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**INDUSTRIAL CONSULTANCY - THE INSTITUTIONAL PROBLEM \***

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The objective of this paper is to identify the role of individual extension as a means of promoting industrialisation, and to examine the implications of this role for the selection and development of an appropriate institutional base for such a service. Most of the research and experience underlying the views expressed have arisen in the area of small-scale enterprise development, but it is felt nevertheless to be relevant to the topic of industrialisation as a whole for two reasons; the least developed countries in particular must look mainly to small enterprises for sustained, equitable and locally controlled industrialisation; in addition it may be necessary to draw a clear line between small-scale and other industries in order to define eligibility for special financing schemes or other promotional devices, but this often leads to anomalies and to unnecessary duplication. The industrial base in the majority of the least developed countries of Africa is so thin, and the need for individual advice is so great, that a single advisory service is probably most appropriate, covering all sizes of enterprise. A few, perhaps mainly foreign managed large enterprises may be in no need of the type of service described in this paper; this does not mean that the service should not be available to all sizes of enterprise and small business experience is equally relevant to the organisation and staffing of a service for those larger enterprises which can make use of it.

It should be clear from the outset what type of activity is being described; the term "extension" is used to describe any form of training or advisory service which takes place outside the initiating central institute; it includes classroom training courses run in field locations, and attempts to promote change through mass media, cultural manifestations, demonstrations and village meetings, as well as the individual adviser who assists individual farmers, families or business enterprises on their own premises. In this paper we are concerned only with such individual advisers; this in no way implies that other forms of extension are not valuable, but those that are particularly relevant to industrialisation are being dealt with in other papers at this meeting. It is also important to define the type of enterprise whose formation, growth and success will contribute to "industrialisation" and should therefore be assisted by individual extension, or "consultancy" as we shall call it for convenience. Farms are clearly the most important forms of enterprise in every one of the least developed countries of Africa, and in many countries the agricultural extension service can learn a great deal from the experience of non-farm extension; farming is of course an industry, but this meeting is concerned with enterprises other than farms, although many of them may be closely linked to agriculture, whether as suppliers of inputs, machinery and processing, or as marketers of the output, but farms themselves are beyond the scope of this paper.

Traders however are very definitely included; in view of their importance and contribution to the creation of wealth it is perhaps unfortunate that the United Nations family does not include a third agency to cover marketing institutions in the same way that the FAO and UNIDO cover farming and manufacturing industry; it is not surprising however since traders have since the earliest times been despised as extortionate middle men, adding no tangible value to the goods they handle, rather than as the vital link between producers and consumers, whose contribution in terms of real value added is often greater than that of the farmer or manufacturer. National wealth can be created by increasing the time, place and information value of physical products as much as by improving their quantity, quality or physical value. Industrialisation depends as much on the development of effective domestic and export marketing intermediaries as on the actual manufacturing units, and industrialisation will be taken for the purposes of this paper to include the promotion of trading as well as manufacturing activities.

The terms "business" or "enterprise", are often assumed to relate mainly to privately owned activities, operating for a profit. State or co-operative owned enterprises are however equally important, and in some countries they are regarded as the main avenue to industrialisation; the types of services which are examined in this paper are equally applicable to them as to privately owned businesses, and although much of the terminology is inevitably associated with private business this should not be interpreted as suggesting that the services are not appropriate to public or co-operative enterprises or, still less, that private businesses are necessarily the best vehicle for industrialisation of the least developed countries.

Any service for existing or potential industry must be based on some assessment of the actual needs and problems of those who are involved; research among large numbers of different types of enterprise, in many different countries in rich and poor parts of the world, suggest that most people who are in business believe that their main need is for more finance or for assets such as equipment or stocks whose purchase could only be funded by the injection of additional capital from outside the business. It is therefore perhaps reasonable that in most countries industrial promotion schemes start with finance; they are after all providing what the business people themselves believe they need.

