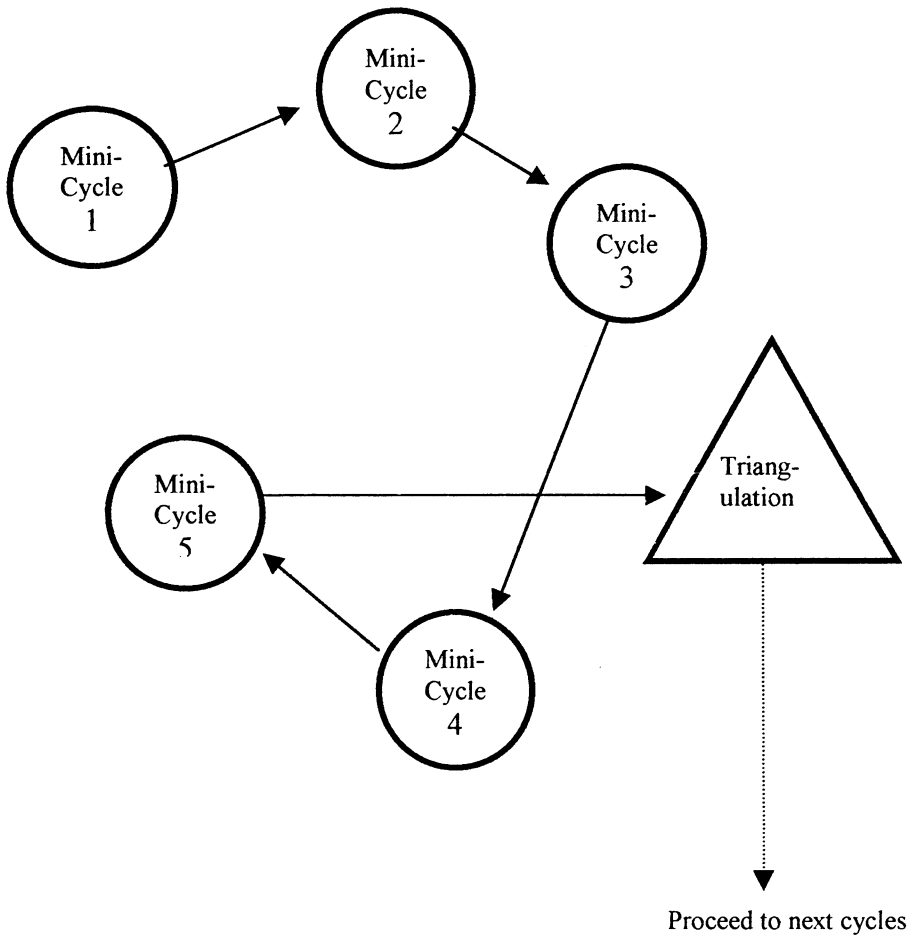
Figure 3: Zuber – Skerritt’s Cycle of Action Research



Perry and Zuber-Skerritt (1991) had suggested that a single cycle of planning, acting, observing and reflecting would be appropriate for a Master's thesis while the Ph.D would need at least two cycles. This study has five mini cycles and one triangulation.

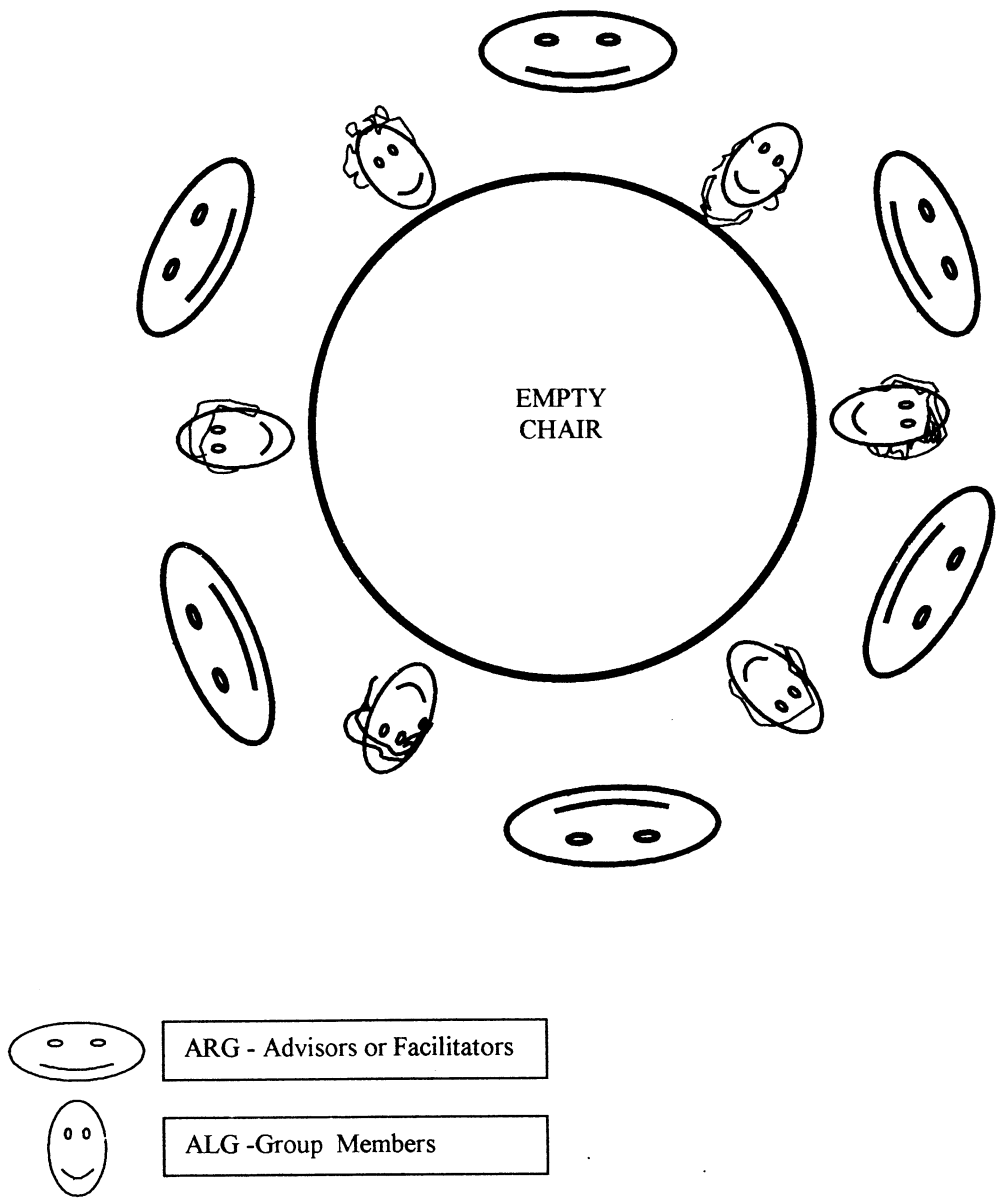
However, there are similar mini-cycles within that one main cycle as the action research and action learning groups keep on a continuous process of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. Each mini-cycle ends with an evaluation phase before proceeding to the next mini-cycle during the action research cyclical process. The evaluation phase aims to obtain validation of the action research processes and outcomes through a triangulation process by the researcher, the research group members and the evaluator (representing top management level of SESCO) before proceeding to the next mini-cycle. In this study triangulation is done after the completion of five mini cycles. It also aims to access the learning outcome of the research and learning participants. This is shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4 : Five Mini Cycles and a Triangulation Processes



Action research process is sometimes very complicated. The researcher should be cautious in selecting applicable or suitable techniques in his study. In this case the fishbowl technique is most suitable. It requires five or six people to form a group and sitting in a circle. They work with a group adviser or facilitator who watches and observes the process. An empty chair is placed in the center of the circle; any group member from the cycle takes turn to sit on the chair and tells his colleagues about his problems in performing his job and the experiences that he has had. When he had finished, his colleagues start asking him questions in the form of challenging and constructing, contributing and supporting his ideas. At the conclusion of the exercise the discussion is open to everyone to comment and every point discussed right from the beginning must be recorded or minute. The fishbowl diagram is illustrated in Figure 5.

Figure 5: The Fishbowl Diagram



Thematic Concern

The thematic concern defines the substantive area in which the group decides to focus its improvement strategies. Group members plan action together, act and observe individually or collectively, and reflect together. The thematic concern should not be confused with a method which might be used to improve things. It should attempt to raise the problematic nature of a particular educational concern and not uncritically accept or propose an education method or the way it is supposed to be better. Thematic concern deals with developing the sensitivity of procedures and explaining them to the ALG members how it helps them to accomplish their tasks or solve their problems.

Once the thematic concern is identified, the action group has to undertake the following steps as stated by Kemmis and Mc Taggart (1988:10):

To develop a plan critically informed action to improve what is already happening.

To act to implement plan critically informed action to improve what is already happening; the plan, to observe the effects of critically informed action in the context in which it occurs; and

To reflect on these effects as a basis for further planning, subsequently critically informed action and so on, through a succession of cycles.

Agreement and Accessibility

To begin with there must be an acceptance of the action research's goals and methods used. The willingness of the participants to participate or whoever involve must be sought in order to obtain a positive and cooperative attitude among those who are carrying it out. Cunningham (1993) identified the following five sequences which are part of this initiation effort:

Entry: Normally the researcher obtains the permission to conduct research from an authorized person in an organization. This process is called entry and it provides commitment of the organization to support the study. The researcher's entry to SESCO is obtained from Head of Corporate Services in writing;

Forming an Action Research Group: Ideally, membership to the action research group would be appointed based on their positions, willingness and have interests on the subject matter. They were issued with formal letters by the management so that they were committed and felt recognize being the members. For the purpose of this project, three persons at the managerial level and four persons from the supervisory level were appointed including the researcher as facilitators for the group members. They are shown in Table 1;

Development of Goals for the Group: For the action research group to function as a team, it must define common goals evolved from its need to

solve a problem or plan an overall direction. The goals provide a helpful orientation for the research effort, effectively focusing and coordinating the many aspects of the research. Inappropriately stated goals, however, are worse than no goals at all;

Training of the Action Research Group: People cannot make intelligent choices about action research techniques unless they feel competent to deal with the problems of other people. Group building from the beginning is necessary to make the group's research genuinely cooperative and effective. Difficulties with group building - or with the skills of research - call for training and improvement. The best way to train the research team is by demonstration or practical application;

The Research Agreement: The action research group must obtain access to those who can authorize the research contract and facilitate research conditions. It is also important, although it may be difficult, to identify indifferent opposing organizational elements. Their arguments can then be inputted into the research process. Including opposing viewpoints tends to legitimize the action research effort. The action research agreement can be secured in a variety of ways. It can be proposed by members of the action research group who hold formal positions in an organization, or it can be secured indirectly through members of the action research group who are connected to other individuals and groups, which, in turn, have direct access to legitimizing agents. Top management commitment may be obtained more easily by a clearly defined contract. A well-defined agreement that includes a statement of needs, goals, justifications, and expectations leaves little question as to exactly what activities the organization is authorizing and supporting.

Table 1: Members of Action Research Group (ARG)

Names	Positions	Referred to as
Haji Sulaiman	Manager Finance	ARG One
Philip Chen	Manager Customer Service	ARG Two
Abang Yusuf	Admin. Officer (Researcher)	ARG Three
Wilfred Ragam	Executive Officer	ARG Four
Puteh Bol	Supervisor	ARG Five
Evelyn Yeo	Supervisor	ARG Six
Latifah Hj. Mohd. Salleh	Supervisor	ARG Seven

Formal letters of appointment for the ARG members are as per Appendices B-1 and B-2.

Why they were appointed?

The researcher should be somewhat cautious if the group consists of the reliable members. Therefore, their appointments were based on the following reasons:

Interested to learn new skills in problem solving;

Each one of them performs supervisory role and have five and over subordinates;

The immediate link with top management and the support group enable them to get support and cooperation;

Committed to see the group problem solving as an on-going process in SESCO.

What were their roles?

In order to make the process of action research goes smoothly it is essential to ensure that the facilitators understand their roles which include the following:

- to help individuals learn;
- to help the group to learn as a team;
- to model helpful behavior:
 - to listen
 - to ask helpful questions
 - to give feedback
 - to reflect
 - to challenge
 - to support
 - to encourage dialogue, not discussion
 - to express / admit feelings
- to give members responsibility for their work and their learning;
- to reflect back on the processes in the group;
- to facilitate the groups' or individual's efforts.

Action Research Process

In this action research process the researcher had planned to form another group, Action Learning Group (ALG) as a case study. The ARG members are acted as observers and facilitators whenever the ALG holds its problem solving meetings. There were 31 meter readers available in Kuching and six were selected to form the ALG. Their names are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 : Members of Action Learning Group (ALG)

Names	Referred to as
Albert C. Dunstan	ALG One
Dolhadi bin Edi	ALG Two
Mazlan Hj. Tambek	ALG Three
Sulaiman bin Daud	ALG Four
Alladen bin Muhidden	ALG Five
Allan Chong	ALG Six

Why they were chosen?

They were chosen basically on three reasons:

interested to learn new knowledge, especially in problem-solving skills which may help at their workplaces;

willing to participate voluntarily and contribute ideas through experience;

tired of facing traditional problems and try to find new and effective ways to solve them out.

What were their roles?

As a member of a dynamic group each ALG member has significant roles to play. The roles are:

To come and prepare for the meeting;

To discuss job related problems

To listen and give feedback

To express opinions and suggestions

To help members by giving opinions or suggestions through questions positively

To reflect

To act positively.

ALG and ARG Relationships

In this study the ALG consisting of six meter readers was used as a case study. They were chosen because they have been doing similar jobs; using same documents or tools and working in similar environment. They were scheduled to hold meetings twice a month to discuss about their problems at their work places. There are thirty one meter readers in Regional Office, Bintawa and about one hundred more are posted elsewhere throughout the State of Sarawak.

The ARG are those staff holding higher positions who help the researcher to collect data through their roles as observers and facilitators. The ARG members would attend every meeting held by the ALG members who discuss about problems they face at their work places. As facilitators the ARG members must play their respective roles in order to make learning possible and goals achieved.

Development of goals for the group:

In order to perform smoothly as a team the action research group must define common goals evolved from its need to solve a problem or plan an overall direction. The goals provide a helpful orientation for the research effort, effectively focussing and coordinating the many aspect of the research. The research group here would have the common goal of examining the effectiveness of action learning as an alternative problem solving process in SESCO.

Training for the ARG and ALG members:

The names action research and action learning were new to all group members, therefore there was a need to conduct a full day training to all the group members. To make training more effective, training program was divided into two sessions, morning session was for all members and afternoon session was for ARG group members only.

Research Agreement:

In order to make training and meeting process ran smoothly members of ALG were issued with letters signed by the Regional Manager (RM) so that they could leave their work places for such purposes. The letter is shown as per Appendix B-3.

Triangulation

Triangulation is a technique that involve comparing the views of different people or groups who experience the same situations. It can be used in both data collection and data analysis to check validity and reliability. This is done through cross-examination the consistency of the information derived at different times and by different means within qualitative methods to ensure accuracy or validity.

In this study triangulation was done after the completion of five mini cycles process. Data triangulation was achieved by using multiple sources data collected at different settings, different times, and from different individuals. The data were sourced from:

The meetings held whereby the ALG and the ARG members were present. (The ALG discussed about their problem-solving and the ARG acted as observers and facilitators);

The individual interviews of peers who were not the ALG members;

the observations of the researcher as recorded in his notes made during the meetings (which form mini cycles through the process of planning, action, observation, reflection and evaluation).

Why chosen Action Learning method?

