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**THE CHALLENGES OF TECHNICAL COOPERATION AND
HUMAN RESOURCES IN THE PAN AMERICAN HEALTH
ORGANIZATION ..
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These two challenges are clearly linked, in that technical cooperation depends on and is to a great extent a product of human effort. But as the title indicates, neither of these exists in a vacuum and they are both related to the type of PAHO we have and the type of PAHO we believe we must have. I will speak more of the technical cooperation needed for the Organization we must have and will structure this in three parts: I will speak of the PAHO Secretariat as an organization, then, I will address the technical cooperation needed for the Organization we must have, and finally I will deal with some particular characteristics of our human resources that are not usually discussed in fora like these.

I asked myself the question “what are we as an organization?” As some of you know, one of my hobbies is management. I became involved in this, in the early 60’s as it became clear to me that in the fullness of time I would have to run something or the other and that I was very ignorant of how organizations functioned. One day my wife brought home a textbook of hers by Peter Blau called *Bureaucracy in Modern Society*. I read it and realized that there was a world out there that was completely outside my world of laboratory or clinical practice, and it became obvious to me that there was a body of knowledge one had to have if one was ever going to be involved in the direction of an organization.

The literature I have read is mostly English and I must thank many of you who from time to time have sent me books and articles on these topics. I have also been fortunate during my 15 years in PAHO in that I have learned a great deal and have seen the fundamental differences that exist between many of the management scenarios in the literature and our own Organization. Some of these are the result of cultural variation within our Organization and some relate to our basic ethic and purpose. And indeed some of these differences relate to the fact that many of the consultants that write about organizations and organizational behavior, deal with static processes, with organizations as they are, and rarely ever deal with how you move an organization from one state to another. My learning has been intensified over the past two years as I have visited every office, I think, except Belize and the Dominican Republic and every Center except ECO. You have all

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contributed to my learning in this field and have concentrated my thinking wonderfully, leading me to distill what PAHO shares with organizations in general and what is our uniqueness if any.

It sounds good to declare our uniqueness, and by implication the special characteristics of our staff. But I think it is much more practical to establish that uniqueness from a basis of understanding our commonality with basic organizational structure and behavior. If I fix PAHO as an organization, then I have to define to you what I understand by that. An organization is: 1) a system of human activity that exists for a purpose; 2) its functioning depends on the conversion of inputs into outputs by means of activities carried out by functionaries; and 3) because it is a human organization it is an open system that is capable of learning and of being responsive to positive thought.

Because I characterize PAHO as a system, by definition there has to be interaction among the various parts and among the various persons that form part of the system. As with most systems, it has subsystems within it. I am also quite definite that because of its nature there has to be some form of arrangement or, if you permit the tautology, some form of organization of the major components, that is its functionaries; and this for me, is a bureaucracy. I won't bore you with the changes in thinking about bureaucracy, but PAHO is a bureaucracy. It is not the rigid bureaucratic model of Max Weber, but it does have certain of his characteristics. It does have loci of authority. I know of no successful organization that does not have loci of authority. There is delegation of authority and there is a system of rules that governs the rights and duties of functionaries as in every bureaucracy and this has nothing to do with the usual pejorative connotation of bureaucracy. Every one of us is a bureaucrat whether we like it or not. Sometimes I am impatient when people confuse bureaucracy, with what I call bureau-anarchy: that is when a bureaucracy exists for self-serving purposes and does not fulfill its pristine purpose of service to an organization.

Now what is it "unique" about PAHO? PAHO has existed for 94 years and for that reason alone is unique as an organization. Those of you who track organizations in the private world know that every year we are told how many of the Fortune 500 companies disappear and the reasons that they disappear and fail. Thus, the first reason I would give for our uniqueness in our longevity, and this has occurred because the Organization is useful and helpful. Organizations that are harmful or not helpful disappear. If you look at the characteristics of any organization that has been helpful and not harmful, you will find several key characteristics. The first is that the constituents or beneficiaries of the outputs are better off for the existence of the organization and, equally important, they acknowledge it. Secondly, that the constituents are knowledgeable about the organization that serves them. Thirdly, the constituents have not left, have not exited, have not thought about leaving and continue to call upon the organization because of the perceived value in the association with it.

The second characteristic of our uniqueness is that, like any good organization it has displayed the capacity to change and to adapt. I am sometimes amused, sometimes concerned but never frustrated, when I hear cries for change that are often very simplistic. I will not cite here the numerous changes that have taken place in this Organization over a period of time.

I sometimes think that these calls for change in any organization, not just ours, mean that there has been non-acceptance and non-satisfaction with the change that does take place; in other words, negation of the fact and often for purely personal reasons. It is a well known phenomenon that you can negate the existence of things if you have a fixed image of what should occur and on how things should affect you personally. There is also sometimes what I would describe as a bankruptcy of thinking in that there is a sensation that something is wrong that cannot be very well defined, so the first call is for change although it is never clear change to what, from what, or for what.