Even brief but critical observation however, during a visit to an enterprise, suggests what closer analysis of the operation confirms; the majority of businesses, particularly smaller ones in developing countries, are not making the best use of the capital they already have, and the injection of more capital will only serve to exacerbate the problem. Machinery is standing idle because of raw material or spare parts shortages, store rooms are full of excessive inventories of raw material, work-in-progress or finished products, and further resources are tied up in receivables which are long overdue. The need here is for assistance and training in making the best use of available resources, which is after all one of the definitions of management. Finance from outside may in time be desirable, but it must be preceded by analysis and improvement of current operations, and accompanied by supervision and assistance to ensure that it is employed in the right way.

This second stage of needs analysis, following from closer examination of the expressed need for finance, might be thought to suggest training as the solution. The need is for behaviour change, the target group are definable and the required skills are readily identified as book keeping, project appraisal and so on. Management training courses in these subjects proliferate, but from the rare occasions when the trainers have the resources and inclination rigorously to evaluate their effects on the enterprises, the results are disappointing. The realities of the business are different from the classroom, senior management are unenthusiastic or actively hostile to innovations, there are no projects to appraise and neatly prepared books of accounts do not seem to lead automatically to improved efficiency. One objective may be achieved in that the certificate of attendance is held to make the enterprise eligible for a loan, but there is not certainty that the money will be any better used, or more likely to be repaid, because of the training.

Clearly not all management training is ineffective. If the trainees are of a fairly senior level, if their experience of formal education is sufficiently high level, and recent, to allow them to apply the generalities of the classroom to the particular situation of an enterprise, if they can be released from their jobs long enough, if they are constantly forced during the training to test what they are learning against the knowledge of their real working situation, and if the training is fully participative, some positive results can be achieved. It is very difficult to satisfy all these conditions however, and formal classroom training courses are more attractive in terms of convenience for the trainer and ease of "delivery" rather than verifiable contribution to industrialisation.

Training courses usually take place in classrooms, and certainly in groups, while consultancy is carried out on a one to one basis within the enterprise. A more fundamental distinction may however lie in the expressed, or at least implicit objectives of the two forms of assistance. Training is, or should be, intended to enable trainees to do something for themselves at a later date when they return to their jobs, while the prime object of consultancy is usually to do something for the manager which he cannot do for himself.

The terms of reference of a consultancy assignment may mention that the client's own staff will be involved in and contribute to the results, but consultants are normally hired to carry out a function that the enterprise finds is impossible or uneconomic to carry out for itself. Manufacturers pay other businesses to produce raw materials, to construct their buildings, to clean their offices or to dispose of their refuse; the installation of a new wages or control system, the appraisal of possible investment alternatives or even the definition of long term corporate objectives and design of an appropriate organisation structure are seen as similarly specialised functions where outside assistance is appropriate.

This type of consultancy is perfectly reasonable when the managers who make use of it are able to define their own needs, to appraise the recommendations and to implement and operate whatever new systems are suggested.

Difficulties arise when clients cannot do these things for themselves, and regard consultancy as a panacea which will in some mysterious way solve all their problems for them. When there are in a country very few managers with any extensive industrial experience, because there is very little local industry, consultancy of this kind can be even more expensive and less effective than training courses, and even if the consultants are asked actually to stay on and run the enterprise they were initially intended to advise, this in itself does not contribute to genuine independent industrialisation.

A consultant whose objective is to promote and assist national industrialisation, rather than to respond to clearly defined needs for specialised expertise, must play a rather different role. He or she must be able to identify solutions to specific problems, but must also and more importantly be able to "put himself out of business" by developing the skill of the manager to diagnose his own problems and to identify and implement solutions for them.