Introduction

Cunningham (1993:24) described action learning as a strand of training which is philosophically connected to the action research tradition. It is a training process which is based on one's experiences, and highlights a process of learning by doing." Action learning was first developed by Reg Revans who started it in coal mines, and later on spread it to hospitals, schools, factories and offices. In his effort to develop action learning he organized managers into small groups of four or five working on coal field problems and meetings near their work pits. The result indicated that there was an increase output of 30 per cent per head in the pits that took part in the action programs as compared to productivity in other pits. Revans in fact, started the idea of action learning when he saw scientists working at the Cavendish Laboratory shared their problems, and received support from each other in their group. He then came up with a formula for action learning as $L=P+Q$, where L is for learning, P is for programmed knowledge and Q is for the ability to ask for right questions. However, Weinstein (1995:49) has suggested two other elements which makes the equation as $L=P+Q+A+R$. Where A represents action and R represents reflection. 'Action' according to her is doing or experiencing while reflection is the process of examining what we believe and value, our understanding and insights, and how we see ourselves changing and moving – unable to. It tells us what else we could have done, or what we could have done differently – and what are the consequences. Thus if we want to cope with changes or to keep update our knowledge and skills, we need to learn harder and faster than change. Therefore the equation is $L > C$. And if $L < C$ it indicates that we are far behind in any circumstances.

Inglis (1994) described action learning as a process which brings people together to find solutions to problems and, in doing so, develops both individuals and the organizations. He further expressed action learning as:

a process which develops people and organizations using important issues confronting the organization as a vehicle for doing so. In action learning these two aspects are always present – the growth and the development of people and of the organization, and simultaneous finding of solutions to problems.

Besides Revans and Inglis, another author McGill (1992) described action learning as;

a continuous process of learning and reflection, supported by colleagues, with the intention of getting things done. Through action learning individuals learn with and from each other by working on real problems and reflecting their own experiences.

What actually is action learning?

In view of the above definitions action learning is a process underpinned by a belief in individual potential according to Weinstein (1995:9)

a way of learning from our actions and from what happens to us and around us by taking the time to question and reflect on this in order to gain insights and consider how to act in future.

People learn in many ways, for example through reading, hearing, seeing, experiencing or doing and so on. Many writers have shown us various methods how

people learn effectively. Reg Revans for example, had introduced 'action learning' method and further developed by many other writers such as McGill (1992) and Inglis (1994). Weinstein (1995) has pointed out that action learning is actually a way how people learn from their own actions in response to the surrounding environment where they live. These people used all sorts of questions in their attempt to understand more or better and reflect on this to gain insight feelings. Once they have that feelings they began to consider what to do in future in order to put themselves on the right tracks or decisions.

Elements of Action Learning

In order for the action learning process to perform smoothly and effectively its five main elements must be of significant to remember which are as follows:

- a small group of people, called the set (five or six) who meet regularly (normally once or twice a month) to work and learn together. Their task is to focus mainly on the action and learning of each individual, rather than the group as a whole;

- each person tackles a work-centered task or project which is essentially the learning vehicle. As such, it might be a specific task that the participant undertakes to gain into how to manage such tasks more effectively; or how to handle, or work with, others better; or how to develop certain personal qualities and skills;

- the set adopts a strict question-based process (no advice, no discussion, no anecdotes), and offers everyone their own airspace during which focus of the other set members is on them and what they are achieving and learning;

- participants revisit their project (ie the action bit of the program) and assess what they are learning at regular intervals – ideally at each set meeting;

- each set is facilitated by a set adviser whose main skills are process skill (ie he or she is not required to be an expert in any particular fields). Their task is to help individuals in the set to learn by taking responsibility for their own learning;

- programs are run over a minimum of three months. This time element is crucial for achieving both the learning and action (ie outcomes on projects).

These elements are found in most management tools now practiced by SESCO such as TQM, QCC, 5S, I Suggest, and ISO 9000. However, the outcome of the action learning methodology seems to be more practical in most cases. In QCC for example, there are the same number of people involve in a problem solving project determined by the group members, at workplace, and the process requires a leader or facilitator. These are found in action learning as well.

Once the QCC group has completed the project on certain topic the outcome is documented and treated as a new procedure or guide and to be followed or complied with. It is the solution to the problem that has been discussed in the project. The same group later can go on to choose another topic within

their workplace for their next project. QCC methodology provides a good system in finding facts but it is not effective enough to overcome 'changes'. The documented procedure derived from the first QCC project may be obsolete after a period of time due to change, such as the existence of new information technology, organizational policy, economic downturn and so on.

In the action learning methodology, the action learning groups do not waste their time and efforts on these because action learning is an on-going process concept. Problems when arise at any time and place can be adjusted and solutions determined throughout the mini-cycle process. This process keeps the knowledge, skills and experience of the group members updated.

Each participant (or the set as a whole if they are working on a group project) has a client – someone in a senior position who can claim ownership of the program; someone who, in Reg Revan's term, knows, cares and can. The client is a champion of the program, committed to it and believing in its values; he or she must ensure that participants are given time by their managers to work on their projects and to attend set meetings. Clients are the senior people who will some way assess the results of the program, either through being given a report or presentation —written or verbal – at the end of a program, or by some form of discussion with the participants. As in the case of this study the set is known as 'the ALG' and the client is the RM of Regional Office, Bintawa. The ARG members are acted as the observers and the facilitators to help the researcher in recording, collecting data and help in analyzing these data.

Application

Like action research, action learning approach also can be applied to the following circumstances:

When we are confronting with a new situation we have never been before;

When we are working with a new group of people we have never dealt before;

When we want to test out new ways of working with people we already know;

When our jobs or roles change and we are not sure what our responsibilities are, or how to relate to our staff;

When the organization we work for is facing a major dilemma and needs to move forward;

When we feel there are untapped human resources around us that we are ignoring;

When the organization we work for is faced with challenges and needs to establish strategies and plans for the future;

When we want to change the way things have been before; and when we want to change something in our own personal make up: the way we do things, the way we react – i.e personal development.

When applied at work, action learning means working and learning simultaneously. Participants on an action learning program will focus on work-based issues, problems and questions. In this study the process would involve meetings, interviews and observing.

Characteristics of Action Research Method

Why action research method is used in this study? Referring to its characteristic which have been discussed, it is considered appropriate for an action research method to be used in this study for various of reasons:

Action research is concerned on real problem issues in real life situations.

There is an existing work-based concern within SESCO with respect to improvement of performance of individual staff based on the individual and organization needs to achieve work-targets and objectives. Simultaneously it is focused to meet the challenges and the needs of the organization towards quality services;

As this study is exploratory in seeking various approaches toward an effective succession system, the cyclical process of the action research method involving spiral steps of planning, action, observation and reflection would be ideal for gathering creative ideas as well as providing, sharing knowledge, and experience through the implementation process;

The collaborative nature of the action research method provides an environment of participation which allows significant interaction as a team-building process within the organization. This will facilitate the exploratory nature of the study and provides for mutual reflection on the issue instead of being allergic to the issue; and

The collaborative aspect is also related to the group dynamics which are necessary for effective collaboration.

What make this an action research study?

It is an action research study based on the following characteristics:

Problem Focus: This study focuses on the problem that affect most staff on individual performance in which their future prospect in the organization is very much depending on;

Action Orientation: The exploratory study of the approaches toward an effective system is in itself a first step of the process which has strategic change implications for the organization;

Cyclical Process: It applies the action research spiral of cycles of planning, action, observation and reflection in exploring the approaches;

Collaborative : One of the main concern in this study is the collaboration among members of the group and participation in problem-posing and answering questions during the process of exploration;

Ethical Basis: At the first place approval must be obtained from the Head of Corporate Services of SESCO and from the State Planning unit to conduct the study. Participants involved in this study are issued with official letters as a compliance of procedures and recognition of their active involvement;

Scientific: The results and the findings of the study are expected to be validated through the demonstration that changes resulting from the study constitutes an improvement to the situations;

Re-educative: Learning is expected to take place among the participants through group processes and teamwork occurring during the study. It is expected that the top management of the organization will have a broader understanding of the various approaches as a result of their evaluating the findings during the process of action research. The researcher and all the group members are expected to gain a greater understanding of the nature of the action research and the action learning processes;

Emancipatory: This study is expected to empower the participants who will involve in the planning, action, observation, reflection and evaluation of task plans for the action research process. This process will lead to improvement in the problem-solving skills of the participants;

Naturalistic: The study allows participants to influence the approaches in data gathering, reflection and evaluation of real-life situations. It also allows them to work collaboratively in developing critiques of existing conditions so as to look for solutions and improvements;

Normative : The study will consider the norms of the organization in exploring the issue of performance appraisal system's effectiveness. There is potential for changes to happen in the organization; and

Group Dynamics: The study requires the formation of action group with six or seven members representing supervisory level and above, while the action learning group comprising of five or six members from any level doing similar jobs and similar workplaces.

Chapter Summary

Action research and action learning have been widely accepted as one of the most effective methods in problem solving process. It is a systematic approach and where anyone can participate and learn. As most of its characteristics are relevant to situations and environment, the researcher feels that it is applicable to SESCO. Further more, the management and the staff involved have expressed their supports and cooperation for this project.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the purpose of the study and the research questions involved. It also attempts to discuss how action learning could be used to improve the performance of meter readers by emphasizing on job problem-solving process using a case study which involves six meter readers. Action research is therefore being used on hypotheses process. The findings will be described in terms of mini cycles after having gone through several meetings with the Action Research Group (ARG) and Action Learning Group (ARG).

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of the study is to explore the effectiveness of performance of meter readers in SESCO Regional Office, Bintawa: A case study based on Action Learning.

Research Questions

The researcher has identified and focused on the following questions as the objectives of his study:

To what extent is the existing performance of meter readers effective in SESCO?

Could action learning be used to improve the performance of meter readers in SESCO?

To what extent did action learning contribute to improvement of the performance of meter readers in SESCO?

Mini Cycle One

Planning

Before the researcher went to Gibaran Action Research Management Institute, Adelaide to present his Action Research Proposal he has obtained a written approval to conduct a research from Head of Corporate Services of SESCO (Appendix A). A similar approval has also been issued by the State Planning Unit of Sarawak. The researcher planned to complete five mini cycles in this study and a triangulation process would be carried out soon after. The implementation process depends on the result of the triangulation in order to achieve the outcome of the whole project. The research general objective and specific objectives are as follows:

General Objective

The main purpose of this study is to explore the effectiveness of performance of meter readers in SESCO Regional Office, Bintawa: A case study on Action Learning.

Specific Objectives

To what extent is the existing performance of meter readers effective in SESCO?

Could action learning be used to improve the performance of meter readers in SESCO?

To what extent did action learning contribute to improvement of the performance of meter readers in SESCO?

The researcher had three meetings with Head of Corporate Services in SESCO Head Office, first to explain the concepts of Action Research and Action Learning, second to draft plan or proposal how would the project be carried out. These were included the following:

To draw a plan for the project or study on action research and the process of action learning;

When to begin and when to complete;

Where to conduct and who would involve;

When and who to issue letters as a formal procedure to nominate them to take part in the project;

Which area of the problem-solving the research should focus on;

To determine how would triangulation method be carried out.

And third, to brief her on the proposal and how the researcher would begin with his research. Based on the main objective of the study the Head of Corporate Service wanted the researcher to prove to the management that action learning is applicable in SESCO.

After the discussion, Head of Corporate Services immediately issued a circular to the other five Head of Departments in SESCO (Generation, Finance, Marketing and Distribution, Engineering Services, Planning and Logistics) to inform them about the project and seek support and cooperation during the phase of research process. Upon receiving the full support from the management the researcher went to see every individual person nominated to join the groups in his project. There were six participants for ARG comprised from managerial and supervisory levels and six participants consisting of meter readers from Customer Services Division of SESCO Regional Office, Bintawa. The later group (ALG) is used as a case study in this project. The researcher received encouragement and positive feedback from all of them.

Action

The researcher called all members to come to the first meeting on 17 February, 1998 to discuss the following agendas:

To form an Action Research Group consisting of two managers, one executive officer and three supervisory staff;

To form an Action Learning Group consisting of six meter readers;

To explain the concepts of action research and action learning methodologies including the roles and responsibilities of individual members;

To plan for the ARG and ALG activities throughout the process of this project. The process would include meetings, interviews and observations. As suggested by the management every meeting should not exceed three hours so that it would not affect too much of the participants' daily tasks.

Observation

The first meeting recorded two ARG members were unable to come due to some urgent matters in office. The terms Action Research and Action Learning were new to almost all of them. As such, some had shown their interests to know more and learn these new management tools with the aim of helping them to solve problems at workplaces and improve the quality of their performance. There were a lot of questions asked by the participants especially on techniques and advantages of these tools. They even compared and relate these tools to total quality management, quality circles and so on. There were few who looked doubtful at the very first place about action learning and action research. After a long explanation they began to be responsive and had shown interests. The researcher felt that it was very encouraging and could see that actual learning process was exactly in progress.

Reflection

At this stage, the researcher had explained the concepts of action research and action learning and were mostly understood by the members. This was so because, the researcher had delivered his briefing in two languages (English and Bahasa Malaysia). Almost everyone was contributing and taking part in the discussion. During question time, questions asked and opinions aired were mainly focused on general issues of the project such as:

What will we get from this project?

We may touch on sensitive issues which sometimes we cannot avoid. Is this allowed?

Sometimes we may not be able to attend meetings due to urgent works that need immediate attendance. Is it accusable?

They wanted to know why they were chosen for the purpose of this study?

The researcher had managed to answer those questions after tea break. He considered tea break was the best time that gave him opportunity to reflect the issues discussed by using past experience to capture the answers and to give feedback. The researcher could see there were some changes occurred after this meeting; understand the action research and action learning concepts more; exposure and exchanges of ideas by asking questions; and willing to complete this project together – team building.

Evaluation

The researcher had learned that there were other methods of problem-solving practiced in SESCO. Those were, quality control cycle (QCC), 5S-Practices of Good Housekeeping, I Suggest-Staff Suggestion Scheme, ISO 9000 and many others.

However, the process and approaches embraced by these methods are complex, time consuming and costly. As they are quite familiar with some of those methods they would like to try Action Learning in order to see whether it is applicable to their situations. The researcher also learned that people would only willing to work hard and cooperate in a research project if they were issued with formal letters from the management. With such letters they were being honored and would feel free when expressing ideas or suggestions.

Mini Cycle Two

Re-Planning

The second meeting was held on 23 February, 1998 at SESCO Regional Office, Bintawa attended by all ALG and four ARG members. The researcher planned to go into further details on the issues discussed in the last meeting. In normal cases, members would be more open and willing to speak to contribute opinions or ideas since they have no opportunity or shy to do so during the first meeting. It was expected to be more interesting because the agenda would include to invite the ALG members to talk about their problems in their workplaces. During this session the ALG members suggested that all meetings be held on Saturdays and twice a month. Saturdays were chosen so that it would not affect much of their daily reading and delivering schedules for the month. The researcher intended to use fishbowl method (Weinsten 1995:307) in this study. This method allows the participants to sit down around a table and each member takes turn to tell his colleagues of his problem in performing his tasks or job. His colleagues will listen, diagnose the problems and try to help him to solve those problems by giving ideas through questions. Members of the ARG would be present in all meetings to facilitate, observe and to review important points that were discussed.

Action

The researcher could sense that at least six main issues brought by the ALG members and expected that these issues could not be discussed in detail within limited time allowed (2 to 3 hours per meeting). As such, in this meeting he suggested that the ALG members to voice out whatever problems they had from their work places. All those problems were written down without allowing the ALG members or the facilitator to ask questions or probe in their attempts to find ways to solve them. Such action would be done during the next meetings. Having done so, the facilitators would analyze and combine those problems which were related to each other to become an issue. The most significant issues would be chosen for further discussion during the next meeting.

Problem 1: Difficulty to meet daily work targets

ALG Five has voiced out his problem to met daily work-targets which were overall assessed at the end of the year. Every morning all meter readers have to come to their office to report for duty, collect materials, receive instructions as specified in the Reading Schedule. Kuching District is divided into 20 zones consisting of 531 sections and over 90,000 consumers. The jobs require the meter readers to go to their respective zones or sections to take the readings and enter them into the Meter Reading Schedule and also to deliver bills and serve notices. Every morning most of them travel few miles away to reach their destinations before they start reading and

delivering bills or notices. Obviously it takes them quite sometimes to travel and thus delay their jobs especially during rainy seasons or transport breakdowns. Members of the group shared his experience and suggested that this issue be brought up during the next meeting.

