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SELECTION AND RECRUITMENT OF CONSULTANTS 1/

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Table of Contents

| <u>Chapter</u> | <u>Title</u> | <u>Page</u> |
|----------------|--------------------------------------|-------------|
| I. | Introduction | 1 |
| II. | Defining the Problem | 2 |
| III. | Sources of Consultants | 5 |
| IV. | Consultant Selection and Recruitment | 9 |
| V. | Summary | 11 |

I. INTRODUCTION

Providing financial and technical assistance to less developed portions of the world has been a major concern of the economically advanced countries during the twenty-five years following the end of the Second World War. This commitment of capital and manpower in an attempt to transfer development capabilities among nations is an unprecedented step in world history.

The emphasis in development programmes during the past two and a half decades has shifted from reliance on massive injections of capital as a cureall for development needs, to a dual effort aimed at providing not only capital but also the technical ability to effectively utilize the financial assistance. Much of the effort to transfer technical knowledge and capability has involved assignment of technical consultants in less developed countries for varying lengths of time.

Use of consultants has produced some excellent progress - but there are also too many instances of consultant programmes which provided little or no meaningful contribution to development goals. It is difficult to document or quantify these instances - in many cases the host country, the organization providing assistance and the consultant himself prefer to forget the unsuccessful consulting assignment. But the author is himself aware of a number of cases where provision of the wrong consultant led to programme failures.

There are a number of reasons why a consulting project may not produce the desired results for the host country. Not all of the failures can be anticipated or prevented. The fact that an altogether too high rate of programme failures do occur, however, indicates that some basic shortcomings exist in the present methods for defining problem areas requiring the use of consultants as well as in the methods used for selection and recruitment of technical specialists.

The problem is not a shortage of manpower. There is no lack of competent professionals who are willing and able to fulfill the development consulting assignments. The difficulty lies in arriving at a satisfactory definition of problems which lend themselves to solution through use of technical consultants; and identification and recruitment of consultants qualified to solve these problems.

Stumbling blocks which may negate a consultant's best efforts include failure by the host country or organization to provide satisfactory facilities and working conditions for the consultant, or the lack of advance provision for adequate follow-up.

The question today is not whether technical assistance can be made more effective, through better use of consultants as well as by other means. It is becoming progressively more difficult to obtain the amounts of financial

assistance required to maintain and increase the present momentum of development assistance programmes. The financial support that can be generated must be expended in such a way as to obtain maximum impact on development progress.

One of the means by which this can be accomplished is through improving the effectiveness of technical assistance programmes, by making better use of consultants. One of the most pressing needs in this regard is improved coordination and communications among organizations responsible for providing development assistance.

At present there is a confusing proliferation of sources which provide technical consultants for development assistance. These sources include international agencies such as the various components of the United Nations, national governments, non-profit foundations, trade associations, religious groups and many more. All too often, there exists almost no coordination or even communication among these organizations, particularly in those areas dealing with selection and recruitment of technical consultants.

In the United States alone, organizations responsible for recruiting development specialists range from the U.S. Agency for International Development, which itself subcontracts specific consulting programmes to other organizations, both governmental and non-governmental to foundations, such as Ford and Rockefeller; trade or industry associations; commercial consulting firms, and various others. None of these organizations can afford to maintain a permanent staff adequate to fulfill all possible future development assignments.

Instead, they must recruit people on the basis of specific programme needs and let their personnel go when these projects are ended and there are no further programmes to utilize their talents. Even the major organizations such as the U.S. Agency for International Development and the United Nations development organizations face this problem to varying degrees.

Some means must be found to establish a pool of technical specialists with proven capabilities for providing effective development assistance. Such a pool would ideally be shared among development assistance organizations. This would require better coordination and communications among these organizations than exists at present.

Another vexing problem compounding the difficulty of providing effective assistance is the lack of adequate, tested criteria for selection of technical consultants who can function effectively in a social, cultural, political, technological and economic environment that may differ materially from that of their home country.