In spite of the best efforts by Government and others to co-ordinate the work of all the agencies whose regulations, assistance programmes or other activities impinge upon industry, there is also a need for guidance through the maze of permits, controls, standards and incentives which may be designed to help but often serve only to confuse. If a manager knows that



he needs advice of this sort, he can come to a central signposting office such as the Small Firms Information Centres in the United Kingdom, but only an individual consultant can alert a manager to rules or assistance programmes of whose very existence he was previously unaware.

We have thus identified a number of tasks which can most effectively, or only, be carried out by an individual consultant or extension officer, working in the enterprises itself; he must be a "business doctor", a trainer, an adviser and friend with personal ability and institutional freedom to look dispassionately at an enterprise and to suggest, and "sell", whatever changes or outside interventions are most appropriate, without any allegiance to any particular kind of service, whether it be a source of supply, finance, training or technology; what are the implications of this multiplicity of tasks for the consultancy? What kind of service should it be?

The owners of businesses, or potential investors, cannot be expected to seek out advice of this sort described; many believe that their principle or only problem is shortage of finance, and others may not be aware that they have any problems at all. The service must therefore reach out to the enterprises, not only in the sense that advice should be given on the spot but it must also be promoted and extended by "cold calling" on enterprises whose owners might never have thought of using it.

By the same token, an individual consultancy service must be comprehensive; it will probably be set up initially in a particular region, but eventually every enterprise, of any size, in any part of the country should not only have access to consultancy but should be in a position to be actively solicited as a "client". This of course demands a large number of consultants; the actual figure needed will depend on the proportion of all businesses which are eventually identified as being capable of making good use of this service, the number of businesses which a consultant can hold in his portfolio at a given time and the frequency of calls and the period over which the advice is to be provided to each business. Each of these are major questions which are beyond the scope of this paper, but the necessary calculations are similar to those made by marketing organisations

when planning field sales representation, or by agricultural extension services when deciding on the number of officers to be employed. The experience in Kenya and elsewhere suggests that measurable cost effective and equitably spread services can be provided by a consultancy group amounting to approximately 25 field officers per 1,000,000 of the total population; this is obviously a very crude figure, but it may suffice to give some indication of the order of magnitude involved.

The task of problem identification and solution, and when necessary reference to appropriate specialised services, obviously require generalists rather than specialists. This has important implications for their prior experience and qualifications and for the type of training which they should receive which may facilitate the recruitment of the larger numbers which are needed.

The advice must be general rather than specialised in that it can make some contribution, even if it is no more than reference to a specialist source of assistance, to any sort of management or technical problem; the consultants must be general practitioners who can recognise and cure diseases they are familiar with, identify problems when reference to more specialised advice is required and advise their patients in such a way that they will in future prevent diseases from occurring or recognise their own symptoms and cure them themselves. A comprehensive service, providing advice to every enterprise or potential entrepreneur in a country which can make good use of it, must also be inexpensive, since most businesses are small, many new ventures will never be established or will fail in spite of good advice, and the national economic importance of improved performance by any one business is likely to be negligible. The total cost will be substantial, because of the numbers involved, but expenditure on transport, offices and so on must be minimised, while the staff should if possible be drawn from a group who are willing to work for rather low salaries.

If the service is to be available, relevant and attractive to every business enterprise, the consultants must clearly be able to communicate easily with every kind of business owner. They must be drawn from the same region and type of society to which the business people belong; the local vernacular must be their own, and they must not be alienated from their potential clients by origins, lengthy formal education or attitudes of contempt or

superiority. The managers of the few large and sophisticated enterprises must of course be advised by people of similar backgrounds to themselves; this implies a hierarchical pyramid type organisation, with large numbers of relatively inexperienced and unqualified consultants and a small apex with far greater expertise, relating to the industrial structure of the least developed countries.