Problem 2: Permission to leave office for sports activities

ALG Four has a problem to obtain permission to leave office for sports activities. This is because once a person is selected to represent the State or National level, Division, District and organization in a particular activity the supervisor cannot release them without any written directives. Such directives usually submitted through wrong channels and sometimes the details written in the letter were insufficient, for example, it did not indicate clearly the number of days for training before the actual competition began. This would make the persons affected difficult to hand over his duties to anyone appointed to relief him during his absence. The management supports the State Government to encourage anyone who involve himself or herself in all sorts of healthy activities including sports. These involvement are given recognition and carry weight in the annual performance appraisal process.

Problem 3: Insufficient training provided for meter readers

This problem was brought up by ALG Two. He said he was still new in his job and has a problem of performing his job as a meter reader effectively. Though the duty of meter reader sound simple, in actual fact it is as difficult as any other jobs. In normal practice, a new meter reader is asked to follow another senior colleague so that he can learn by observing him doing his job. He then ask to do similar job alone. The problem arised when he complained that reading meters and delivering bills are not the only jobs of meter readers. It is much more than that, for example he needs to entertain the consumers inquiries about some simple technical matters and general procedures which are related to his job. It is impolite to ignore or turn away from consumers if they need the information for good reasons. Therefore on-the-job training is not enough and the period scheduled for such training is too short an not organized. There should be a specific training program provided for meter readers so that they can perform more effectively. Most members pointed out that this is their common problem and suggested the Training and Development Division to analyze its Training Needs Analysis (TNA) exercise.

Problem 4: Having problem to communicate with rural consumers

The problem of how to make the consumer understand some important messages is rather difficult in some part of Kuching area. This problem was voiced out by the ALG Six. He said some consumers purposely do not want to understand or purposely ignored some advises such as telling them the danger of illegal extensions. Illegal extension or meter tampering does not only against the Sarawak Electricity Ordinance (Cap. 137) but create a danger to their properties as such action could cause fire. Some irresponsible consumers show positive response in the presence of meter readers or supervisors but as soon as they go away the consumers forget everything. There is still no change when the meter reader comes back in his next visit.

Problem 5: Location of meters – problem of taking the reading

ALG Three voiced the problem of difficulty to take reading due to the distance of location of meters. Quite a number of meters are hanging seven feet above the floor; blocked by objects; and located inside bedrooms or kitchen. These normally happen when the consumers renovate and repair their houses, thus change its original positions. There are also meters covered with thick, black and oily dust such as meters installed in coffee shops and kitchens. These factors contribute to the delay and wrong readings are likely to occur.

Problem 6: Risks while performing duties on roads

ALG One is concerned about the danger and risks he was exposed to on roads when carrying out his duty on rainy days and peak hours. Reading is delayed in certain areas due to muddy roads, fierce dogs, and the distance from one house to another.

Problem 7: Updating addresses of consumers

Delay in updating of addresses of consumers took considerable time and treated as the most serious problem of meter readers. According to ALG Five, normally he recorded down the names and addresses of any new consumers and meter numbers in the area he goes and submit it to his supervisor for updating in the Reading Schedule so that it will appear the following month. When the schedule is ready the names of the new consumers still do not appear in the list.

Problem 8: Report on illegal reconnection of supply

ALG One reported that electricity theft was first detected by meter readers. According to procedure any such misconduct or foul activities must be immediately reported to the meter examiners for action to avoid further losses of electricity. The consumers if caught and proved guilty would be fined, and as such they have the ground to accuse the meter readers for lodging reports to the authority concern. In such situation it is a threat to meter readers and make them scared to return to take reading in the affected areas.

Problem 9: Handling lock-gate notices

The ALG Six complained that the design of the lock-gate card is not suitable to use. This card is too thick, heavy to carry on motor cycle, too much details need to be written on it, and it must be costly. When doing job on site he has not much time and places to write on and therefore it creates problem to them. If he just take the meter numbers he believes that other details or information could be obtained through the office information system..

Problem 10: Reading meters in HV areas or Industrial Zones

This problem was brought up by ALG Three. As practiced in the past reading of meters in High Voltage areas or industrial zones were done by meter examiners and now the job is assigned to meter readers. There were no proper training given how to enter these areas despite the danger located at specific areas. The entrance keys leading to these areas are kept by the Watchmen or Officers of respective firms and premises and normally looking for them takes considerable time. When they are not available, normally they make appointments or leave message telling them what time they come back.

Problem 11: Low quality of materials and equipment provided

Most ALG member were not satisfied with the quality of materials supplied to them. For example, the management provided a low quality plastic rain coat and without trousers. The purpose of rain coat is not only to cover the meter readers from rain but to protect the documents from getting wet and destroyed. The bags as far as possible must be water proof and made of good materials.

Problem 12: Names and addresses of consumer numbers in reading schedule not sequence

In many cases where there were new installation of meters especially in heavily developed areas the newly installed meters could not be located by meter readers and also not printed in the Reading Schedule. If printed they appear in other sheets of Reading Schedule and mixed up with thousands of other consumers. Normally it took a long time to look for them and if found the meter readers have to come back to the exact locations (site) to take the readings.

According to members this problem is one of the most complex because it takes too much of their time and effort to settle.

Observation

The first part of the meeting seemed cool as most participants were still shy and not quite sure what to say. However, after half an hour the atmosphere had changed as quite a number of problems aired were shared or experienced by most members. It was observed that the participants grabbed the opportunity to express their problems and feelings about it. They even wanted to discuss seriously how the problems existed and how did it happen. Since the meeting this time is purposely held to record and list out the type of problems they have had at their work places, further discussion related to the causes and implications of those problems would be included during the next meetings. The members even tried to bring up some sensitive issues which of accusing some other people which is not worth to record in this study.

Reflection

The researcher has recorded twelve problems in this meeting. Towards the end of the meeting everyone was trying to grab an opportunity to talk and group participation becoming more active and interesting. Their reaction has indicated that they had the confident and felt comfortable when talking as members of the group. This may be due to the lack of accesses or communication to channel their grievances and be heard by the management.

Evaluation

Both the ARG members and the researcher have learned a lot of new things from this meeting. First, they began to learn the type of problems meter readers are facing. Second, people will contribute more when they feel that they are in a group facing common problems and sharing similar interests. And third, though this research does not complete yet the ALG members and the researcher could feel that they know how to use Action Learning and Action Research methods and appropriate to a research situation.

Mini Cycle Three

Re-Planning

The third meeting was held on 11 March, 1998 between the ARG members only. In this meeting the researcher planned to analyze the data collected during the first and second meetings with the ALG and recorded in Mini Cycle One and Mini Cycle Two processes. When completed the next step is to proceed with two meetings of Mini Cycle Four and Mini Cycle Five. Triangulation process would follow soon after.

Action

This meeting was attended by all ARG members to analyze problems brought up by the ALG members during meeting one and meeting two which were recorded in Mini Cycle One and Mini Cycle Two. The group observed that some problems were related to each other and therefore they decided to choose four significant problems as main issues for further discussion during the next meetings. The members agreed to choose four out of twelve significant problems and planned to discuss two problems in one mini cycle.

Ranking method was used to choose the four significant problems based on two criteria, urgency (to determine the immediate needs of the problems to be solved and avoid further damage), and importance (to indicate the degree of needs of the problems to be solved). The result of the ranking method process is shown on Table 3.

Table 3: Ranking Method: Scale 1 – 10 where highest point is the most significant.

Problems	Urgency	Importance	Scores	Remarks
1. Difficulty to meet work-targets;	9	9	18	Chosen
2. Problem to get permission to leave office for sports activities;	6	4	10	
3. Insufficient training provided for meter readers;	9	10	19	Chosen
4. Having problem to communicate with rural consumers;	5	5	10	
5. Location of meters – problem of taking the reading;	9	9	18	Chosen
6. Risks while performing duties on roads;	6	8	14	
7. Updating addresses of consumers;	8	8	16	
8. Reports on illegal reconnection of supply	7	8	15	
9. Handling lock-gate notices;	7	7	14	
10. Reading meters in HV areas or Industrial Zones;	6	8	14	
11. Low quality materials and equipment provided;	8	8	16	
12. Names and addresses of consumers in Reading Schedule not sequence;	10	10	20	chosen

This meeting also warranted the researcher to arrange for triangulation and to brief the RM on what had been discussed. Simultaneously, the researcher would seek permission from the RM to proceed with Mini Cycles Four and Five.

Observation

Almost all members came on time for this meeting. Looking at their friendly faces and notes that they carried it seem that they were prepared for the meeting. When the meeting was in progress everyone took the opportunity to inform members what they have observed during the last two meetings. The researcher could see that the ARG members have not much problem to understand the ALG members problems and had help a lot in the learning process. They said that they even could feel how the ALG members were confronted with such problems. On certain extent it took quite sometimes when they started to compare the Action Learning methods of solving problems with that of existing methods practiced by SESCO such as Quality Control Cycle, I Suggest and many more. “Action Learning I feel is better to certain extent because it seems to me that it is an on-going process,” said one of the ARG members. “What make you say that?” asked his colleague. “You know”, he said, “when we form an action learning group and discuss some problems the process is continuous which follow specific steps such as the elements of the mini cycles. The elements of planning, observing, acting and reflecting enable us to understand better our problems and determine the solutions. Once solutions are found and improvement is made the process continues to keep track, up date and make adjustments to the existing solutions in order to cope up with changes. Unlike the QCC method, once a

certain project is completed the same group may choose another problem or jump direct to another topic as their next project after the old one has been documented. It is then registered and practiced to solve similar type of problems. However, as time goes by, changes would occur and moves very fast due to invention of new technology, the QCC documented problem-solving procedures would be obsolete or become out of date as we might not do things like before.” What this member said was true and mode of his perception and thinking has changed. “ Would you try this action learning method at your work place”, asked another colleague. “ Oo, I would decide on that after this project is completed”, he replied

Reflection

The researcher observed that the ARG members began to show some confidence on the action learning and action research methods in problem-solving process. At least now they were exposed and knew that there were other management tools which were also applicable in situations like theirs’. Being facilitators and observers, the members did not talk much during the previous meetings with the ALG because they were busy writing points except probing. This meeting was taken as an opportunity given to them individually to tell all members about their opinions and suggestions.

Evaluation

The researcher learned that people were more open, learn more and faster in a group where they have common interests and have common problems. It was also learned that people would become more defensive when their ideas were challenged and try to find ways by giving logic examples to convince others to support or agree with his ideas. Most facilitators were appointed based on their experience in conducting meetings, and as such they were able to control all meetings that they attended with the ALG. Skills in conducting meeting in this process is important so that the researcher, facilitators and the observers would gain as much information as possible in order to diagnose all facts discussed.

In his attempt to ensure how much the ALG and the ARG have learned from this project the researcher had decided to make a survey in order to collect additional and supportive information through a simple questionnaire after triangulation.

Mini Cycle Four

Re-Planning

The fourth meeting was held on 4 April, 1998 at Regional Office, Bintawa attended by six ALG and two ARG members who acted as facilitators and observers. The researcher earlier planned to discuss in detail two problems in this meeting and they are: Problem One - Difficulty to Meet Daily Work Targets, and Problem Three – Insufficient Training Provided for Meter Readers. The next meeting will discuss on Problem Five - Location of Meters- Problem of Taking the Reading, and Problem Twelve – Names and Addresses of Consumers in Reading Schedule are Not Sequence. In his attempt to record as much information as possible the researcher emphasized on the answers to questions such as, What were the symptoms of the problems? How did it happen? What were the implications? What has been done to overcome the problems? What were the results or outcome? And what were the suggestions of staff affected?

Action

The researcher again used fishbowl method in this meeting. The members formed a circle and sat face to face with an empty stool at the center for anyone in the group to sit and take turn to talk. The ARG members who acted as facilitators and observers sat behind them ready to jot down points into their note books and joined the discussion as well.

Problem One: Difficulty to meet work targets

In Meter Room Section there are five meter examiners and each one of them has six or seven meter readers under their supervision. Their job descriptions are shown in Appendix C-1 and Appendix C-2. Every morning the first thing they do is to check the meter readers' reports on tasks accomplished the day before. Then they issue a new daily tasks known as Reading Schedule to meter readers and this is treated as their work targets for the day to accomplish. The Reading Schedule as shown in Appendix E is a ready printed document containing the number and other details of the consumers. It also includes which sections of the zones and the number of consumers in each section. The meter readers need to achieve a certain number of reading in specific areas as shown in Appendix E.

Researcher, " You said there are some factors that contribute to your failure to meet your targets, can you name few and give examples?"

Opinions and suggestions contributed by ALG members in their attempts to answer this question were recorded. The ALG members claimed that it is hard to achieve these targets because there were a lot of things or preparation they have to do besides taking reading from house to house. The environment factors are one of the main problems. Every morning the meter readers come to their office to submit report, collect materials and receive instructions before they go out to the field. Most of the zones and sections are located few kilometers away and it takes sometimes to reach there. The delay of meter reader job also seriously affected by bad weather, road conditions and transport breakdowns. They travel by motorcycles and in order to avoid risks they need good quality raincoats with reflector, boots, bags and to pay extra attention while travelling on roads in the out skirt areas.

Misprinted of consumers names or if printed they appear in other sheets of Reading Schedule is a normal case. The meter readers have to spend long hours to look for these names and if not found on the spot they have to come back on other days.

SESCO Regional Office, Bintawa is practicing alternate month reading method. This means that if the reading is made in January the actual unit of electricity consumed is printed in the bill for that month, while the bill for February would show the average (estimate) figure or unit consumed based on the average consumption for the past few months. In cases where the estimate readings are either high or low the adjustments would be shown in the bills issue for March. Beside reading meters there are at least five types of other jobs to do on spots by meter readers. These forms are:

Home Card (shown on Appendix F): This card is normally displayed near the meter box and not allowed to be removed or destroyed. The purpose of this card is to show to the consumers and the other meter readers or meter examiners the record of unit consumed and also other records about that particular meter. If the consumer has any

complain about the record they can do so through telephone numbers printed on the form.

ARG 5, "What type of complain would the consumers lodge from this form?"

ALG One, " Normally a consumer compares the unit written on the card to the unit shown on the meters. Of course it is not the same because the unit written on the card was taken on the date the meter reader read the meter. While the unit shown on the meter itself is the total unit consumed at the time when the consumer reads the meter which could be few days or months later."

Meter Reading Response Card or Locked Gate notice card (shown in Appendix G): When a meter reader comes to a premise and finds that the gate is locked or the owner of the house is not in, therefore the meter reader cannot take any reading. He fills the card and leaves it inside the consumer's letter box or the consumer's neighbor if letter box is not available. The card indicated that the meter reader had arrived at the premises on certain date and time. The consumer upon receiving this card is expected to take appropriate action, (1) to send the card with reading figures written on it through prepaid postal services, or (2) to send the reading through fax machine, or (3) make telephone call and inform the Clerk on duty in the Meter Room Section of the reading and or (4) the consumer may make an appointment with the Meter Readers by informing the date and time he would like to meet him. If the consumer prefers to return the card it will be delivered direct to the Billing Section.

ARG Three, "The process seems simple and straight forward, why do you think that lock-gate notices affect your performance in achieving your work-targets?"

This question is quickly answered by ALG Five, Two and One. They said, when a gate is locked they do not have proper place to write on and fill the lock-gate cards. Obviously it take sometimes to look for one, plus the time taken to get the cards from their bags and fill it. It would take about two to three minutes to process one lock-gate card and they have the average of ten to twenty cards to fill daily. They cannot rely on this type of system because the disadvantages of this system are mainly due to the consumers' attitude and ignorance. If they respond, the reading might be wrong because they do not know which figure to take and with poor hand writing. The affected premises might be left unoccupied for many months or years and obviously there were no response at all.