I also think that organizations in all parts of the world are but a reflection of the ambient culture. Many of us come from systems in which when the administration changes, there are often administrative and personnel changes that do not reflect any changes in the approach to the fundamental problems. So therefore it is normal to think that there must be demonstrable and radical change in organizations when there is a change of leadership. I also have to admit that some persons are anarchic by nature and prefer to be in a position of constant flux and change, than in a situation of stability. In a room like this there will be some of us who are anarchic-- and those that are more anarchic than others will wish to see more flux and instability than the others.

The third reason I would give for our uniqueness is because of our governance structure. We are unique in terms of our governance structure in that we are intergovernmental and not international. The needs of a Secretariat of an intergovernmental organization, with legal and financial restrictions are different from those of some of the organizations to which many people refer.

Fourth, PAHO is unique because of the nature of our cause. There are few organizations in the world that have a cause like ours. We exist to make a difference to the health and well-being of people through cooperative effort and this sets us apart from many other organizations whose aim and objective is profit. There is a school of thought that says, that even the profit-making organizations have an ethical and moral basis and Peter Drucker points out it is morally unacceptable not to make a profit, but that will be another discussion.

The fifth reason we are unique, I would say, is perhaps the most important one of all. It is the nature of the vision of our Organization. This vision, perhaps more than anything else, will determine our continuation for another 94 years.

I have said before that an organization can be modified by positive thinking. Last year in our discussion about leadership, I pointed out that I doubt that there will be disagreement that one of our main functions is to draw people in the Organization into a sharing of a vision of what we want to be. Events of the past year and the comments from many of you have strengthened my appreciation of the appropriateness of that vision. I now speak about it with much more certainty, with much more force and hopefully much more eloquence and conviction. As I said last year, the vision I have for an organization like ours is one of being the major agent for change in health in the Americas - the major agent for stimulating the improvement of health, and the major health authority that can hold up an image of our countries engaging in a different debate about health. I see our Organization being a major instrument for demonstrating the appropriateness of a Pan American approach to important health problems.

Last year I ventured to share with you the image or the vision not so much of the Secretariat but that of the health of our people as a noble cause for which we should advocate. When first I started to talk about it this last year I had to restrain myself sometimes in my enthusiasm because I began to sound almost like a good Baptist preacher - - I have nothing against Baptist preachers - - indeed I admire them. But as I read and thought more about it, I have come to be convinced that it is an idea that I hope will catch traction one day. We may convince the nations of the world that no longer have to struggle for or against an ideology, that they can focus their energies on something that it is of benefit to all human kind. I am now much less timid in proposing this openly in my public discourse and more and more I am seeing that it is not something that is so far fetched that it has to be a mirage. The difficulty is translating this into practice. I see this as something almost beyond ourselves and I use a quotation from Bernard Shaw that I knew before I saw it in Peter Senge's book, that it is a part of the joy of life being useful for a purpose you consider a mighty one.

We also have to speak to some of the basic principles which underpin this vision. The principles that I have hammered out here and elsewhere, and I will continue to emphasize, are those of equity and Panamericanism that must be seen as part of our constitutional being.

But to return more specifically to us as an organization, there are two final points I wish to make and the latter specifically leads into the other two sections of this presentation. We are learning, but we have a long way to go to understand how to live with the paradoxes that are present in many organizations and are apt with respect to PAHO. Many of you seek for certainty. This is normal, but as we grow older in organizations, as we have more responsibility in them, one of the things that we all have to learn is that one has to live with paradox. Living with paradox and dealing with paradox is one of the essential features of leaders of organizations. It is the paradox of how to be flexible and still have plans: it is the paradox of how to be differentiated and yet integrated: it is the paradox of how to be horizontal and yet vertical. No organization operates in one mode forever.

When I hear persons say that we should adopt a more horizontal structure, I recall what happened to Apple. There was Steve Jobs in a garage with a few brilliant minds creating a world-beating computer. What some persons do not recall is what happened when John Scully came to Apple, and how much of the horizontal approach changed. When people say we should have more horizontal work in PAHO, they do not appreciate how many interprogrammatic committees we have, how many are born, live and die. They do not realize what happens in the Representations, where in fact most of you are adopting a more horizontal approach to the preparation of our annual plans. In the last three Representations I visited, it was evident that the method for creating consensus about what should be in the program for next year was essentially a horizontal one, while a hierarchical structure still existed in the office, because there is quite definitely a locus of authority which is delegated as time and circumstances warrant.

The idea of certainty is very comforting but at a certain level of leadership you have to accept that it does not exist in the real world. There are paradoxes, and we have to live in this age of paradox. I know that some of you have difficulty with this and seek certainty, but no leader has

that luxury. I can give many other examples of the paradoxes that are real and demand judgment usually on the basis of the particular case.