The consultants, at all levels, must be generalists; this has implications not only for their training but also for the content of their advice; they must not have any leaning or preference for any particular type of intervention whether it be finance, technical innovation, industrial estates, classroom training or marketing assistance. They should appraise each business situation dispassionately on its own merits, and offer whatever suggestions, introductions, advice or actual assistance is appropriate. They must measure their own success, and themselves be evaluated, not in terms of the "sales" of any particular service but in terms of the satisfaction of their clients' needs and the performance of the enterprises they advise. This performance may be measured in terms of turnover, employment generation, profitability, investment or some combination of these, but the stress must be on the results of the enterprises rather than the consumption of any form of assistance.

The consulting service must be widely available, even to those owners or managers who are not aware that they need it, and it must be inexpensive per business served, even if the total cost must necessarily be rather large because this service must cover the whole country. Does this suggest that a charge should be made or that the consultancy should be free? A proportion of the clients will initially need some persuasion to provide a consultant with the information he needs before he can help them, and so will be actually suspicious or even hostile; if even a small charge is levied from the beginning, they, and others to whom a small charge is a significant sacrifice, will decline. This may lead to the all too common situation where only those least in need or help actually are helped, while those who can benefit the most fall even further behind.

On the other hand, goods are often valued at what they cost, and the "buyer" of an intangible service such as consultancy is more dependant than most on price as an indicator of value; experience in Kenya indicated that even the least sophisticated small-scale rural traders were willing to pay a proportion of the cost of consultancy, after they had received and benefited from an initial period free of charge. Commercial consultants often give some advice as part of their initial proposal, in order to encourage potential clients to retain them; there is no reason why a national industrial consultancy service should not use the same technique.

The basic specification for an industrial consultancy may now be said to have emerged; it must be widely available to all types of business wherever they are, it must generalist and diagnostic rather than specialised and prescriptive, and the advice must be available at different levels of sophistication to match the industrial hierarchy of the country; the consultants must be able to communicate easily with their clients, they must be able to introduce any appropriate specialised service, or none, as is appropriate for the enterprise, they must aim to "put themselves out of business", by training their clients to act without advice, and the service should if possible be charged for after an initial introductory period. What are the implications of this specification for the organisation and institutional location of a consultancy service?

As with so many national development tasks, it is difficult to decide what should be done, but it is almost certain to be more difficult to decide who should do it. Viewed from the point of view of Government, it could be argued that at least eight Ministries or Departments could reasonably be responsible for field staff in contact with industry. The Ministry of Education is usually responsible for vocational training, and if consultancy is viewed mainly as a training activity, it should be part of the national human development task which takes place in schools, colleges and in people's homes and work places; many industries produce or sell goods which are a potential hazard to consumers, and every business which employs people must be concerned with safety at work and environmental responsibilities; The Ministry of Health therefore needs to inspect and advise businesses about their responsibilities to society and their employees. In many countries

there is a Ministry or Department of Trade, concerned with distribution and export promotion; there is a need for field staff to advise on all aspects of marketing, to encourage import substitution and export activity and to introduce customers particularly Government Departments; The Ministry of Industry is concerned with technology; should they not employ field staff to inform industry about new appropriate technologies, to encourage local manufacture of equipment and generally to improve the profitability of manufacturing enterprises? The State Bank, through whatever channels are appropriate, will be responsible for finance and loan schemes; field contact is necessary to solicit and investigate applications for credit and to supervise its use. The Ministry of Works is responsible for infrastructure and in particular for constructing and managing industrial estates; they must therefore be in regular contact with tenants, to ensure that they are making the best use of the package of services which is provided for them. Working conditions, wages, trade union activity and trade and technical training may be the responsibility of The Ministry of Labour; here again, some field contact may be required. In many countries enterprises of all sorts, and not only farms, are encouraged to form co-operatives in order to increase the scale of their operations; The Department of Co-operatives has field staff to identify groups for whom co-operation would be of value, and to encourage and assist their efforts to work together, and these people should be in touch with at least the smaller industrial units. This list is not all inclusive, but it should serve to suggest the number of Government Departments which might legitimately be involved in providing on the spot advice to industry, and to indicate the potential for confusion.