Meter Faulty Report Form (as shown in Appendix H). This form is used to make report on faulty meters. Faulty meters are very common everywhere which is caused by irresponsible consumers. When they feel unsatisfied with the high consumption or with the motive of stealing electricity to reduce costs. Normally these type of consumers drill or make small holes and loosen the meter glass cover so that they can insert an object to stop the meter discs from rotating. When this is done the number of units consume stops but the current keeps on flowing as usual. Another method is by using a highly technical tactic to divert the flow of the electricity power through separate cables so that it bypasses the meter and therefore the amount of electricity units consume cannot be detected or recorded by the meter. It needs a highly skilled technician to do because the job is very risky. Though the meter readers do not fill this form but it needs time to write down remarks against the consumers' names on the Reading Schedule. Upon receiving these reports the meter examiners fill the

Faulty Report Forms accordingly and submit them to the Revenue Management Engineer for further investigation and to take appropriate legal action.

ARG Three, "Can you explain how does this faulty meters affect the speed of your work?"

ALG Two, "The investigation is done by an Engineer from other Section and due to the amount of work load that he may have would delay the investigation,"

ALG Six added, "Another factor could be due to late notification, meaning that, if the damage is proven and the meter is changed and they had failed to inform us on time, misreading would occur. This is because the new meter number is not shown on the Reading Schedule."

Notification of Change of Consumers Account (as shown in Appendix I.): The procedure to lodge report on this particular incident and the implication are similar to Meter Faulty Report is made. If there are reading errors, or wrong addresses and names printed in the Reading Schedule and adjustment is to be made, Notification of Change of Consumers Account Form is used. This form is therefore prepared to inform of the discrepancies and errors to Billing Section so that correction could be made before the Reading Schedule for the following month is printed.

List of illegally reconnected Accounts Form (as shown in Appendix J). The procedure to lodge report and the implication is similar to reports prepared for Meter Faulty and Notification of Change of Consumers Accounts. This form is used to lodge reports on illegal connection or reconnection made by the consumers. In certain areas there are houses built without the supply of electricity. The owner of these houses normally get the supply from their neighbors through illegal extensions of cables or ordinary wires. This action is wrong under Electricity Supply Ordinance and liable to be charged as electricity theft and danger to public.

Similarly, as in the case of lodging reports for faulty meters and notification of change of consumers' names and addresses, the meter readers have to write some notes against the existing consumers' names on the Reading Schedule. Before the List of Illegally Reconnected Account Form is prepared normally the Meter Examiner reconfirm the report by visiting the site and when done this form is submitted to Accounting Officer in the Billing Section to take appropriate action.

In other cases, when a consumer does not settle his bills after due dates his supply is liable to be disconnected. When this happens the consumer has to pay a certain amount of reconnection fee on top of all the outstanding amount overdue if he wants the supply reconnected. In order to avoid extra charge and since electricity is the basic need of every one he reconnects the supply through illegal means. The illegal activities mentioned above are very common in our community every where. They do not only create a loss of revenue to our government but create a type of irresponsible culture among our people. The action is also risky because it deals with life cables and can cause death and big damages to properties.

ARG Seven, " Other that what had been discussed, what else could contribute to the delay of your job?"

ALG Two, " There are a lot of fierce dogs around and the consumers sometimes purposely let them free. Few of us have been bitten by these dogs."

ALG Six, "When our friends are on leave we have to take over their jobs and therefore we have extra job to do."

ARG Three, "What have been done on your part once you discover or come across any of those problems?"

ALG One, "We inform our supervisors, verbally."

ARG Two, "What did they say?"

ALG Five, "They said we will look into it. We wait and wait, nothing come out. Still the same. Ha ha ha ha."

ALG One, "Not all the problems we brought up cannot be settled. We receive the feedback fast enough for those problems that can be decided solely by our supervisors."

ARG One, "Have you ever been consulted by your supervisors or peers in order to get your suggestions how to solve the problems that you brought up to them?"

ALG Five, "Yes, but it is done here not that serious. What I mean is that, there are no proper meetings or serious discussions initiated to look at our problems."

ALG Six, "We have 'I Suggest' method practiced here to bring up our suggestions or opinions on matters pertaining to our work environment. First it receives good response but now the response is declining"

ARG One, "Why?"

ALG Six, "I am not quite sure. Perhaps because the action taken to suggestions we made are slow or no action at all. Therefore people stop contributing ideas or suggestions."

ARG Six, "Do you involve in QCC?"

ALG Three, "We heard about QCC but we do not involve in it. There are no QCC activities in the Meter Room Section right now. Perhaps people here are not interested".

ARG Six, "Why do you say so?"

ALG Three, "I don't know".

Problem Three: Insufficient Training Provided for Meter Readers

ALG Two said that he could perform much better if he was given proper training on his job and therefore he could contribute more to the organization where he works. All ALG members agreed that there were no proper training provided for them except a two-day Customer Service Course which some did not have the opportunity to attend yet. In his attempt to get more information the researcher asked, "Can you give us examples, what type of training you really require, and how does it help you?" When this question was asked it like a piece of bomb exploded on an open ground! We would like to be trained on technical knowledge! We want more customer service course! We want to be trained on how to handle problems and to handle angry consumers.

SESCO is practicing its own Training Programs for various levels of staff. It aims to train and develop existing staff in order to equip them with relevant skills and knowledge. The Corporation also provides scholarships for selected students in higher learning institutions in engineering courses. The training management can be categorized into three Divisions under Corporate Services Department:

Training and Development Division: This Division is responsible to conduct in-house training; recommend and select staff to attend external training within Malaysia; to arrange and send staff appointed by the management to undergo training

or courses overseas; and to arrange industrial training program for students from various higher institutions;

SESCO Training School: This Division is mainly responsible to train Form Five potential school leavers for a period of two years in technical fields before engaging them as technicians. It also provides training for existing technicians and other staff in information technology;

Quality Management Division and Corporation Safety Division. The main functions of the former Division are to take responsible to maintain and improve the Corporation's quality services, products and management of assets while the later is responsible to enhance safety on injuries to staff and the society, and damages to properties. Though training is not the reason why these Divisions exist but their individual objectives may not be achieved if training is ignored (neglected). As such these Divisions have their own training programs for such purposes.

The Training and Development Division conducts Training Needs Analysis in August and September every year for the following purposes:

To identify SESCO's training needs;

To develop an efficient and effective training plan for SESCO;

To assist the Chief Minister Department to make a comprehensive training plan for the State by providing them information regarding our training needs.

Besides conducting Training Needs Analysis the Training and Development Division also distributes Training Directory to all staff. Training Directory contains a list of in-house courses titles, dates and places those courses are going to be conducted, and application forms. It was observed that out of 27 courses offered only one – Customer Service Course - is related to part of the meter readers' jobs. Unlike Storekeepers, the Meter Readers have no specific training program designed for them. SESCO Training Program is illustrate in Appendix K.

ARG Seven, "Can you tell us, how did they train you before you were assigned to do the job as a meter reader?"

ALG Four, "I was asked to follow a senior colleague to observe how he did his work".

ARG Seven, "How long you did that?"

ALG Four, "About one month."

ARG Seven, "How much did you learn? What I mean is can you do the job if you are directed to go on your own?"

ALG Four, "I can do this routine jobs such as taking readings, distributing bills and serve notices but I cannot do much when come to handling consumers' inquiries on technical matters and on processing of bills".

ARG One, "Have you ever bring up your problems to your supervisor?"

ALG Four, "Yes, I did".

ARG One, "What did he say?"

ALG Four, "Same thing. I will look at it he said".

ARG Four, "Can you explain what does that mean?"

ALG Four, “ Our supervisors listen to what we tell them but whether they have taken any action to help us solve our problems we do not know. Because we did not receive much feedback and seldom have formal meeting to discuss our problems seriously”.

ARG Four, “ Do you have any suggestion?”

ALG Four, “ We would like to have proper and regular meetings to discuss and find ways to solve our problems together. It must be documented and submit to the management for discussion. All this while we feel that we were neglected. When the consumers’ complains on high bills, non receipt of bills, estimated reading charge is too high and so on, and the blame is put on us. We were accused of taking wrong readings, careless, doing *kedai kopi* reading and many more”.

ALG One, “ If other staff in SESCO can do their jobs better because there is specific training provided for them, we also feel the same if we have such opportunity”.

Observation

In the first and second mini cycle meetings the researcher has observed two important behaviors of the ALG members; first, in the early part of the meeting they were not quite keen to talk and felt shy or scared to do so for whatever purpose. Second, at the later part of the meeting when two or three persons in the group started to speak and raised common problems of their interests the other members followed and joined the conversation actively and seriously.

The meeting conducted during the third mini cycle went smoothly. Most participants were more willing to discuss their problems openly of which they rarely did before. They were willing to share their problems with others as well as giving opinions. Some felt that this project/exercise was one of the best opportunity they ever have to express their unsettled problems they have had. The researcher observed that there were signs of cooperation and team works in the group. They were trying to help each other – when a colleague could not explain what exactly he wanted to say or used the correct words – they smiled, laughed, joked and made funs. However, there were few who said that this action learning method is good but doubtful on the response of the management. One member said, “ After spending so much time discussing about our problems and giving out our opinions I am worried when the project is completed the management does not agree to consider on it”. Based on the way some of the ALG members expressed their feelings the researcher could sense that some of them were not quite confident on management’s decision.

Reflection

The process of handling the meeting in the third mini cycle was much easier than the earlier cycles. Most of the members by then began to understand what action research and action learning process were all about and could imagine how it worked. One of the participants said he could feel action learning approach might be appropriate in their work environment. It could be an effective problem-solving tool provided that its implementation has the full support of the management. This is so because members of the ALG are given opportunity to speak freely and contribute their ideas to help solve their own problems. “ It’s our participation is important,” said one of them. It is different from talking direct to the superior officers individually. Being in a group they feel their contributions are welcome, firm, real and genuine.

Evaluation

Most of the time people feel scared to criticize the weaknesses of their working procedures or organizational culture individually. Therefore, it is hard to change the attitude of the people in it who are used to such culture. Among the uses of action learning is to bring in changes by creating new ideas. Groups of people within that organization who have similar interests and objectives can initiate for a better situation and improvement through this tool.

Mini Cycle Five

Re-planning

This meeting held on 18 April, 1998 was to discuss Problems Five: Location of Meters – Problem of Taking the Readings, and Problem Twelve: Names and Addresses of Consumers in Reading Schedule are not Sequence. The researcher intended to collect more information as he considered these two problems were significant by allowing members to probe and to contribute ideas, opinions or suggestions as much as possible.

Action

Problem Five: Location of Meters – Problem of Taking the Reading

This problem was brought up by ALG Three in second meeting and it was one of the most common problem that meter readers have. Initially all meters were installed at proper places and standardized in accordance to SESCO's specification. However, after few years when the consumers' standard of living became higher most likely they repaired or renovated their houses. When this happened the locations of meters would change its positions. It was common to find several meters were located in the kitchens, store rooms and even bedrooms. It also changed the height of the meters from six to seven or eight feet high. In places like coffee shops and highly polluted areas, meter glasses were covered with thick, black and oily dusts. All these had caused the figures inside the meters could not be seen clearly and as a result reading errors were most likely to occur. Another factors which contribute to reading errors when meters were blocked by objects either purposely or unpurposely placed by the consumers and when told they refused to remove them.

ARG Seven, "If the meters are off position, is it not the responsibility of the consumers to move it so that it can be seen and undisturbed?"

ALG Six, "In actual fact it is but they do not want to do it. Because it is troublesome for them to report it SESCO and to pay for the service".

ARG Seven, "What have been done to solve this problem?"

ALG Three, "We have reported this type of problem to our supervisors and they know it well. But the consumers do not want to pay for the costs. They said, if you want to remove the meters go ahead but I not going to pay you. So the problem is left just like that. There are some responsible consumers who are willing to move their meters."

ARG Seven, "Do you have any suggestions?"

ALG Three, "We would like these meters to be repositioned so that we can save much of our time. It is not convenient to enter so many houses, ask permission, put off our shoes and enter the room where meters are located. It could be possible if the removal fees be paid by installments in small amount and include in their monthly bills."

Problem Twelve: Names and Addresses of Consumers in Reading Schedule Are Not Sequence.

Meter Reading Schedules are prepared by Billing Section and when completed meter examiners distribute them to meter readers. Meter Reading Schedule is a printed document which shows the names of consumers, addresses, meters' and consumers' numbers, tariff previously recorded, and other relevant details about relevant consumers. Each meter reader is given a set of this schedule which contains few hundred names of consumers in a particular zones and sections. Their task is to go to the areas as shown in the schedule to read meters and enter the reading figures that indicate the unit of electricity consumed for the month. Early in the morning they come to their office to submit the schedules issued the day before (also known as meter readers' daily report) to their respective meter examiners who supervise their work together with other reports recorded for the day. The meter examiners' duty is to check the readings and to reconfirm of its accuracy, and if necessary they go to the spot for spot checking or meet the consumers affected. When completed the schedules are returned to the Billing Section so that bills could be printed. The problems arise when the meter readers realize that the new consumers names do not appear in the Meter Reading Schedule, or if they do they are normally mixed up with other consumers' names in other sheets of the Reading Schedule. How does this happen? Take Zone 10 as an example and this zone has 12 sections in it with 17,800 consumers. The development in every zone is very fast with many new housing estates and commercial buildings around. In Kuching we have two authorities that allocate the premises numbers for the purpose of preparing legal documents and as well as for the premises' permanent addresses. Those authorities are the Land and Survey Department and the Dewan Bandaraya Kuching Utara or Selatan. The first authority provides the registered lot or residential number for certain piece of land to build houses and this lot number is used in all legal documents. The developer or land owner uses this lot number for the premises' addresses when they submit their application for electricity supply. Upon receiving the application on white forms the Consumer Service Engineer passes them to the Meter Room Section in order to obtain which Zone and Section does this application belong to. When completed the Meter Room Section return the forms to the Consumer Service Section where it is keyed into the computer. The computer will automatically create Consumers' Number which is to be used by SESCO as reference to this particular consumer and appears in monthly bills. The number created by the computer is sequential following the dates and time when it is registered. The meter readers take the reading based on this number to locate the meters and the premises. The problem they face is, though the numbers are sequence in the Reading Schedule but it is not so when they arrive at the exact location. As the area of each zone and 'the number of consumers are large it is not possible to find the premises in a short time. Situations becoming more complex when few months later the Dewan Bandaraya creates another number for the same premise and the procedure requires this number to be displayed at the premises and used as official postal addresses. Both the consumers and the meter readers become confused.

The meter readers however, suggested that all managers of relevant sections must sit together to discuss how to solve these problems. As it involves various sections the solutions to these problems cannot be decided alone.

Observation

Like meeting held in Mini Cycle Four the members were more open and willing to express their feelings towards their jobs, problems, supervisors and management. They hardly wait for the facilitators and members to ask questions if they wished to say something. The researcher found that the process of getting information was much easier than before. They seemed more sincere this time in giving reliable facts on what have been happening in the past. For example, telling the researcher that their supervisors are slow in making decision. or act when a problem is brought up to them.

Reflection

Through action learning approaches participants tend to learn procedures how to describe problems faster and systematic so that listeners would understand what actually were on their minds. Colleagues would be able to share those problems when they realize that they also experience the same. Then they relate those problems with the achievement and how would it affect the organization's performance. Finally they recalled what had been done in the past on their attempts to solve those problems – submit report or bring up to the attention of their immediate supervisors.

The first and second meetings (Mini Cycle One and Two) were considered as successful and fruitful. There were a lot of experience gained and changes recorded which indicate how people learn through Action Learning and Action Research process. As an example, one of the participants quoted that, “I hardly realize that we can learn more and faster by asking questions.” And his colleague said, “All these days we were scared to ask questions especially to our boss because we were afraid he might have wrong perception on us?”