II. DEFINING THE PROBLEM

First step in determining the need for a consultant and specifying the type of consultant to be recruited is identification and definition of the problem. This may be done by representatives of the host country, or may be delegated to a consulting group already working on projects related to the problem area, in concert with host country representatives.

In any case, the people who will be directly concerned with implementing suggested solutions should be involved in initial identification of the problem as well as in defining the limits and restraints and specifying needed consultant capabilities.

This involvement is important in at least two respects. First, the people most concerned with the problem area can contribute greatly to problem identification. Second and just as important, the consultant may be able to develop operable solutions but these solutions must be implemented by the people directly concerned with the problem area or the consultant will have wasted his efforts.

Being called in on a project that has been negotiated at the ministerial level but which is not accepted by the agency or the organization directly concerned can completely frustrate the best efforts of a consultant. Reams of reports embodying solutions to development problems are gathering dust on the shelves of government ministries and bureaus around the world, not because the suggested solutions were not feasible, but because of failure to involve the right people in the initial stages of project planning.

Some of the difficulties encountered by the International Marketing Institute Korea Marketing Development Team provide a good illustration of this latter point. IMI went into Korea with an 18 month USAID contract to help develop marketing research and marketing capabilities in several sectors of the Korean economy.

The original project agreement was negotiated by the Korean Economic Planning Board, ROK Ministries of Commerce and Industry and Agriculture and Forestry and the U.S. Agency for International Development mission to Korea. When the IMI team arrived in Korea to work with subunits of the above agencies and other organizations, they found that at least two of the four man team assignments required spending almost half of the 18 month period selling the programme to the agencies with whom they worked, and more particularly to their immediate associates and counterparts in these agencies.

In one case, a hostile counterpart actually succeeded in disbanding a marketing research group selected and trained over an eight month period by one of the IMI specialists, just at a time when the research group was starting to produce valuable landmark research surveys.

In this case, it took an organizational shake-up by the president of the host organization to repair the damage. Lack of acceptance by counterpart organizations and agencies also proved a hindrance to other IMI team members for the initial period of their assignment. Once this hurdle was passed, the team was able to chalk up some solid project accomplishments.

One of the common errors in problem identification is confusing symptoms with underlying causes. Failure by farmers to adopt modern farming practices in developing areas for years was diagnosed as due to lack of initiative or unwillingness to renounce the ways of their ancestors. More recently it has been demonstrated that higher farm product prices and access to greater varieties of consumer goods as well as proven evidence of ability to greatly increase crop yields can motivate startling changes in farming methods.

The author once interviewed a group of farmers in one of the more poverty stricken rice farming areas of Korea to determine whether lack of technical information or lack of motivation might be a contributing factor in their failure to improve their cropping practices. These farmers, most of whom had very little formal education and whose only link to modern mass communications consisted of two or three transistor radios owned by comparatively well to do villagers, showed an extremely sophisticated grasp of their needs and problems - including

lack of production credit facilities, rice prices which had remained low in comparison to rising prices of farming inputs such as fertilizers and insecticides, and lack of adequate market information to guide their selling efforts. Yet the author was told by a government official in this same province that the farmer's biggest problems stem from his own ignorance and unwillingness to work harder.

Once the problem has been identified, it must be defined. That is, the elements of the problem should be examined to determine whether they lend themselves to solution by outside consultants. It is helpful to separate problems that involve policy decisions from those that involve only procedural aspects.

For example, projects that require engineering design or mapping of a resource base such as harvestable timber, cultivable soils, mineral resources are usually more amenable to subcontracting to an engineering firm or other technically specialized organization than are problems which involve marketing facilities, design of educational systems, economic planning, health services and other problems which involve decisions affecting large numbers of people.

Resources available for solving the problem should be carefully evaluated in relation to the scope and complexity of the problem area. Are there qualified specialists already available in the country to provide problem solving capabilities? These people may be found in other government bureaus, in the universities or in private industry.