This situation may be said to be reflected at an international level, since industry touches every aspect of national life. Every United Nations Agency, and not only UNIDO, is involved in some aspect of industrialisation, but since their impact in any one country is limited and the need for their specialised assistance is far beyond their capacity to supply it, not too many problems arise.

At a national level, however, the difficulties may be overwhelming; in most countries some or all of the Ministries mentioned above have at least some field contact with industry, and although the resources of one Department are usually too limited to allow more than token coverage duplication and conflict inevitably arises. This may be further compounded by the work of non-Government agencies, such as charities or church groups, local or foreign businesses whose legitimate interest can be served by some form of local industrial development or universities or technical institutes whose staff quite reasonably view consultancy in the field as a necessary extension of their work in the classroom and the laboratory. Inevitably some industries or regions are overwhelmed with advice while others are neglected, and different institutions, with different loyalties and prejudices, advise different solutions so that the owner or manager of an industry is confused and may even be misled into making unprofitable investments because what one agency suggests is in conflict with the plans of another.

Although each of the large number of agencies which may attempt to advise industry in the field may ultimately have the same general objectives of improving national welfare, the means at their disposal are different and an inexperienced owner, manager or investor is ill-equipped to select for himself an appropriate package of assistance from the large number of "salesmen" who knock at his door. Consultancy is usually viewed as one ingredient in the total range of necessary services, which also include finance, classroom training, technical and marketing advice and so on. This is rather like a primary school offering reading and writing as optional subjects along with mathematics, history, geography or science. Clearly certain skills are necessary equipment for any form of education, and similarly the ability to diagnose business problems and to decide what remedies are required is of a different order from finance, technology or marketing assistance. Consultancy should therefore be placed at the apex of whatever assistance programme is offered to industry: this does not mean that consultants should control the other services, but they should work from a neutral base, owing no allegiance to any particular service, but familiar with everything that is available.

If all the Ministries and Departments mentioned earlier are thus disqualified from control over consultancy service, what solution is there to the problem of its institutional location? Many solutions have been attempted; co-ordinating committees have been set up, with members drawn from every Department with some interest in the subject, independent national institutes have been established with the function of providing advice and consultancy and for co-ordinating the other specialised services, or a single Ministry or other group such as the banking sector has been selected as the apex institution, with authority to set up and operate a consultancy service and to co-ordinate the remainder.

The results have rarely come up to expectations; any new institution faces jealousy and rivalry from existing interests, and the organisational problems of setting up and running a nationwide industrial consulting service are such as to daunt even the most generously funded and expertly staffed institution; they are often too much for a new and untried organisation to which people of the necessary skills and experience are naturally unwilling to commit their careers since there are so many other opportunities open to them. Existing Ministries or other Departments find it difficult to integrate the very specialised function of consultancy into their operations; salary scales may be too generous for the very inexpensive and unqualified people who must be hired to cover the vast number of smaller industries if the service is to be economic, and they may be too low to recruit the small number of highly experienced consultants needed for the few larger and more sophisticated enterprises. Government Departments are rarely organised to charge for their field services and even the experience of private marketing organisations shows how difficult it is to organise genuinely national representative coverage with a minimum of headquarters overhead, effective and regular supervision and versatile and enterprising field staff.

Some companies operate successful national sales forces, and a comprehensive industrial consultancy service should in many ways be organised along similar lines, with continuous supervision and evaluation by results, and a small, economic but effective specialised headquarter's staff for dealing with particular "house accounts" or other problems. A consultant is however "selling" a far more complicated "product" than soap or cigarettes, and Government Departments with their tendency towards centralised administration and bureaucracy are ill-equipped for so difficult a task.