Evaluation

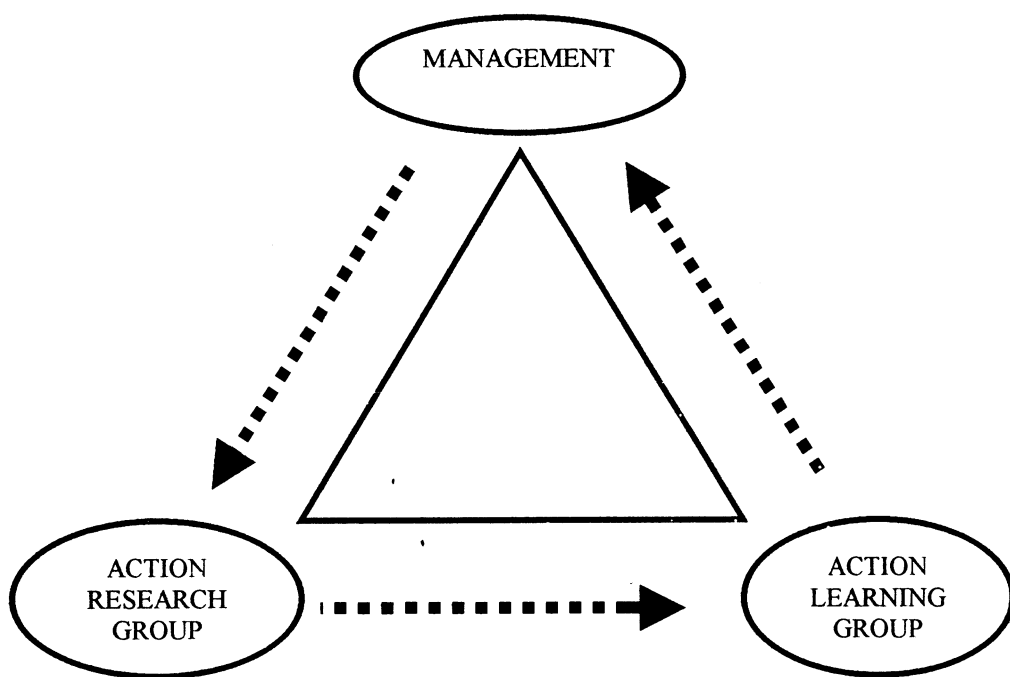
In this meeting the researcher had learned that the ALG members began put their trusts to their facilitators and the researcher. They were more open and not scared to disclosed some important and including sensitive issues about people behaviors at work. The researcher could feel that this is the unique of action research because problems at work could begin with some undesired behavior, culture or norms which influence how people behave, think and individual style of managing people. In our society normally people try to avoid talking about the weakness of their bosses in meetings, instead they talk more about their boss's strengths because they are scared such action might create unhealthy atmosphere at work places. Therefore, the best thing to do is to keep quiet even if the subordinates' intentions are sincere and constructive.

Triangulation

Triangulation is a technique that involve comparing the views of different people or group of people who experience the same situations. It can be used in the data collection and data analysis to check the validity and reliability. This is done through cross-examination the consistency of the information derived at different times and

different means within qualitative methods to ensure accuracy or validity. In this study the triangulation process involved the views of the ALG, the ARG and the management (representing by the RM) pertaining to the outcome of the study. The triangulation process is shown in Figure 6

Figure 6: Shows a Triangulation Process Used in Action Research.



Data triangulation is achieved by using multiple sources data collected at different settings, different times, and from different individuals. Here the data were sourced from:

The meetings held whereby the Action Learning Group (ALG) and the Action Research Group (ARG) members were present. The ALG members discussed about their problem-solving while the ARG acted as facilitators and observers.

The individual interviews of peers who were neither the ALG nor the ARG members.

The record kept in files obtained from the Customer Service Division.

The observations of the ARG and the researcher as recorded in their notes made during the meetings.

The meeting was held on 24 June, 1998 between the Regional Manager and Consumer Service Engineer (representing the management), the Supervisor and meter readers (representing the ALG), and the researcher representing the ARG) at Regional Office, Bintawa. The researcher told the Regional Manager (RM) and the Consumer Service Engineer (CSE) the purpose of the meeting which is aimed to inform them of the findings. First of all the researcher explained the concepts of action research and action learning, and also the roles of those who were involved in the process. This is shown in Appendix M. He focussed his findings based on the following questions.

What were the symptoms of the problems?

How did it happen?

What were the implications?

What has been done to overcome the problems?

What were the results or outcome?

What were suggestions of staff affected?

Then the researcher touched on the main purpose of the meeting which was to explain his findings based on four selected problems brought up by the ALG members during the earlier meeting. The overall concept is shown in Appendix M.

Problem One: Difficulty to meet work targets

Work target refers to the meter readers' daily tasks that indicate the numbers of meters to be read depending on certain areas as listed out in the reading schedule plus some other related works that need to be accomplished. There were four reasons recorded which contribute to the delay in achieving their daily work targets:

It takes sometimes for them to travel such a distance from the office to the sites (zones) where they perform their jobs;

The delay is affected by the weather and roads conditions (where they have to travel on foot);

Travelling on motorcycles is always at risk, therefore they take extra precaution and drive slowly to avoid accidents;

When there are misprinted meter numbers or the numbers are not sequence it would take so much time to search and locate them.

Referring to problem one the CSE said that the management is aware of those problems. The management has been planning and taking various steps to overcome the problems such as providing meter readers with safety shoes, quality rain coats and provide motorcycle loans (for permanent staff only). However, he admitted that some problems are complex and need time to solve. The complain on poor design of SESCO Meter Reading Response Card or lock-gate card will be looked after in order to suit the requirements. A new system of delivering bills in Zones One to Zone Five using the service of Pos Malaysia Berhad is in progress and if found feasible it would be extended to other zones in densely populated areas.

On problem three, the RM and CSE still believe that on-the-job (OTJ) training is most appropriate and effective for meter readers. They should be able to perform satisfactorily after the OTJ training is completed. However, they agreed that the system need to be improved and restructured so that the OTJ training program and process would be more effective. Other type of training as suggested by the ALG is not so urgent but necessary to meet the organization's quality customer service policy.

Both the RM and CSE agreed that Problem Five which is to reallocate the existing meters so that it is easy to reach is considered as quite difficult to overcome and necessary. This management's traditional problem which is very difficult to overcome because it involves some amount of money to be charged to the consumers in order to remove the meters to suitable positions. The consumers refused to pay because they said this is SESCO's problem and not theirs'. SESCO cannot do the job because it involves a big sum of money. In order to minimize the problem SESCO had drawn up policy so that meters for new premises should be installed near the gates or outside the compound so that the meter readers need not have to enter the house or compound to read meters.

Problem Twelve is also considered as serious and the CSE explained that the management is aware of difficulties to meter readers. As this problem involves people from other sections such as Billing Section it would take sometime to solve. Furthermore when the system is computerized and it involves consultants to do. However, both managers of affected Sections are working closely to ensure that this problem is minimized or solved.

Researcher, " Not long ago some local newspapers published some incidents where few consumers were shocked when they received high electricity bills. Can you explain what were the causes?" (shocked electricity bills are shown in Appendices M-1 to M-3)

RM, " Those incidents occurred when we changed our manual billing system into a new CIS system. Normally, whenever a new system is introduced to replace the old one this type of errors always occur, and after a while it would be OK soon after errors were detected and adjusted or corrected. As you can see now such incident is no longer existed. It has no connection to errors in reading of meters".

In few years to come the CSE said about fifty percent of meter readers work can be reduced if the proposal to use and purchase hand-held devices (HHD) is approved. This device which have been used by the Tenaga Nasional is very powerful. It is twice as big as an ordinary calculator and weights about 500 grams only. The size and the weight of its printer is almost the same and it is very convenient to carry and specially designed to resist shocks or damage if it falls on the floor at certain height. The meter readers only need to enter the consumers' account or meter numbers and the figures of electricity units consumed into the HHD by pressing appropriate buttons and it will automatically calculate the amount charged. The printer will immediately print the bills right on the spot for the consumer concern. If either numbers were wrongly keyed in the HHD will tell and rejects totally after errors is repeated three times. The device has to be handed over to Meter Room Office daily

in order to up date the record in the main files. At the moment the CSE is arranging a training program for meter readers to learn how to operate the HHD.

There will be a lot of problems as discussed earlier in this research can be solved or reduced with the aid of the HHD. If implemented it would help the meter readers to:

Read meters faster and easier;

Issue bills faster and more accurate;

Get rid of sequence problem as the HHD can search the records within seconds;

Get rid of carrying much paper documents;

Avoid writing some reports;

Though these problems can possibly be reduced in the near future with the aid of HHD, the management always feel that it is still necessary to find ways to solve and reduce existing problems and the problem of the HHD might create. The Regional Manager had been working hard to look for alternatives in order to minimize not only problems face by meter readers but in all areas under his jurisdiction. As in this case, for example, he had submitted one proposal to the Managing Director in order to recruit about ten new meter readers.

RM, " After triangulation process what are you going to do?"

Researcher, " If RM agrees this project to proceed, first I would design a task for the case study and monitor the progress. It may take three or four months to complete and I think the outcome or changes can be seen soon after."

Finally the RM had expressed his appreciation on the researcher's effort to conduct this study in the Regional Office at the right time in order to help identify problems his employees are facing and at the same time find out ways to solve them. He would like to see this research be completed as soon as possible for his information. He also would like to see if this project is done continuously and cover other areas where this method is relevant and applicable.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Introduction

This chapter summarizes the entire study. It would also include the conclusion and the recommendations that might be useful for managers, employees of SESCO and for future Action Research researchers.

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendation

This action research was conducted with the general objective to explore the effectiveness of performance of meter readers in SESCO Regional Office, Bintawa: A case study based on Action Learning. To be more specific it was aimed to answer three following objective questions:

To what extent is the existing performance of meter readers effective in SESCO?
Could action learning be used to improve the performance of meter readers in SESCO? and

To what extent did action learning contribute to improvement of the performance of meter readers in SESCO?

An action research and action learning methods were used in this study. During the process qualitative data were collected through meetings, observations and interviews. Triangulation process was also used to validate data with the presence of the RM (representing the management), ARG (representing the facilitators, observers and the researcher), and the ALG (representing the meter readers or case study).

The findings of this research are summarized according to the three specific objective questions of this study.

The first objective question was to what extent is the existing performance of meter readers effective in SESCO?

Problem number one which an ALG member brought up was about his difficulty in accomplishing his daily work targets set for him. Other members of his colleagues were experiencing similar problem. The environment factors were considered as the main causes of this problem, such as bad weather and distances from office to sites and from house to house in remote areas. Other reasons were due to time taken when doing odd jobs other than reading meters and delivering bills. Meter readers daily work targets were prepared and decided by the meter examiners and a supervisor. The system of allocating the zones and the number of consumers for each meter reader was developed based on past experiences of the meter examiners and the supervisor. These experiences were documented as a guide and procedure for the existing meter readers. This is illustrated in Appendix D and Appendix E. Appendix

D contains the particulars about the consumers and the number of consumers reside in a particular zone, while Appendix E shows the estimated number of meters to be read in a specific area per day – such as kampongs, shophouses, housing estates and so on.

Take a kampong area as an example, and based on schedule of Appendix E a meter reader has to read the average of 128 meters per day (ie 7.5 hours), or 17 meters per hour. In actual fact a meter reader only able to work a maximum of six hours per day excluding overtime. This is so because he normally leaves his office at 8.30 in the morning and probably reaches his destination half an hour later. It must be considered also time taken to do other jobs besides reading and delivering of bills. Based on the interviews conducted by the researcher most of the time the meter readers cannot accomplish the work targets as stated in the Reading Schedules. All these factors determine the performance effectiveness of meter readers leading to their difficulties in achieving their daily work targets. If a person unsuccessfully meets the needs or achieve a specified target or score on standardized procedures, he is said to be ineffective (Robins 1991). Therefore as in this case the researcher found that the extent of the effectiveness on existing performance is not satisfactory or ineffective because of factors that are beyond their control, and these factors are identified as follows:

The impact of the environmental factors such as rains and distances;

Targets were set by the meter examiners and supervisor based on their experiences over ten years ago;

The absence of coordination between Sections to up date records and identify problems.;

The researcher suggests that the existing system of distributing and setting work targets be reviewed and up dated. Simultaneously, the existing job descriptions of meter readers (which are rarely reviewed) also need reviewing exercises as they are closely related to the Meter Reading Schedule. It is advisable that meter examiners and the supervisor meet regularly and formally in order to obtain views and suggestions from everyone pertaining to their jobs. When problems arise that involve other Sections these views could be helpful. To make meetings effective it is suggested that a procedure or methods be used such as team building, collaboration and so on.

The second objective question was could action learning be used to improve performance of meter readers in SESCO?

The researcher used a case study in his research to explore if action learning could be used to improve performance of meter readers. His case study consisted of six meter readers also known as the ALG, and six officers called the ARG to assist him to facilitate, observe and to collect data on the group's behavior. The former were asked to list out common problems they have at their work places as their project, discuss them in meetings which was held twice a month and on Saturdays.

In the past staff of this Section was not keen to involve themselves in problem solving activities introduced by the Quality Management Division in SESCO.

Problem solving tools such as QCC, 5S-Good House Keeping, I Suggest-Staff Suggestion Scheme and many others have been practiced in SESCO for many years. There were many prestigious awards won by the staff who involved actively in QCC. Initially staff in the Meter Room Section have also been involved in QCC but they never complete any cycle. The researcher's interview with some former cycle members revealed that the reasons were because the QCC process normally took too long to complete and involved too much time spent on meetings. This Section practiced tight work schedules that must be completed on specific period of time and therefore restricted the interest and commitment of staff to involve in QCC activities.

On the contrary, the researcher believes that action learning can be accepted by meter readers and used to improve their performance. It is because the concept of action learning itself would possibly made it applicable to their situations. Action learning is a process where people learn continuously by doing something and testing it out. Thus it requires everyone to work on a real project (Reg Revans 1994). In this sense, the meter readers' task is to accomplish daily work targets indicated in the Reading Schedule which is assumed as the project. The project is the real or actual things they do everyday or continuously. Testing them out means to explore if there are any other methods or systems to do it better, faster, easier, with quality or added values, and without errors.

Action learning process requires a small group of people (six or seven) who are doing similar jobs in a Section or Division and have similar problems. A minimum of two short meetings a month between two and three hours are sufficient for the group members to discuss on issues, asking questions, challenging of ideas, giving or asking feedback, reflecting and so on.

The researcher observed that this is the unique part of action learning as it encourages the group members to communicate freely and discuss about their actual experiences they have had. For example, in this case study everyone was given chances to bring up any work related problems and tell members what might have caused the problems, what were the impact on his job, what has been done to solve them and to seek the opinions or suggestions from others. This activities enable everyone to learn, share opinions and get feedback from each other thus lead to problem solving process and simultaneously improve their performance. Based on these factors and from the researcher's observation of the case study he is confident that action learning can be used to improve the performance of meter readers in SESCO.

The last and third objective question is to what extent did action learning contribute to improvement of the performance of meter readers in SESCO?

As at today, the data or information gathered to determine the degree of contribution of action learning to improve the performance of meter readers in SESCO is still insufficient. Due to time constrain this project cannot be completed in time for assessment and it has to be extended for another at least four months. The outcome of the tasks given to the ALG or the case study would be known by then.