Now, the second of these points relates to an analogy that has become popular and one that I find very useful for PAHO. It is the analogy of the sigmoid curve. It is said that most organizations that are continuing to prosper have learned how to jump from one part of the sigmoid curve to another. You start slowly, then you rise rapidly until you reach a plateau, but you can never remain on the top part of the sigmoid curve forever. You either jump to another sigmoid curve or you continue on the downward slope and as it were converting the sigmoid curve into a bell. The organizations that prosper, that move, that change, that adapt, that progress, that live, learn how to move from the top part of one curve to another curve. The critical characteristics of the PAHO that is evolving, the characteristics that will allow our Bureau, our Organization to live for another 94 years and continue jumping curves are our technical cooperation and our human resources.

Last year I said that there was still poor understanding of our technical cooperation and I said then that we are advancing. I say now that we have advanced somewhat. I think the technical discussions and the interregional meetings organized by the Office of Analysis and Strategic Planning (DAP) really helped, but we have a long way to go. Our mission says that technical cooperation is our business. Let me make a parenthesis here: we presented a document to the Directing Council on the WHO Constitution and I made an statement in that document that there was a blurring of the differences between what have been described as WHO's two essential functions, technical cooperation and the normative or standard setting role and Dr. Mazza from Argentina took to me to task. On reflection he is partially right. The clear responsibility of a World Organization is to set standards of what should be preserved and identified as the norm in the world.

But we must not diminish technical cooperation. Cooperation means to work with, and the question we always ask is how do we work with our countries. What are the components of this output that is technical cooperation? What do functionaries do to produce this output? How do we work with countries transforming inputs into output? As I said before, this is an essential function of human organizations and I am concerned if our functionaries do not give thought about how to convert inputs into this output.

In our case, the major inputs are our knowledge, our money and our labor and the major locus of work with countries is at the level of the Representations. There are sometimes difficulties in our countries in understanding what we do, and as I have pointed out this is one of the critical prerequisites for helpful or successful organizations. Where I have traveled and encountered difficulties for our work, it is almost always because we have not followed the basic steps in programming our technical cooperation, which I have repeated almost ad nauseam. There must first be definition of the national priorities, a clarification of what technical cooperation is necessary and then identification of what cooperation comes from our Organization.

I reviewed my notes on the reports of the technical discussions on technical cooperation as well as the report prepared by DAP. In these reports there is repeated mention of flexibility in technical cooperation and the need to develop new forms of technical cooperation. What is notable, however, is that we do not specify what are the existing forms. All of you know of the development of what we described as a taxonomy of our technical cooperation. This did not spring out of one person's

head, but was the result of an analysis of the activities carried over two years by technical programs. I am going to charge DAP with developing a consultation to revisit this next year and to determine if we continue to use this taxonomy for our programming, but I will insist on the application of a taxonomy because I do believe that if we are going to be clear about how we convert inputs into outputs, we must have no doubt about the nature and substance of our technical cooperation.

The issue of flexibility comes up repeatedly, but I do not have time to address it here, in the sense of what is the difference between liberty and license, where does flexibility begin, and where do we go past the borders of what should occur in an organization. In this context of our technical cooperation, I have become less and less tolerant of the comment that we cannot be successful because our countries are complex and the complexity of countries in some way inhibits our technical cooperation. Complexity is a norm, it has always existed and will always exist. It is a part of nature that turbulence is normal and all our countries, large and small, have human organizations running them that are complex.

Let me comment on the roles of the regional and country programs, in relation to our technical cooperation. For those of you who query these roles, I have two questions. Have you read the Cabinet paper which we developed on these roles? If you have read it and you agree with it, then I don't see what the point of the query is, and if you have read it and you did not agree with it, the question I would ask is why did you not comment on it, so we could incorporate your comments into another version. I ask you again to read the Cabinet paper on the topic as well as the paper that we prepared recently for WHO on Programs and Priorities, that sets out loci of responsibility and action that should obtain in a multi-level organization.

Having spoken about organizations in general and ours in particular, about technical cooperation and how we need to be more specific about what we do, I now want to spend the next few minutes addressing the other issue of human resources. I would like to begin by going back to the history of technical cooperation, of which I have written and spoken to you before. Just to recapitulate, when the United Nations system was fashioned out of the rubble of World War II, it represented a magnanimous effort that was directed not only at rehabilitating the defeated, but extending support to all poor countries. There was basically a transfer of knowledge and expertise to the less fortunate and the twin emphases were on institutional building and human resource development. This has changed somewhat over the years.