It is probably necessary to adopt a more flexible and pragmatic approach, and to recognise that the massive scale of the problem need not necessarily be met by a massive or monolithic solution. It must be accepted that any industrial establishment, or whatever size, needs on the spot advice, but this does not mean that they should all be served from the same source. There are many different types of industry, and they are located in different places; it may be administratively neat for one rather large organisation to service all the consultancy needs, and this may be the ideal solution; ideals are rarely attainable, however, and it is usually better to work from the imperfect present towards a rather less imperfect future than to discard all existing activities and attempt to replace them with the perfect solution.

What is needed may not be a new organisation, nor a massive reallocation of responsibilities, but a sensitive appraisal of existing services, followed by tactful steering and suggestions for new emphases rather than attempts at abrupt change. Clearly even this function has to be carried out by somebody, based on some institution, but the organisation, staffing and funding requirements are very small, and a neutral but prestigious institutional location can be found in most countries for a co-ordinating activity of this sort.

It is interesting to compare the British and the American approach to small business development; the Small Business Administration in the United States is a very large centrally controlled organisation, with extensive field representation, and it offers advisory services, training courses, loan guarantee schemes and other facilities. The Small Firms Division of the British Department of Industry, on the other hand, comes close to the approach that is advocated here. A very small central office with some two dozen people, including secretarial and administrative staff, monitors and promotes the various interests of small business. The Division itself operates Small Firms Information Centres in a number of cities, but apart from this it restricts its role to research, encouragement and tactful co-ordination, and its central staff attempts to protect the interests of small industry by bringing pressure to bear on any Government Department whose activities or plans appear to damage the small business sector.

Particular industries may best be advised by specialized organisations, whose objectives are close to those of national development so that the consultants can be expected to give completely dispassionate advice, based on continuing experience and training in the same field. In Malaysia Pemas Ekar performs this function for the retail grocery trade; their main function towards achieving their objective of indigenisation of retail distribution is to operate wholesale warehouses throughout the country; the specialised consultants are independent of the sales force and it is recognised that if the country's indigenous retailers are helped to upgrade their skills through on the spot advice they will also buy more goods from the wholesale outlets. In some countries private and possibly foreign controlled manufacturers of vehicles or consumer goods need more effective distribution channels and servicing facilities for their goods; they may be encouraged to provide general business advice to whatever industries are of interest to them.

Regional administrations with particular problems may be encouraged to set up their own regional services for particular groups, such as is done in India, and voluntary organisations such as the Partnership for Productivity group can work on their own in one region, as they do in Kenya, or for particular industries in co-operation with Government as they do in Botswana or indeed in partnership with a large private investor in one region as they do in Liberia. In Sri Lanka the Industrial Development Board concentrates partly on industries with export or import substitution potential, and has also developed special programmes to encourage the establishment and efficient operation of rice mills, while in Brazil the University of Salvador has set up an advisory service for small-scale industries in the city and the surrounding area.

A detailed survey in any country will reveal many such services, satisfying the consultancy needs of particular regions of industries. If Central<sup>o</sup> Government has even a general idea of the number, location, scale and activities of industries within a country, it is not difficult to identify areas and industries which do or do not have access to a consultancy service. The need is so great that any request for withdrawal to avoid duplication can always be more than matched by expansion in another direction, so existing institutions need not feel threatened by any attempt tactfully to co-ordinate their activities. Some areas will be totally devoid of any form of advisory service; if it is not feasible for existing services gradually to

extend into these areas, proposals should be sought from local or foreign agencies to start an appropriate service on a modest basis. As industrialisation occurs, needs change, so that the situation must be continually monitored. The smallest village based advisory service may incorporate innovations and techniques of great value elsewhere. It is often better to replicate such activities in different communities, rather than to encourage an essentially local community based institution to extend beyond its own organisational capacity.

Consultancy is in general not an activity which benefits significantly from economies of scale; the national need is probably best served by local or sectoral solutions, and Central Government must only recognise the need for what it is, define the broad specifications of an acceptable service, and tactfully co-ordinate and encourage a plurality of institutions to satisfy it.