However, the existing data revealed that there were some development and the researcher has full confidence action learning method can be used to improve meter readers' performance. In his attempt to discover the effectiveness of the method he has recorded the following :

During the triangulation process the RM has commented that the action learning method could be applicable. He agreed this project to continue and to give support;

The ALG and the ARG have also agreed to further involve as they are confident that action learning method is applicable to their situations and can help solve their problems;

Absenteeism was recorded as low as 5% throughout the process. Both the ALG and the ARG members were committed and active in discussing all issues;

The researcher observed that members were already familiar with the action learning techniques and approaches;

The researcher also would like to suggest that a specific training program must be designed for meter readers. This is because meter readers' job is unique and unlike that of Clerical Group. Clerks are placed in one group of scheme of service and considered as common users, meaning that they are liable to be transferred and attached to any section and assigned clerical jobs in a particular section. Thus the jobs they do would be different from one another and as well as the formats and equipment they use. Unlike the meter readers who are doing similar jobs and applying similar procedures in almost every aspect of the job by using the same documents and tools. In such aspect the current training program or modules may be applicable to Clerical group in order to provide them with multi skills and approaches on doing jobs in various Departments, Divisions and Sections. As in the case of meter readers there should be a specific training program or modules designed which must include the reviewed of 'Good Meter Reading Practices' (as shown in Appendix N) for them in view of the nature of their jobs and daily tasks. In addition to that the number of meter reader staff is big enough to make this specific training program or modules more effective and relevant. Other training may be considered to provide them with broader knowledge as far as motivation and quality of work life is concerned. As can be pointed out the researcher found only a small part of existing training program is applicable to meter reader, which is Customer Service Course.

The researcher also have the opinion that all the four Divisions (Training and Development, Training School, Quality Management and Corporate Safety) should coordinate and use one TNA instead of conducting training individually. This might be more systematic, save costs and would produce better results.

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Appendix A

PERBADANAN PEMBEKALAN LETRIK SARAWAK
SARAWAK ELECTRICITY SUPPLY CORPORATION SESCO



Alamat : Peti Surat 149, 93700 Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Telefon : 082-441188

Telek: MA 70100

Telefeks: 082-444434

Bil. Surat Tuan (Your Ref.):

* Bil. Surat Kami (Our Ref.): PLS4/13C/AHAD/g

1.11.97

Encik Abang Yusuf bin Abang Spawi,
 No. 165, Taman Tupong Jaya II,
 Jalan Astana,
 93050 Kuching.

Dear Encik Abang Yusuf,

RE: ACTION RESEARCH PROPOSAL

With reference to the above-captioned, the Corporation has no objection to your doing the research on Performance Appraisal subject.

We hope you will be successful in your effort.

Yours faithfully,

(Hajjah Maznah Dasmu)
 HEAD (CORPORATE SERVICES)

Appendix B-1

PERBADANAN PEMBEKALAN LETRIK SARAWAK
SARAWAK ELECTRICITY SUPPLY CORPORATION

SESCO



Alamat: Peti Surat 149, 93700 Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia

Telefon: 082-441188

Teleks: MA 70100

Fax: 082-444434

Bil. Surat Tuan (Your Ref.):

Bil Surat Kami (Our Ref.):

PLS4/13C/AYAS/NMS
24 February, 1998

"DUPLICATE COPY"

Encik Wilfred Ragam

Through: Manager (Corporate Admin.)
Wisma SESCo.

Dear Encik Wilfred,

RE: ACTION RESEARCH GROUP

This is to inform you that Encik Abg. Yusuf Bin Abg. Spawi is going to undertake a work-based research project in SESCo from January to June 1998. This research is slightly different from traditional research methodology and has been widely accepted as an appropriate and effective management tool in most organisations.

We feel that the outcome of this project will benefit the Corporation and their staff involved, we therefore, would like to nominate and appoint you as one of the group members. Encik Abg. Yusuf will brief you on the concept of Action Learning and Action Research Methodologies soon.

For reference and record purposes, please sign the duplicate copy of this letter and return them to Encik Abg. Yusuf of 4th Floor, Wisma SESCo, Kuching, if you accept this voluntary appointment.

Your cooperation is highly appreciated to make this project a success.

Yours faithfully,

(Hjh. Maznah Dasmii)
HEAD (CORPORATE SERVICES)

Appendix B-2

SESCO Regional Office, Sg. Biawak, Jln. Belian, 93450 Kuching

082 - 482020

Fax No: 082 - 330355

KUC 4/13C/AY /IG

February 9 1998

1. Encik Philip Chen, Regional Office, Kuching
2. Puan Evelyn Yeo, Regional Office, Kuching
3. Cik Puteh-Bol, Thru' Mgr (CS), Regional Office, Kuching

Dear Encik /Cik

RE: ACTION RESEARCH GROUP

This is to inform you that Encik Abg. Yusuf bin Abg. Spawi is going to undertake a work-based research project in SESCO from January to June 1998. This research is slightly different from traditional research methodology and has been widely accepted as an appropriate and effective management tool in most organisations.


We feel that the outcome of this project will benefit the Corporation and their staff involved, we therefore, would like to nominate and appoint you as one of the group members. Encik Abg. Yusuf will brief you on the concept of Action Learning and Action Research Methodologies soon (please refer to Appendix 'A' enclosed).

For reference and record purposes, please sign the duplicate copy of this letter and return them to Encik Abg. Yusuf of 4th Floor, Wisma SESCO, Kuching, if you accept this voluntary appointment.

Your cooperation is highly appreciated to make this project a success.

"BERSATU MENUJU WAWASAN"

Yours faithfully


(Chua Say Kiat)
REGIONAL MANAGER
WESTERN REGION

Encl:

Appendix B-3

SESCO Regional Office, Sg. Biawak, Jln. Belian, 93450 Kuching

082 - 482020

Fax No: 082 - 330355

KUC 4/13C/ MY /IG

February 9 1998

Please refer list attached.

Dear Encik

RE: ACTION LEARNING GROUP

This is to inform you that Encik Abg. Yusuf Bin Abg. Spawi is going to conduct a case study on the effectiveness of Action Learning Methodology in SESCO w.e.f. January to June 1998. This management tool has been widely accepted in most organizations due to its effectiveness in dealing with problem solving techniques.

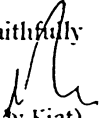
We feel that the outcome of this program will benefit the Corporation and the staff involved, we therefore, would like to nominate you as one of the group members in this program. Encik Abg. Yusuf will brief you on the concept of Action Learning Methodology soon (please refer to Appendix 'A' enclosed).

For reference and record purposes, please sign the duplicate copy of this letter and return them to Encik Abg. Yusuf, 4th Floor, Wisma SESCO, Kuching, if you accept this voluntary appointment.

Your cooperation is highly appreciated to make this project a success.

"BERSATU MENUJU WAWASAN"

Yours faithfully


(Chua Say Kiat)
REGIONAL MANAGER
WESTERN REGION

Encl:

c.c. Abg. Yusuf Bin Abg spawi

Appendix C-1

PERBADANAN PEMBEKALAN LETRIK SARAWAK
Job Description

Job Title: Meter Examiner	Job Code:
Date:	Author:
Job Location: Western Region	Job Grade:
Supervisor:	Status:

<p>Job Summary:</p>
<p>Job Duties:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To supervise meter readers under your direct charge by checking on their daily performance, mileage claims, overtime claims before submission to STA, making site checks on meter readers doing meter readings, bill delivery and locked houses as reported by them; 2. To check reading for high consumption complaints for areas located to you and to submit N/Forms through STA (M/Room) for adjustment; 3. To continually update consumers' addresses and inform CE and Billing Section through N/Forms; 4. To submit reading schedule/advance list/suspense list to Billing Section right after checking according to schedule (if possible); 5. To investigate and submit illegal reconnections report reported by meter readers to Sr. Clerk (DT) through A.O.(B); 6. To investigate and submit faulty meter report reported by meter readers (report must be accompanied by sketch); 7. Any other duties as and when instructed by your supervisors.
<p>Working Conditions:</p>
<p>The above information is correct as accepted and approved by:</p>
<p>Sgd: Meter Examiner Sgd: Regional Manager (Western Region)</p>

Appendix C-2

PERBADANAN PEMBEKALAN LETRIK SARAWAK
Job Description

Job Title: Meter Reader	Job Code:
Date:	Author:
Job Location: Western Region	Job Grade:
Supervisor:	Status:

Job Summary:**Job Duties:**

1. To do meter reading and delivery of bills;
2. To serve locked gate notices upon locked houses, enter reading in the home cards. To replace home new cards of cards are missing, fully filled defaced etc;
3. To take note on all consumer's complaints (verbal) and report to your examiner;
4. Report all abnormalities of meters, such as meter jammed, meter glass broken/loose, meter tempering by filling in faulty meter report forms. Ensure that sketches must be drawn to show the location of the consumers.
5. Continually update consumers' addresses in the meter reading schedule, such as house numbers and lorong numbers (if possible telephone numbers).

Working Conditions:

The above information is correct as accepted and approved by:

Sgd: Meter Reader

Sgd: Regional Manager (Western Region)

Appendix D

SCHEDULE.GA METER READING SCHEDULE FOR 207035 M001
SESCO (Kuching CIS) USER: CHEN FOO JIN IS
Scheduled On : 10/07/1998 Printdate : 12/06/1998

SEQUENCE DESC : Stn 201 Zone 007 Sect 025

PRINTED ON : 03/07/1998

TOTAL INSTALLATION : 63

METER READER : _____

READING DATE : _____

• INPUT BY : _____

CHECK BY : _____

SCHEDULE GA METER READING SCHEDULE FOR 207035 0001 Lpty/Pg: 2
 SESCO (Kuching CIS) USER: CHEN FOO JIN 15:37:51 03 Jul 1998
 Scheduled On : 10/07/1998 Printdate : 12/06/1998

** NO CONSUMER ** (1) 201-029752 (1)
 NATAHARI BUNGALOW MAXWELL ROAD 93000 KUCHING
 Meter Location : LOCATION CODE NOT ON FILE
 Seq&Key No. : 207035
 M/R Notes :
 Other Note : No meters
 Installation Disconnected - 31/12/1989
 No current consumer

TAN SRI DATUK LEE HUN HOE (10) 1 201-029759 (2)
 NO. 3 L77 S35 RICKETTS ESTATE TEL: 244986 93000 KUCHING
 Meter Location : LOCATION CODE NOT ON FILE
 Seq&Key No. : 207035
 M/R Notes :
 Meter no Date Tariff Prev. Read Mult Prevtype
 25P1806:1 10/06/1998 0 47317 *II* 1_1_1_1_1

MOMD AMIN B HJ SATEN (10) 201-029760 (3)
 NO. 10 ROADWAY RD 93000 KUCHING
 Meter Location : LOCATION CODE NOT ON FILE
 Seq&Key No. : 207035
 M/R Notes :
 Meter no Date Tariff Prev. Read Mult Prevtype
 25P2871:1 10/06/1998 0 44528 *II* 1_1_1_1_1

PASCALI SDN. BHD. (11) 201-029761 (4)
 FLAT 1 RICKETTS COURT 93000 KUCHING
 Meter Location : LOCATION CODE NOT ON FILE
 Seq&Key No. : 207035
 M/R Notes :
 Meter no Date Tariff Prev. Read Mult Prevtype
 10S29345:1 10/06/1998 0 30142 *II* 1_1_1_1_1

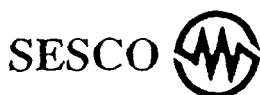
PASCALI SDN. BHD. (11) 201-029762 (5)
 FLAT NO. 3 RICKETTS COURT 93000 KUCHING
 Meter Location : LOCATION CODE NOT ON FILE
 Seq&Key No. : 207035
 M/R Notes :
 Meter no Date Tariff Prev. Read Mult Prevtype
 T264:1 10/06/1998 0 78831 *II* 1_1_1_1_1

PASCALI SDN. BHD. (11) 201-029763 (6)
 FLAT 5 RICKETTS COURT 93000 KUCHING
 Meter Location : LOCATION CODE NOT ON FILE
 Seq&Key No. : 207035
 M/R Notes :
 Meter no Date Tariff Prev. Read Mult Prevtype
 10S24361:1 10/06/1998 0 47497 *II* 1_1_1_1_1

Appendix E READING PLUS DELIVERY SCHEDULE

KUCHING		NORMAL DAYS OR SUNDAYS	FRIDAYS	SATURDAYS	O/T
ZONES		7-5 Hrs.	6-25 Hrs.	4-25 Hrs.	2 Hrs.
1	SHOPS	145	121	92	40
2	KAMPONGS	105	90	70	30
3		150	125	95	40
4	HOUSING	140	120	90	40
	P/DWELLING	95	80	60	30
5	FLATS	170	140	110	45
	P/DWELLING	115	95	75	30
5	P/DWELLING	115	95	75	30
	HOUSING	140	120	90	40
7	HOUSING	140	120	90	40
	P/DWELLING	105	90	70	30
8	HOUSING	140	120	90	40
	P/DWELLING	95	80	60	30
9	HOUSING	140	120	90	40
	P/DWELLING	105	90	70	30
10	HOUSING	140	120	90	40
	P/DWELLING	85	70	55	25
11	P/DWELLING	95	80	60	25
	HOUSING	140	120	90	40
12	P/DWELLING	95	80	60	25
	HOUSING	120	95	75	25
13	P/DWELLING	80	70	50	25
	HOUSING	120	95	75	25
14	P/DWELLING	85 ¹⁰⁰	70	55	25
	HOUSING	140	120	90	40
15	HOUSING	140	120	90	40
	P/DWELLING	105	90	70	30
19	High Density	5			—
20	Great Lakes	40			—

Appendix G

SESCO METER READING RESPONSE CARD

To be completed by Consumer *

Meter Reading *

--	--	--	--	--	--

Date

	/		/	
--	---	--	---	--

Date Reading *

	/		/	
--	---	--	---	--

Name

--

Telephone Contact *

--

Consumer No.

--

Meter No.

--

We were unable to take your meter reading today due to your gate being closed/locked and there was nobody in your house to respond to our call. As such, we appreciate it if you can provide us either one of the followings:-

1. * To read and provide your reading and post back this card.
2. To read and call us with your meter reading at Tel. No. 482020 Ext. 113 or 140 within 2 days or fax the card to us; Fax No. 082-330355
3. To call us at the above phone No. for an appointment to read your meter.
Failing to provide anyone of the above, your bill will be estimated.

BAYARAN POS
AKAN DIBAYAR
OLEH PEMEGANG
LESEN

SETEM POS TIDAK
PERLU JIKA
DIPOSKAN DI DALAM
MALAYSIA
ATAU SINGAPURA

SAMPUL JAWAPAN PERNIAGAN
NOMBOR LESEN 234

The Officer in charge
Billing Section, Regional Office
Sarawak Electricity Supply Corporation
Jalan Belian, Sg. Biawak
93450 Kuching.