Perhaps an even more basic question relates to the tools available for attacking the problem - financial resources, working facilities, necessary research base. One common cause of programme failures has been a result of tackling problems that are too big to be handled by the resources programmed for their solution.

Another responsibility of the host country is identification and provision of effective counterpart personnel to work with the outside consultant. Ideally these counterpart personnel should be in a position to complement the consultant's skills with their own. They should be people who will continue to work in the problem area after completion of the consultant's assignment and who can learn from the consultant as they work with him.

Basic staff work must be completed before the arrival of the consultant. This will include identification of the problem; specification of policy constraints which may hinder solution; selection of counterpart personnel; provision of adequate working facilities, supplies, subsistence and support.

Provision should be made for follow-up activities before the consultant is retained. Follow-up will usually consist as a minimum of provision for a complete review of consultant recommendations and determination of their feasibility; identification of agencies or organizations which will be responsible for implementation of the solutions if they are judged feasible; and subsequent monitoring of this implementation by the consultant or by other consultants at periodic intervals.

Once the problem has been defined, the need for a consultant determined and preparations made for his effective use, search for the proper consultant can begin.

III. SOURCES OF CONSULTANTS

Consultants may be drawn from a variety of sources, ranging from the individual freelance or consulting firm to international organizations, universities, government agencies, technical organizations and others. Specialized organizations have grown up such as the International Executive Service Corps which recruits retired or close to retirement executives and supplies them for consulting assignments in developing countries on an expenses only basis.

The difficulties involved in recruiting technical specialists and the control often exercised over projects by the organization supplying development assistance funding commonly leads in practice to recruiting of consultants through development organizations. In turn, these organizations often recruit specialists from outside their own permanent staff to undertake particular development assignments.

Previous performance is the best criteria for selection of a consultant source. Demonstrated success in working with similar problems in the same or comparable situations provides a clue to the organization's ability to supply suitable consulting services.

The organization desiring to recruit consultants from a particular source should as a minimum check with previous users of the source's services; investigate the general reputation and financial resources; check experience and reputation of the principals and permanent employees; obtain a clear understanding of source and capabilities of any personnel to be utilized on a subcontract basis; and make certain the consulting organization can satisfy specific conditions of the consulting assignment in question.

Capability of the consulting organization to train and motivate local personnel should be a key criterion of effectiveness. A primary role of development specialists should be to build institutions and train and motivate local personnel. This is the orientation that almost any assistance effort by an outside development agency should assume. Unless a suitable institutional framework is developed, the contribution made by an outside consultant may end as soon as he leaves the country. It is as important for development consultants to be teachers as doers.

The International Marketing Institute Korea team included as one of its primary objectives training and establishing a number of marketing research centres within their counterpart organizations. During their 18 month tour, the IMI team was successful in training a cadre of marketing research specialists who are carrying on the work initiated by the team. This training of personnel and building of marketing research institutional frameworks was probably the greatest contribution made to the future of Korean marketing by the team.

The problems encountered in finding and keeping first-rate technical experts has led to more and more reliance on subcontracting development projects to commercial consulting firms, private organizations, universities and others. This can represent an effective solution, particularly when the problem to be solved involves engineering or similar skills as in designing a bridge or making an inventory of natural resources. However, it is difficult to find organizations which possess the capabilities to perform subcontracting assignments in areas such as educational system design, economic planning or marketing.

There is a need for more consortia of experts representing various complementary disciplines. Peter Drucker points out in his new book "The Age of Discontinuity" that we are shifting from a Cartesian view of the universe in which the accent has been on parts and elements to a configuration view with the emphasis on wholes and patterns. Drucker's views fit with the current preoccupation by business and academic circles on application of the systems approach to problem solving.

Effective application of knowledge to development problems requires a systems approach - it is not enough to supply individual experts who can fit only one piece into the puzzle. The total environment affecting the problem must be considered if proposed solutions are to be effective.