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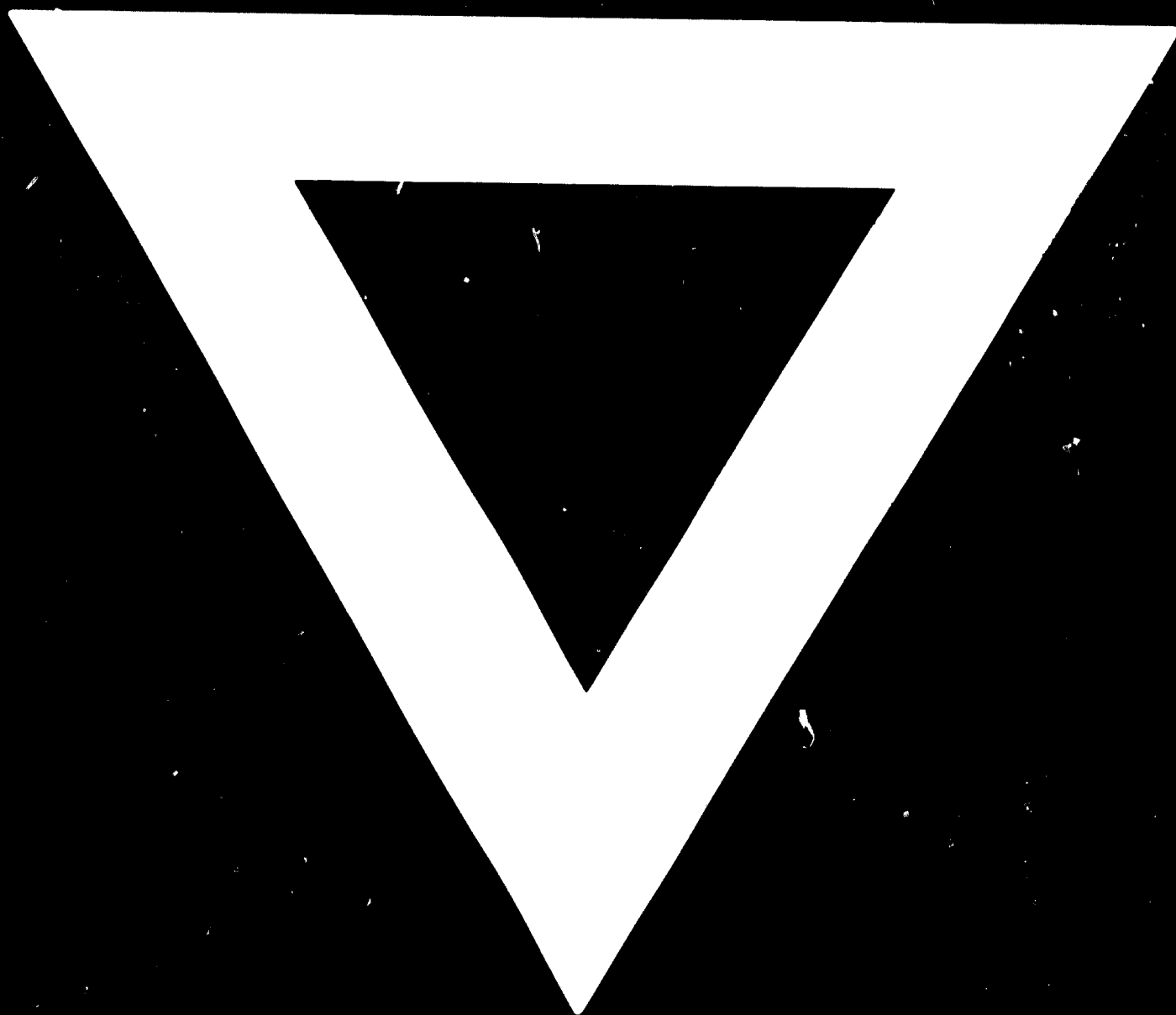
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