Appendix H

SESCO METER FAULTY REPORT FORM

Connection No. : Section No.:
 Zone No. :
 Old A/C No. :
 Meter No. :
 Name and Address :

SKETCH (MAP) FOR THE FAULTY
 METER'S LOCATION _____

Please tick against the appropriate box(es)
 and write down the meter readings:

	Previous Month Code	Previous Month Reading	Present Meter Reading
1. Meter Class Broken/Loose
2. Meter Jammed
3. Meter Tampering			
a) meter casing with hole
b) Shunting
c) Objecting obstructing disc register from turning
4. Meter tampering suspected			
a) meter casing seal broken
b) meter cover seal broken
c) Cutout seal broken
d) Seal imitated

5. Others Please specify

Date:

Meter Reader's Signature:

Meter Reader No.:

SARAWAK ELECTRICITY SUPPLY CORPORATION

NOTIFICATION OF CHANGE OF CONSUMERS ACCOUNTS

Serial No. 2799[illegible]

PLEASE UPDATE AS NECESSARY

Appendix I

(Meter Room)

Appendix K

IN-HOUSE TRAINING PROGRAMME - 1997

COURSE CODE	TQ101	COURSE DATE	COURSE VENUE
COURSE NO	9701 9702 9703	24-26 JUN 13-15 OCT 1- 3 DEC	HQ
CEU	3	NO. REPEAT	3

COURSE TITLE: CUSTOMER SERVICE

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

At the end of this course the participants will be able to

- 1) Recognize the importance of customer satisfaction to the company today and in the future
- 2) Know customers' expectations
- 3) Able to communicate effectively with customers
- 4) Change their attitude towards customers

COURSE CONTENTS:

- 1) Your role in the company
- 2) Understanding the importance of customer service for the organisation
- 3) Effective communication skills.
 - Telephone
 - Counter Service
 - Dealing with enquiries
- 4) Case Study - Dealing with problems

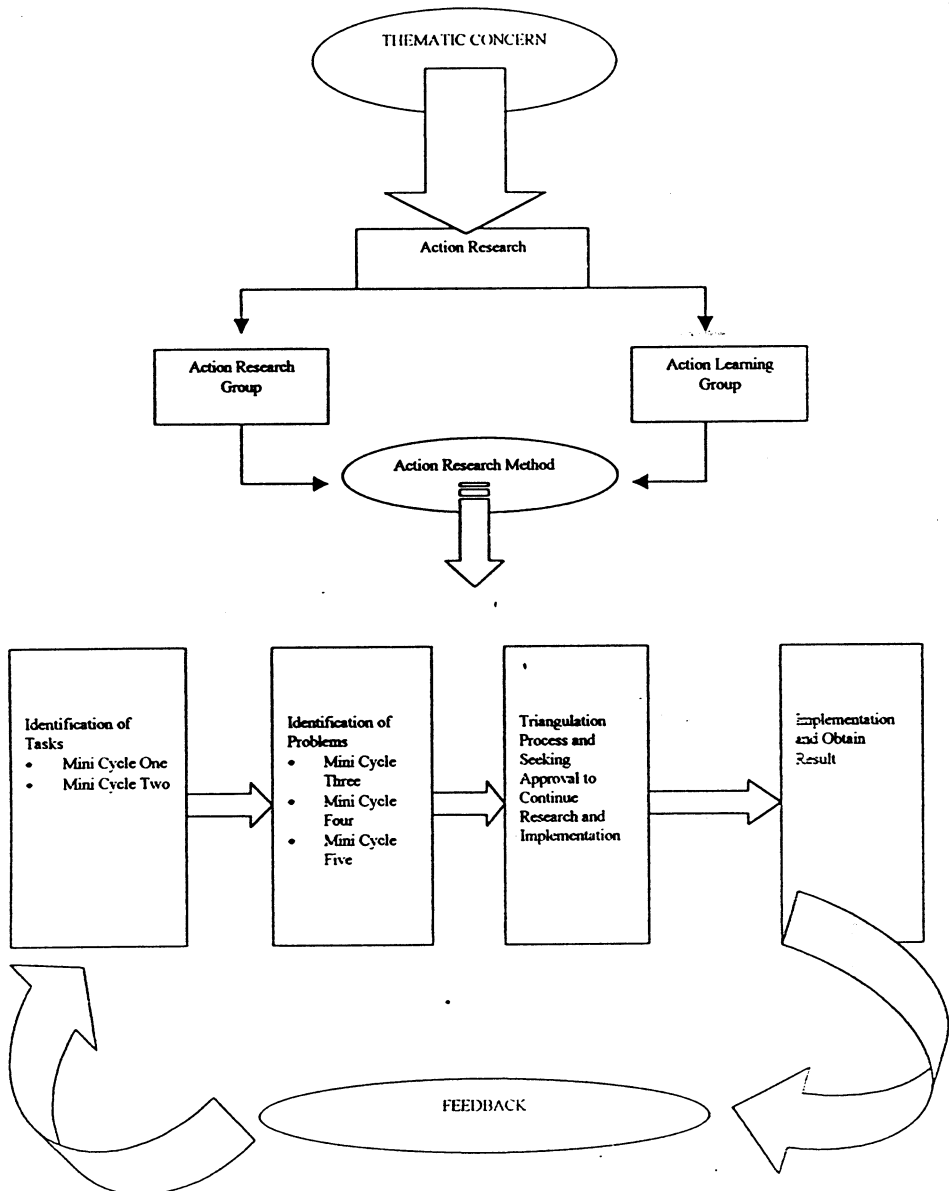
TARGET GROUP:

Front line staff, Administrative clerks, Meter Reader, Connection & Disconnection Team.

DURATION: 3 days

Appendix L

Action Research Process



Policeman receives RM10 million electricity bill

M121 — Another policeman had a shock of his life when he received an electricity bill amounting to RM10,121,338.61 from the Sarawak Electricity Supply Corporation, M121 branch.

Constable Hassan Alimat who lives at the Divisional Police Complex at Jalan Putat here said two of his colleagues also convicted electricity bills amounting to RM11 million recently.

Meanwhile, BESCO Mtl yesterday issued a notice, informing all consumers within 2 mi. of Mtl, Hudson, Lehigh, Tully and the Mohawk areas that the electricity bills that they receive recently may have some irregularities, especially for "Charges for the Month" and "Total Charges" due to some technical problems involving the computer at the data offices.

Consumer can make inquiries at the nearest Regional Office here which can be contacted on telephone number 085-32020

DATE	DESCRIPTION	AMOUNT	CHECK NO.	DATE	DESCRIPTION	AMOUNT	CHECK NO.
1/1/77	1/1/77	...	...	...
1/2/77	1/2/77	...	...	...
1/3/77	1/3/77	...	...	...
1/4/77	1/4/77	...	...	...
1/5/77	1/5/77	...	...	...
1/6/77	1/6/77	...	...	...
1/7/77	1/7/77	...	...	...
1/8/77	1/8/77	...	...	...
1/9/77	1/9/77	...	...	...
1/10/77	1/10/77	...	...	...
1/11/77	1/11/77	...	...	...
1/12/77	1/12/77	...	...	...
1/13/77	1/13/77	...	...	...
1/14/77	1/14/77	...	...	...
1/15/77	1/15/77	...	...	...
1/16/77	1/16/77	...	...	...
1/17/77	1/17/77	...	...	...
1/18/77	1/18/77	...	...	...
1/19/77	1/19/77	...	...	...
1/20/77	1/20/77	...	...	...
1/21/77	1/21/77	...	...	...
1/22/77	1/22/77	...	...	...
1/23/77	1/23/77	...	...	...
1/24/77	1/24/77	...	...	...
1/25/77	1/25/77	...	...	...
1/26/77	1/26/77	...	...	...
1/27/77	1/27/77	...	...	...
1/28/77	1/28/77	...	...	...
1/29/77	1/29/77	...	...	...
1/30/77	1/30/77	...	...	...
1/31/77	1/31/77	...	...	...
TOTAL	TOTAL	...	...	...



Ma Loo shows her May electricity bill for RM16,657.63 (right) and RM52.65 bill (left) for April.

RM16,000 shock for power consumer ^{ST 22/6}

By Cecil Ha

HIGH PRICE TO PAY. Imagine the shock you will get if you receive a monthly electricity bill from the Sarawak Electricity Supply Corporation (SESCO), for over RM16,000.

That was how a consumer felt when she discovered yesterday that she was billed RM16,657.63 for approximately 50,500 units of energy allegedly consumed in May.

Wishing to be known only as Ms Loo, the complainant said this was the first time she had received a bill which greatly exceeds her normal RM140 to RM60 monthly power bill. In April, the consumer was charged RM52.65 for 165 units of energy consumed. She found the mind-boggling bill in her letterbox at her residence in Taman Mable.

Loo admitted there was never

anyone around during the day to allow meter readers into the house compound as for them read the meters.

"How can they make such an obvious mistake even if the bill was based on an estimated meter reading only?" she questioned.

She argued that as private dwelling would consume over RM16,000 worth of energy in a month.

She pointed out the bill was evidently double-checked as it was stamped and signed.

When contacted yesterday, manager of the Customer Service Department at SESCo, Philip Chen, reasoned that the discrepancy could have come about from either a faulty meter or a mistake could have been made by the meter reader.

"Our meter readers read between a hundred to two hundred meters in a day so it is pos-

sible that they could have made the mistake," he explained.

Chen revealed that 'meters' are read on alternate months only.

"If we do not have access to read certain meters, we will make an estimate of the actual reading," he said.

Chen clarified that it is not unusual that consumers are overcharged in their electricity bill. However, he said these consumers would subsequently have their money reimbursed in cases of overcharging.

He said such a case does not occur frequently, adding that other cases of mistaken billing have been resolved amicably.

He reminded the public of their duty to allow the meter readers to carry out their obligations as stated in the terms and conditions of supply.

He added a meter reading should be supplied by consumers if the meter readers

were locked out.

He advised the complainant to either call the SESCo bill inquiry department or get in touch with him directly.

In this case, the bill was left in the letterbox to ensure that the consumer clarifies the matter with SESCo," explained Chen.

He did not dispel the possibility that the consumer was overcharged because of an error in the corporation's computer system.

Chen said it would be wise for disgruntled consumers to respond so that SESCo could investigate their claims.

For the first one hundred units of electricity consumed, consumers are charged 34 sen per unit. The tariff for the second and third hundred units is 75 sen per unit while every subsequent unit consumed after the 300th would be charged at 32 sen per unit.

Shocking Bills

On Aug 17 I received two electricity bills, one for the month of June (red bill/reminder) which was due on Aug 15, and the other for July, due on Sept 10.

When I went to pay them, I was automatically surcharged 50 sen for the June bill. It was unfair to have issued me a reminder and then slapped me with a surcharge. Why is the Sarawak Electric Supply Corporation (Sesco)

doing this? Will this happen again?

PM 25/9

Shocked

The People's Mirror has received numerous complaints similar to Shocked's.

A spokesman of the SESCO billing section, when contacted yesterday, said the "two bills one go" situation is

caused by SESCO's efforts to "adjust" their billing system.

He said Kuching has been divided into zones, therefore, people in different zones would be affected at different times.

"Every consumer within the zones will receive two bills simultaneously. We have fortunately covered all the zones, including the latest one which includes the Tabuan Jaya

area.

"It would not happen twice as this is only caused by our readjustments works," he explained.

He further said the charges on the bills are based on estimates.

Asked about the surcharge, the spokesman said it was possible that it was caused by the complainant's previously unsettled bills.

People's Mirror 25.9.96



GOOD METER READING SCGEDULE

FOR

METER READERS

SESCO REGIONAL OFFICE

BINTAWA

GOOD METER READING PRACTICES

1. Courtesy to the Public

The Corporation has more than 93,300 consumers accounts and this figure is increasing by about 350 per month. During the performance of your duties you will be meeting more consumers than probably other employees. As such your attitude, behaviour, discipline, self-control and personal appearance will not only affect the performance of your work but will also help to form an opinion of the Corporation and its employees in the minds of the consumers.

You must always remember that the entire business of the Corporation depends on the needs of the consumers. It is the Corporation's constant aim to provide consumers with an economic, reliable and efficient service. Therefore to us the consumer is:-

- (a) the most important person in our business.
- (b) dependent on us and we are dependent on him.
- (c) not an interruption of our work - he is the purpose of it.
- (d) a flesh and blood human being with feelings and emotions like our own.
- (e) not someone to argue or match wits with
- (f) deserving of the most courteous and attentive service.

COURTESY COSTS NOTHING - BUT IT IS A VERY VALUABLE COMMODITY

2. Dress and Personal Appearance

It is desirable that you be neat and proper in your dress and hair style during working hours as this may help create better working conditions. A consumer may dislike or show outright animosity towards a sloppy and dirty looking Reader. So you should:

- (a) be in your uniform while on duty.
- (b) keep your uniform clean and well-pressed and shoes polished.
- (c) be well-groomed.
- (d) wear uniform in proper manner eg. shirts buttoned.
- (e) avoid smoking in consumer's premises.
- (f) have on your person the SESCo Authorisation Card.

3. Reporting Sick

You are advised that when you feel unwell after having taken your meter reading schedules and on the way to work you feel that you should see our doctor, or wish to see our doctor in the morning before coming to office, you should, wherever possible, phone the examiner, so that your coming late to office can be accounted for, and also make it possible for the office to arrange and to re-allot your work to some other Readers. In case of an emergency, inform the Duty Examiner yourself or through a responsible person of this so that arrangements could be made to collect the schedules from you. In all cases schedules must be returned and on the same day. In this way estimated billing and inconvenience to consumers can be avoided. This is especially so if the schedules had been estimated in the previous month.

4. HANDLING METER READING SCHEDULES

1. General

- (1) You are completely responsible for the schedules.
- (2) Care must be taken to prevent loss of our damage to the schedules.
- (3) Schedules should be kept clean and dry.
- (4) No alterations or obliterations are permitted in the schedules. All reports are to be written on the side or bottom space of the schedules but not in the meter reading entry boxes or use a separate report sheet. Correction of meter reading is allowed but need to be substantiated & signed by the meter reader concerned.

II. Before leaving the office

- (1) Ensure that you have received the correct schedule.
- (2) Count the number of meter sheets in the schedule. If any is missing report to issue examiner.
- (3) Ensure that if maps are given they are the correct ones and that none is missing.
- (4) Write meter reader number and meter reading date on the 1st & last page of the schedule. The meter reader will be allocated with each Section of the schedule. In this way errors or other complaints concerning any meter can be readily traced to the correct Reader.
- (5) For specific meter reading, the meter reader assigned shall observe instructions given eg. reading meters before/after certain time, making appointment with consumers before reading, getting keys for certain premises from other places etc.

III. Approach to Premises

- (1) Be punctual if previous appointment had been made.
- (2) Check for any information in the reading schedules eg. position of meters, dogs, etc.
- (3) Do not knock the door too loud or for too long and when using the electric bell, do so sparingly.
- (4) Call out "Meter Reader" and identify your self when consumer is checking on the caller.

- (5) Consumer requests identification before permitting entry:-
- a) produce Corporation identity card.
 - b) produce Personal Identity card if consumers' security personnel etc is dissatisfied and requests further identification.
 - c) if consumer requires further assurance, suggest that he phone 482020 - 113 or 144 Meter Reading Division for:-
 - (i) Reader's name
 - (ii) Reading day verification
 - d) do not hesitate or argue with consumer over the identification.
- (6) Ask consumer if it is safe to enter if there is dog present.
- (7) Respect for the consumer's privacy:-
- (a) When invited to enter, close gate/door behind you.
 - (b) Use designated paths when approaching premises or meters:-
 - i) do not jump fences.
 - ii) do not cross new lawns or gardens.
 - iii) do not disturb flower beds.
 - iv) go only to the places where the meters are located - do not loiter in other places and arouse suspicion or annoyance of the consumer.
 - v) do not smoke inside the premises.
 - vi) do not annoy pets - leave them alone
 - vii) do not remove anything without permission eg. drains.
- (8) Respect for the consumer's social and religious traditions - Removal of shoes.
Compulsory removal of shoes is necessary before entering:-
- a) a muslim consumer's house
 - b) places of worship - Mosque, Hindu and Buddhist temples.
In other cases, it is generally considered courteous to remove one's shoes:-
 - a) if shoes are wet and/or muddy.
 - b) if consumer had recently washed or polished the floors and staircases.
 - c) if floor is carpeted or expensive items are lying on the floor.
 - d) if hallway is used for sleeping or prayers.

- e) when requested to do so by the consumer, but avoid this embarrassing situation by removing your shoes before being asked to do so especially if the requesting party happens to be a child. Note in meter sheet for other Readers to conform.
- (9) On rainy days remove your raincoat/umbrella and leave it outside the door before entering the house. This is to avoid being, accused of dirtying/damning the consumer's house.

IV. Reading of Meters.

- (1) Read all the meters in the schedule
- (2) If you do not know the location of the meters see if you can obtain consumer's co-operation.
- (3) Check the meter number and house number before reading.
- (4) Read the meters from a suitable distance.
- (5) If the electric meter is too high, request a chair/ladder.
- (6) Be accurate in reading the meters.
- (7) If meter glass is dirty, wipe it before reading. Where possible and where appropriate advise consumer tactfully that it will be of great assistance if his meters are kept clean.
- (8) Read the meters even though (Supply disconnected but meter not removed) is shown on meter sheet.
- (9) Record your reading, reader's number and date of reading in the meter card. Replace with a new meter card if there is none or lost.
- (10) Repeat all door locked cases so as to avoid estimated billing of consumers.
- (11) Where necessary use a torchlight to read meters. Using of matches is forbidden.
- (12) If consumer wishes to know the reading, oblige him. But advise him that the readings are printed on the bills each month and he could use this for his reference.
- (13) Close the meter box door after reading.