Design of an irrigation system cannot be left solely in the hands of an irrigation engineer. Specialists in agricultural production and soil scientists must determine the crops best suited to the terrain, climate and soil types. A marketing specialist is needed to ascertain the prospective markets for the proposed crops and determine how best to market the products.

A sociologist and perhaps an anthropologist should be added to the team to investigate means of motivating local farmers to effectively utilize the additional production capabilities represented by the new irrigation facilities.

International Marketing Institute, affiliated with the Harvard Business School, provides an example of a special purpose consulting group, in this case organized for the purpose of introducing the marketing concept to the developing countries. The IMI Korea Marketing Development Team during their 18 month stay in Korea tackled marketing and marketing research needs across a broad front, ranging from marketing of industrial and agricultural products to export marketing.

The IMI team included a marketing research specialist, an agribusiness marketing expert, an industrial marketing expert, and a marketing education specialist. The team represented a unique first time effort to thoroughly explore the marketing problems of a developing country and to suggest approaches to solution of these problems as well as identifying and training potential local marketing specialists. The team approach proved to be highly effective in this type of assignment.

The IMI project illustrates one approach to reconciling the long standing argument between proponents of long term consulting assignments and those who believe in shorter term assignments for more highly specialized consultants. The four man IMI team stayed in Korea for 18 months. Their efforts were to be supplemented by the use of four or five more specialized consultants for periods of three months each. Only two of the short-term specialists were subsequently utilized, due to difficulties encountered in finding the right specialists and to certain problems in contract implementation. However, the two short term specialists who did work with the team were able to make significant contributions toward project objectives.

Proponents of longer term consulting assignment ranging in length from 18 month or two year contracts to some contracts of six years with FAO point to the benefits to be gained by keeping personnel in the same assignment for an extended period. These benefits include opportunity for the consultant to gain a broader understanding of the situation, preserve programme continuity and see projects through several stages of development instead of participating in only a limited portion of the total effort.

On the other hand, it is often difficult to persuade the most competent technical experts to interrupt their own work for several years in mid-career to accept an overseas assignment.

One solution to this dilemma might be creation of a two-tier development edifice. The first tier would be a cadre of professional development specialists representing a number of disciplines. This professional development corps would represent the foundation for development consulting programmes. It might logically be incorporated into a subagency of the United Nations, perhaps utilizing some of the present facilities of UNIDO, FAO and others. The corps should be a permanent establishment with provisions for recruitment of the best qualified specialists from throughout the world, plus established career ladders, in-service training and self-improvement programmes and the other paraphernalia of a permanent bureaucracy.

Ideally this corps would supplant the efforts of national development agencies such as USAID. The Agency for International Development under its various designations over the years has performed valuable services for development. However, AID has been harassed by somewhat erratic short-term policies and fluctuating budgets. This has impaired the agency's ability to attract, train and effectively utilize competent personnel and has made effective long range planning difficult.

An approach has already been made to establishing a corps of professional development workers through agencies such as FAO, UNIDO, USAID and others. But these efforts need to be expanded, coordinated and further professionalized for greater effectiveness. There tends to be considerable overlap and in some cases even competition between these various agencies.

Careerists who staff the development corps must be "generalized specialists" that is their knowledge should be based in a specialized area, but they should be capable of extending their abilities beyond their own specialties into related or even unrelated fields. They should be people who can effectively organize, guide and evaluate truly interdisciplinary development programmes. These professionals might be stationed at development centres located in various parts of the "third world".

Ideally, specialists in a particular field would be responsible for programmes on a multi-country basis. This should lead to opportunities for some coordination among countries in development programmes where such coordination is presently lacking.

An example of one such area is that of commercial fisheries, where many countries are attempting to increase their share of the ocean catch, to provide more protein for their people and cash in on world demand for fish imports. Intelligent coordination and co-operation is a must if these fisheries development programmes are not to clash head-on. Some of this co-operation should be fostered by a multi-country fisheries development consulting unit.