When we look at the hey day of technical assistance, the staff that assisted were mainly expatriates. PAHO staff have always been predominantly from the Region, but when I look at the form of work of 25 to 30 years ago, it was still the assistance mode. When you speak to persons who were active at that time, they still refer to what they went and did in the countries, not what they helped the countries to do. When you read descriptions of technical assistance, you will see much emphasis on expatriates going and doing things. They did it, they trained people, they executed programs. But as we have discussed elsewhere, technical assistance evolved into technical cooperation, with an emphasis on partnership.

My major thesis is that as long as technical cooperation was only in transferring skills then it was quite proper to focus almost exclusively on the particular skill and expertise to be transferred. I do not believe that this is now enough. I think the essential skill is knowing how to work with the countries, how to cooperate, how to get countries to cooperate among themselves. And this is in addition to the disciplinary expertise, which the new consultant must have. The new consultant must have, in addition to disciplinary expertise, knowledge of what works and where, knowledge of the resources to be mobilized, knowledge of the information and skills needed and, as the old consultant says, he or she has got to know the territory; you have got to know the territory. Thus, the fundamental point I would make is that to cooperate technically is a skill in itself.

It is claimed that PAHO staff lose their skills over time and often their counterparts at the national level are better prepared than they are. You will pardon my saying that this is a hold-over of the arrogant behavior that often characterized technical assistance, when the expatriate was the sole repository of the knowledge and came to transfer his, and it was usually his skills. Having said this, however, there is no reason in the world why any PAHO staff member should not be able to maintain enough of a general level of expertise to carry out his or her work. It is in the nature of things that you lose some skills but you gain others.

Let me reemphasize the point I just made about the skill in cooperating. The Pan American Health Organization hires persons with a certain level of knowledge in their particular area. Dr. Lavertu will show you tomorrow the level of technical qualifications our staff has, and I am proud to say that we have highly qualified technical staff. Much of that staff, when they come to PAHO, do not know how to exercise the skill that is really necessary for cooperation, and they cannot be blamed for that, because this is something that is not taught. One of the issues we will discuss in our Organization is how to help these bright-eyed, enthusiastic, highly qualified men and women to acquire another skill in addition to that which they obviously have by nature of the degrees and diplomas that they bring with them. How do we help our staff to learn to cooperate with the countries?

The idea is being floated that we do not need to have many consultants. This view is predicated on the perception that the only attribute that the consultant brings is his or her peculiar disciplinary skill. It is not predicated on the idea that the real and valuable skill that the consultant brings is one that potentiates his or her disciplinary expertise. It is the skill of cooperating with countries, of helping countries to move forward, helping countries to do what they wish to do and they say they will do, when they meet in fora like these. That is, I think, a critical issue that is never quite brought forward in this discussion. I have tried to point this out to ministers or persons who say to me that a consultant who is in PAHO for ten years and who began as a crack infectious disease specialist, loses his edge after ten years. It may be true that he or she will find, in his or her country of work, people who are more expert than he or she in the latest developments in the area of infectology. But if he or she is assiduous and has applied him or herself to the work, there will be very few people better in helping countries to put in place what is necessary to correct their problems from infectious diseases. That, I think is the nub and the pith of the difference between ourselves and many other organizations that offer direct financial assistance.

This point is so important that I am deliberately not going to dilute it with other aspects of purely personnel management in PAHO.

Thus, I have ignored such things as the approach to supervision; reward systems in organizations and the lack of a reward system that is based on the premise of incorporating into an organization professionals who are already formed and are being hired for specific tasks without consideration of a career. I am deliberately not going to deal with evaluation systems and the pluses and minuses of negative control systems. I must be definite here and say that I am not searching for any new personnel policy.

In conclusion, I have tried to set out some of the commonalties and the unique characteristics of PAHO as an organization. I have tried to articulate more precisely the vision of what I see us as being or becoming. I have tried to address the two aspects of the Organization's life that affect the possibility of carrying out our mission, and approximating our vision. These are the technical cooperation and one fundamental aspect of our human resource requirements. I am going to invite you to reflect on what I have said with regard to human organizations: that positive thinking can induce the changes that we need. I leave you with this, and doubtless I will hear some of your reactions to these ideas for human resource development.

As you go through the week and you debate the issue of human resources, I would only ask that you remember and keep ever before you, what I describe as some of the fundamental principles of the constructive inquiry and discussion that can lead to changes in organizations. These are that first, every system works or has worked to some degree. Therefore, please begin with an appreciation of what is and what works. To use an expression that I learned in Jamaica; "too often we pull ourselves up by the roots to see if we are growing", and that is not helpful. We want to have a genuine effort towards appreciative knowledge of what is fundamental for our purpose. The second point I would make to you is that the concentration of the imagination of senior managers in this organization should lead to some suggestions that can be validated for their usefulness. This is one of the principal reasons for trying to concentrate the senior talent in the organization in one place at one time during the year. So I hope that, when I hear about your discussions, you will be able to say to me that these two recommendations have been observed.

Thank you very much.