V. Obstruction to Meters

All obstruction to meters within and outside the premises and which can be rectified by the consumer, irrespective of whether the obstruction has been caused by the consumer, should be brought to his/her notice and he/she be requested to remove the obstruction to facilitate reading. Tact, tolerance and discretion is required of you here as the consumer may refuse or ignore your request but at the same time better consumer/reader understanding may also develop if request for simple assistance to remove the obstruction is met by you.

When you come across an obstructed meter you should:-

...S/-

- (1) inform consumer of difficulty in reading and request that the obstruction be removed.
- (2) render assistance if task is not time consuming or risky.
- (3) use judgement - if obstruction is of a small not fragile or valuable nature, obtain permission and remove it yourself. But if the obstruction is large, fragile or expensive, request consumer to remove it.
- (4) if the obstruction is of a heavy or permanent nature, draw the consumer's attention to it and request that he move it. If he refuses to comply, inform him that until the obstruction is removed, his consumption may be estimated. Suggest possibility of making arrangements to have meter position changed.
- (5) if an electric meter box door is stuck:-
 - (a) inform consumer first - request consumer to open the door or obtain approval to do it yourself.
 - (b) suggest that consumer trim door edge or equip with handle. This will benefit the consumer by eliminating estimated readings. Explain also the other disadvantages caused by the obstruction:-
 - (i) Damage to meters.
 - (ii) Difficulty in changing meters.
 - (iii) Risk of fire.
 - (iv) Replacement cost of damaged meters borne by consumer.
 - (v) Estimated consumptions may result in high bill for the period.

VI Consumer Requests Assistance

- (1) Use your judgement - help in short, simple tasks especially if this will make your work easier and consumer satisfied eg. removing minor obstructions.
- (2) Understand what is required before assisting.
- (3) Politely decline any tasks where accidents may occur that may result in having blame attached to you eg. where consumer requests you to remove expensive or fragile item from showcase or shelf before reading meter. Explain to consumer that you cannot take the responsibility for any accident that may occur and request consumer to do it himself.
- (4) Politely decline any dangerous, improper or time consuming tasks.
- (5) In other cases, express regret:-
 - (a) that you are not 'qualified' to do such a task.
 - (b) that unfortunately, you do not have the time - that you have an appointment to read other consumer's meters at that time.

VII Leaving the Premises

- (1) If consumer happens to be present, inform before leaving the premises.
- (2) Close gate/door behind you - do not slam.

VIII Before leaving the reading area

- (1) Check your reading once again.
- (2) Ensure that all the meters have been read and no meter sheets have been missed.
- (3) If meter has not been read make sure that you have inserted that appropriate remarks:-
 - Dial Dirty, Glass broken, meter damaged
 - door locked
 - meter obstructed
 - Panel window blur
 - Cannot be traced.

S. FACED WITH A "BAD DOG"

The presence of dogs in the premises are noted in the meter schedule eg. (fierce) dog, etc. You are advised to exercise caution and discretion when working in such premises:-

- (a) Before entering the premises, check meter sheet for information on presence of dog.
- (b) Check gate/door for 'Beware of Dogs' sign.

A. Consumer is Present

- (1) Make yourself known - get the consumers' attention.
- (2) Before entering, ask consumer if he has a dog (if there is no mention of it in the meter sheet). If the consumer had acquired a dog make a note in the meter sheet.
- (3) Ask consumer if it is safe to enter - point out that you are a stranger to the dog and your uniform may excite the dog. If there is a 'dog warning' in the meter sheet, but the dog is not in sight ask the consumer where it is and if necessary to chain it.
- (4) If consumer maintains that his dog will not bite, use judgement as to entering the premises. If still in doubt, request consumer to kindly control the dog while you read the meter.
- (5) If the dog is excited and consumer maintains that it would not be necessary to chain it, where appropriate explain with:-

"I can read the meters, but I am afraid that my mind will be on the meters as well as on the dog. I only hope you can chain the dog".

- (6) If consumer fails to co-operate or is unable to control the dog:-
 - (a) Suggest that you will return later, after the dog has been chained.
 - (b) Suggest that consumer can be billed on estimated reading and note in Report Sheet and also inform your examiner of this.
- (7) Do not command the dog when the consumer is present.

B. Consumer is not Present

- (1) Use discretion when entering premises where consumer is not present.
- (2) If the meter is at rear of premises and dog free in the backyard, go to the front door and kindly request that the dog be controlled.
- (3) If dog definitely hinders access to backyard, inform your Examiner who will look into the matter.

C. Approaching the Dog

- (1) In general, when approaching a dog, ignore him.
- (2) Never show fear.
- (3) Any approach should be made with the arms and hands at the side, palms in. Raising the arms in a threat to strike is poor policy.
- (4) Allow the dog to sniff back of hand. Never turn the palm of the hand towards the dog.
- (5) If a dog charges with head down and tail low, he is not fooling, he is a dangerous animal.
- (6) To stop a charging dog, try an order in a firm, clear and commanding voice, such as 'down' or 'go back'.
- (7) If a dog is bent on biting, hold out the schedule or other item for him to bite and continue to give the firm command.
- (8) Walk slowly backwards.

D. What to do when bitten by a consumer's dog

- (1) Inform consumer that you have been bitten by his dog and show him your wound.
- (2) Do not argue or threaten consumer.
- (3) Telephone and inform Duty examiner that you have been bitten by a dog.

- (4) Call at the Staff Clinic, (HQ).
- (5) Call at the nearest Police Station and report the incident.
- (6) Collect a copy of the completed form from the doctor and submit to your Duty Examiner together with your sick certificate and schedule with the appropriate remarks written in the Report Sheet.
- (7) In case of a serious attack by dogs and you are unable to move, request consumer to make an emergency call dialling 999 for an ambulance.
- (8) Do not ask for any compensation. Leave this to your Examiners.

DIFFICULT CONSUMERS

Tack, discretion, tolerance and patience is required when handling such consumers. Consumers' complaints may be of various types and some may be uttered just for the purpose of annoying the Reader. A different approach is required in each case and some of the common types of complaints and the approach which could be used in each situation is given below:-

I. 'Known' Complainer:-

- (1) Take all precautions and follow all the rules of good consumer courtesy. Do not annoy the consumer by doing or saying any rash things.
- (2) Follow instructions in meter sheet if any are given.
- (3) Knock the door; identify yourself; wait for permission to enter.
- (4) Close the gate and/or door behind you and use designated paths.
- (5) Remove shoes if instructions are given in meter sheet or if told by consumer.
- (6) Do not smoke in the premises.
- (7) Request permission to read the meters.
- (8) Carry on in a quick efficient manner.
- (9) If questioned, answer simple service queries; refer more complex matters to appropriate departments.
- (10) Remain calm and pleasant - do not argue.
- (11) Go direct to the place where meters are located do not loiter in other places and arouse suspicion or annoyance of the consumer.
- (12) As stated earlier, when leaving, close gate and/or door behind you - do not slam.

II. Complaint of entering premises without permission

- (1) Apologise!
- (2) Check instruction in meter sheet. If none is given, record it in the sheet.

III. Complaint of botheration

But if consumer complains about being bothered for permission, explain that you are not permitted to enter any premises without getting consumer's approval.

IV. Complaint of reading too fast or from too great a distance

- (1) Apologise immediately
- (2) Step up closer and read meter again.
- (3) If there is a reason for not being able to get close to the meter eg. some obstruction, explain to consumer.
- (4) If meter is obstructed preventing you from getting closer, request consumer to remove it.
- (5) Check, then if necessary, verify the reading to the consumer.
- (6) Reassure consumer as to accuracy of readings.
- (7) Comment on training and experience which enables you to read quickly and from a reasonable distance.
- (8) Make a notation in the Report Sheet that consumer is particular about the reading distance and speed of reading.

V. Consumer abuses you or the SESCO

- (1) Listen carefully - decide if consumer is joking or serious.
- (2) If complaint is genuine eg. about meter readings or SESCO bills, provide explanation or refer to appropriate departments.
- (3) Attempt to change topic of conversation.
- (4) If consumer is rude or remarks are intended to annoy you:-
 - (a) ignore remarks
 - (b) do not argue or retaliate - be patient and pleasant.
 - (c) read meters in quick, efficient manner and leave the premises before any incidents occur.
 - (d) if consumer obstructs meter, leave the premises and report to your Examiner.

7. COMPLAINT OF 'HIGH BILL'

- (a) Listen to complaint.
- (b) Ask questions for your own clarifications as well as the consumers - ask if consumer knows of any reason for the high consumptions.
- (c) Explain obvious causes:-
 - (i) Accounts adjusted due to under-estimation in previous month(s). Readings are estimated due to:-

premises being inaccessible,
bi-monthly reading,
obstruction of meters,
meter dial sweating,
difficulty in locating meters,
the account being a new one for which time
is required to process the meter sheets
and arranging them in the schedule in waiting
order before actual readings are taken. Other
reasons.
The estimates are based (by computer) on the
average of the consumers' previous consumption and
on the standard average for the type of premises
in the case of new services.

- (ii) Extra days in reading month.
 - (iii) Longer billing period because of holidays.
 - (iv) Electric leakage.
- (d) Other cases for increases in last bill:-
- (i) Due to faulty meters or appliances.
 - (ii) Additional appliances.
 - (iii) Extra people in the house - visitors.
 - (iv) Festive occasions
 - (v) Change in rates - domestic to commercial.
 - (vi) Hot weather.
- (e) If consumer is dissatisfied with your explanation, suggest that he contacts Meter Reader supervisor or Mr. (CS) Telephone no. 482020 extension 113 or 112 or call personally at service counters of Kuching Regional Office or Customer Service Centre, Kuching Plaza.
- (f) Explain that there are employees in Meter Reading Division who may be able to offer better explanation.
- (g) Make a note in the Meter Sheet.

MAKING A 'GRACEFUL' EXIT

- (a) A casual conversation with a consumer (not a complaint situation):
- (i) Show interest in subject, problems or request - be a good listener.
 - (ii) Use good judgement in directing the conversation to a courteous close. Wait for an opening or the end of a thought, then excuse yourself in a courteous manner:-
"I should be getting along now....."
"I must be on my way....."

"Well, I must be going, I'd like to complete my work before I'm caught in the rain (if cloudy day)".
"I almost forgot, I have an appointment in the neighbourhood".

- (b) An invitation in for coffee, tea etc.
 - (i) "I've just had breakfast (lunch, tea etc) thank."
 - (ii) "I only just stopped ten minutes ago for coffee, thank you."
 - (iii) "Thanks, but I am running a bit late so I should keep going."
- (c) Do not loiter in the consumer's premises after having read the meters. Undesirable rumours and circumstances may result.
Remember:-
 - (i) Consider what the other person may think ie. nosy neighbour who can't wait to tell the consumer's husband about the extra time the meter reader spent in the house after having read the meters.
 - (ii) Also consider the neighbour who might insist that the meter reader is wasting his time and allege that this accounts for why they read fast and also the reason for the high bills.
 - (iii) Also the potential charges to meter readers if consumer blame them for any missing valuables or damage to other personal property.

9. CONSUMER QUERIES

1 Common Queries

- (A) Why a different can each month?
- (B) Why a different day each month?
- (A) Different Man
 - (1) To know all schedules and working areas.
 - (2) Equalization of work load due to varying lengths of routes and 'heavy' and 'light' reading areas.
 - (3) To avoid continuation of reading errors which could possibly occur if meters are read by same man. Early detection of errors benefits both the consumer and the Corporation.
 - (4) Rotation works as a check on the efficiency of the Readers - keeps errors and other reasons for non-reading of meters to a minimum.

- (5) Prevents consumers from becoming hostile towards a particular Reader eg. if consumers believe that the increase in their bills is due to the reader's error.
- (6) Difficulties may be more readily noticed by a different Reader not used to a location.
- (7) Increase in the number of accounts and so in the number of schedules. It takes a Reader a longer period now to read in the same area again.

(B) Different Day

Explain the 30-day reading cycle which can be affected by:-

- (1) Weekends and holidays
- (2) Difference in lengths of months.
- (3) Increase in schedules due to new accounts.
- (4) Manpower affected by vacation leave, sick leave, etc.

Suggest consumer contact Meter Reading Division Telephone 482020 ext. 113 or 140 for exact reading date each month.

II. Service Queries and how to direct them

(A) Service Queries

- (1) Can I have my meter moved outside/inside? ..
- (2) Why is my meter so noisy? '
- (3) My meter must be running too fast.
- (4) There must be something wrong with my meter.
- (5) I am vacating soon and I want my supplies cut off and my bill settled.
- (6) When are you reading the meters next?
- (7) Why is my bill so high?
- (8) I want separate metering and billing for my tenant and me.

Listen carefully to full details of query -
get the facts straight before offering explanations.
Assist for answer clearly - be brief and to the point.
If in doubt, refer consumer to appropriate departments
in the Corporation.
Be accurate in giving information and making
referrals.

10. METER READER'S REPORT

You are required to report all incidents and difficulties you encounter in your work in the Meter Reader's schedule or in a separate Report Sheet to be attached to schedule (Do not report on the reverse side of the schedule sheet as it is not practicable for the office staff to go through each meter sheet for follow-up action). This is to enable them to be dealt in time before the next Reader encounters them. Reports should be brief and to the point. Reports can be of two types - those concerning meters and those concerning other matters related to their work.

Your duty examiner will then compile your reports into notification forms to be submitted to the relevant Sections for CES updating or field actions.

(A) Concerning Meters:-

- 1) dials covered with dirt.
- 2) meter panel or box damaged.
- 3) dials sweating or damaged
- 4) meter facing wall.
- 5) meter cover missing, seal missing or glass broken.
- 6) meter damaged or missing.
- 7) meter removed, changed or fixed vice versa.
- 8) new meters installed but no meter sheet in folder.
- 9) meter sheet indicated disconnected (fuse removed) but meter registering.
- 10) reading abnormal i.e. high, static or reversing.
- 11) meters installed high e.g. electric or located in steep slope e.g. water.
- 12) meter cannot be traced. If previous Meter Reader had reported so but you are able to trace, then make a note of the location so that the information could be properly transcribed into the appropriate meter sheet for other Readers' information.
- 13) meter completes one revolution or is returning to zero or 'turning over' each or every month e.g. meter tripped.
- 14) discrepancy in meter number or reading.
- 15) meter leaking (increasing).
- 16) meter obstructed - type of obstruction and if consumer had been approached for the removal of the obstruction.
- 17) Irregularities suggesting illegal connection of supplies. DO NOT DISCUSS THIS SUSPECTED CONDITION WITH THE CONSUMER.
- 18) Unsafe house wiring
- 19) Unauthorized supply extension from one house to another.
- 20) meter jammed (same reading as previous month) and yet someone staying in.
- 21) no card bin.

(8) Other matters concerning work

- (1) House door or gate locked - meters not read
- (2) House vacant - meters not read, readings static, meters removed, etc.
- (3) Dogs in premises - consumer not present. Consumer unable or unwilling to control the dogs, etc.
- (4) Meter sheets not in working order.
- (5) Meters not read due to heavy rain - time and duration of rain must be stated. This helps not only to account for non-reading but also to explain to consumers complaining of estimation or disputing the reason given for estimates.
- (6) Street names or house numbers changed.
- (7). Premises used for trade but rate charged is domestic.
- (8) Complaints from consumers - high consumption, etc.

Writing of reports in the schedule or report sheet during working hours should not be done in public places eg. coffeeshops, restaurants, etc as this may give an erroneous impression to the public that you are inserting fictitious readings, etc.

11. ACCEPTANCE OF GIFTS AND REWARDS

You may, during the course of your work, come across situations where a consumer may wish to reward you for your help or offer you gifts during a festive season. He may also attempt bribery to prevent you from reporting of illegal tapping of supplies or using his premises for trade while paying domestic rate.

If the gift is offered as a reward for help or during a festive season, the Reader should politely refrain from accepting it without embarrassing the consumer. This should also be the case if bribery is intended. But as a further precaution a report should be made to the examiner for any necessary action to be taken.