

Management Training through Special Awards

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BACKGROUND

IN THE COURSE of its work on promoting and disseminating improved irrigation management practices, IIMI has recognized the existence of field practitioners who take risks to develop and test management techniques which produce successful results, but which are not disseminated to the irrigation audience either because of the lack of opportunities and/or abilities to record their experiences, or because of a lack of support, interest and even recognition on the part of the agencies for which they work.

IIMI has therefore created the Special Awards Program, a direct training method that provides opportunities for irrigation professionals who have developed successful innovative approaches to irrigation management problems to pass on their experiences to others by documenting and publishing them as case studies.

This program provides participants with an opportunity to spend between two and four months at IIMI headquarters or at one of its field locations, and to record their experiences under the guidance of Institute staff, who assist participants in formulating their ideas and approaches. IIMI provides awardees not only with allowances to cover their expenses but with substantial assistance in developing their field-level experiences into case studies.

By 1989, IIMI had provided three such awards to irrigation managers from Sri Lanka and the Philippines. Their experiences have covered organizing irrigators' associations to improve system operation and maintenance, farmer participation in the rehabilitation of a small system, and promoting coordination between farmers and agency officials in irrigation system management. As part of the Special Awards Program, in 1990, an irrigation professional was selected and invited to write a case study on his successful experience in the Philippines in turning over of a pump irrigation system to a farmer's organization. IIMI has found the Special Awards Program to be very useful in exposing real problems in irrigation management and the processes by which responses to these situations are developed. The case studies enable IIMI both to learn about innovations that do not result from its own research efforts and to

disseminate them — a function envisaged within the Institute's mandate. IIMI is interested in expanding this program and with it the base of information on management innovations tested in the field.

SPECIAL AWARDS AS A MEANS OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Special Awards Program provides an element of training in assisting irrigation managers to develop themselves professionally. The program recipients are usually irrigation practitioners who are mainly field-oriented professionals without opportunities to diversify the development of their knowledge and skills in different areas of concern.

IIMI's program contributes greatly to the professional development of the recipients of Special Awards, providing them with considerable input from its international staff. In particular, international research staff spend time helping the awardees to develop ideas into instructive case studies, and work with the awardees in reflecting on their experiences. Since the recipients are field practitioners and rarely have a research background, IIMI scientists provide them with assistance in analysis and presentation. Editorial staff help to develop the awardees' skills in the writing and production of the case studies. Computing support is also provided.

The literature on adult learning reflects a general agreement that adults learn from their own experiences. Consequently, they tend to place great value on assistance from others when this facilitates their understanding and provides them with opportunities for new insights.

IIMI's Special Awards Program is designed and implemented to provide learning opportunities to the awardees. They are invited and assisted to:

- Review their concrete experience.
- Develop a reflective observation through analyzing the experience, probing the issues and problems, and postulating causes.
- Develop an abstract conceptualization by verbalizing concepts and principles while developing a generalized framework for tackling the issues and problems.
- Improve their future professional practice, by applying the insights gained through analyzing and presenting the case study.

The approaches applied in the Special Awards Program are firmly rooted in accepted adult learning processes, and aim to provide awardees with a vital resource for their self-development.

MANAGING THE SPECIAL AWARDS PROGRAM AT IIMI

The Institute's Training Unit coordinates and supervises the administration of the Special Awards Program in consultation with IIMI staff involved in providing support to the award recipients. Draft administrative proce-

dures for the program have been presented to IIMI's international staff for analysis and comment. IIMI's Management Committee discusses and approves them after revision by the Training Unit to incorporate suggestions from IIMI staff. The procedures aim to establish criteria of application, selection and the placement of awardees, and to emphasize the necessary steps for program planning (orientation), implementation (supervision) and evaluation, including follow-up and post-evaluation phases.

PROGRAM PUBLICITY

The Institute publicizes the awards through various media, including newsletters and irrigation-related publications, and by notifying irrigation institutions about the availability of awards.

APPLICATION AND SELECTION

Applications are sent either to IIMI's field offices or to headquarters, and they include a summary of the experience the applicant proposes to write up under the special award. The candidates that IIMI attract to this program are professionals who typically work in irrigation, agriculture or other relevant departments within national agencies, and who have had considerable field experience in enhancing system performance. Awards are granted on the basis of the following criteria:

- Demonstrated professional competence.
- Experience in planning and implementing innovative system management approaches.
- Presentation of a valid proposal describing the expected results of the study in terms of improved irrigation management practices.
- Potential for publishing an instructive case study.
- Interest of an IIMI staff member to offer substantive assistance in writing the case study.
- Willingness to participate in IIMI's training program when necessary.

A Selection Advisory Group comprising a Training Specialist and international staff at headquarters and at field offices is established to review applications. The final selection of awardees and decisions on their placements are made by the Training Unit after consultation with this group. The selection is presented to IIMI's Management Committee in the form of clear recommendations for its approval.

OUTPUTS OF THE SPECIAL AWARDS PROGRAM

The main output of the Special Awards Program is published case studies documenting the innovative management practices implemented by the awardees. These studies are distributed to a wide audience, including dissemination through seminars and workshops, and are also used to develop training materials.

Through the case studies, innovations developed in real situations by irrigation professionals are made accessible to other managers and researchers concerned with irrigation management, enabling their insights and approaches to be shared within the international community of irrigation professionals. The awardees are also invited to participate in IIMI's training programs as trainers, to share, analyze and discuss their case studies, giving concrete examples and details of problems faced and solutions attempted.

EVALUATION OF THE SPECIAL AWARDS PROGRAM

IIMI is developing a procedure for ongoing evaluation while the awardees are writing the case studies, as well as a post-evaluation exercise, in order to provide feedback and to assess the effectiveness of the Special Awards Program. The training staff contacts irrigation institutions to ascertain the use and influence of the studies in changing procedures and management behavior. Training agencies are also asked to evaluate the usefulness of the case studies as training materials. The effectiveness of individual awardees is assessed through their participation as trainers in IIMI's training programs.

Based upon the results of this assessment, IIMI reviews and improves the implementation of the program, particularly with respect to illustrating management innovations and the professional development of the awardees.