The second tier of the development consulting edifice would consist of a pool of technical experts willing to devote shorter lengths of time to consulting assignments. These assignments might range from a few weeks to several months. The short-term specialists would work closely with the permanent professional personnel of the development corps. They would be assigned to work in limited problem areas, with their efforts programmed and guided by the permanent personnel.

In this fashion it should be possible to maintain a staff of generalists to supply broad problem solving capabilities, and at the same time gain access to specialized technical inputs from a large number of highly competent experts in various fields, without the necessity of staffing with a large number of specialists on a permanent basis.

Provisions should be made for short-term specialists to return at periodic intervals for the purpose of monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the recommendations they make during their initial tour.

Sources of short-term specialists would include currently utilized sources such as universities, agencies of national governments, private consulting firms, trade associations, technical institutes and an additional source that is often overlooked today, that is the firm interested in doing business in other countries.

One component lacking in some development programmes is the practical understanding of the commercial application of project end results. This understanding could be supplied by representatives of business firms who are willing to make their personnel available for occasional consulting assignments. In some cases, companies interested in supplying equipment, licensing technical processes or entering into joint ventures can be a valuable source of useful technical advice in a development project.

If the short-term consultant aspect of the two-tier development corps approach is to function effectively, screening procedures and an information exchange system must be incorporated.

The initial screening device used by most agencies at present is the personal history form. As Hans Fahlstrom points out, this is not entirely satisfactory, since it indicates only the theoretical and practical experience of the applicant, but does not specify his performance in previous jobs or point up other attributes that might lead to success or failure in a development assignment.

Recruiting short-term specialists is often a hit or miss operation, depending in large part on word of mouth, contacts stemming from professional meetings, journal articles, etc. There is urgent need for a systematized procedure for obtaining, retaining and disseminating information about prospective short-term technical development specialists. Lack of such a system compounds recruiting problems.

Some attempt has been made by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to list departmental employees including state extension workers who would consider short-term overseas development consulting assignments. However, an ideal system would reach far beyond government into the ranks of universities and private industry.

In the light of today's electronic data processing capabilities, creation of a data bank on prospective short-term development consultants should not pose any major technical problems. Since previous performance is the only really valid criteria found to date for prejudging a person's effectiveness in an assignment, the most important component of the data bank would be an evaluation of the short-term specialist's performance in earlier development consulting assignments or other overseas assignments. Combined with careful definition

of the problem to be solved, a data bank covering specialist capabilities, training and experience should be a major asset to present development agencies, as well as to the professional development corps advocated earlier.

Such a data bank could remove much of the guesswork from recruitment of development consultants.

IV. CONSULTANT SELECTION AND RECRUITMENT

One of the first questions that arises when use of a consultant is considered is the advisability of recruiting a local expert as opposed to someone from outside the country. The chief advantage of a local consultant is his familiarity with the local situation, as well as his deeper understanding of the cultural, social, technological and other aspects of his environment.

However, there are two reasons for questioning the advisability of sole dependence on local consultants in most developing countries. The first is a practical constraint. In many developing countries there exists as yet only a small pool of qualified resource people in most technical areas. Generally these qualified specialists are already committed, indeed in most cases over committed in already existing programmes. It may be poor economic wisdom to rob an ongoing programme to start a new project, or even worse, further fragment a local specialist's time in an attempt to involve him in additional assignments.

Another reason for bringing in an outside consultant is the cross-fertilization of ideas and techniques that can result. Some of the largest and most successful corporations in the United States also make the most extensive use of consultants in various aspects of their business. These corporations have found that an outsider can often arrive at a clearer understanding of a problem because he doesn't possess the preconceptions that often result from long and intimate association with the environment within which the problem exists.

There is another advantage to outside consultants. If they are effectively utilized as suggested above, they will be able to transmit some of their skills and knowledge to local counterparts who in turn can form the basis for an eventual local corps of experts. One objective in use of outside consultants should be eventual possession by the developing country of a group of local specialists who have gained an understanding of various approaches to solution of development problems.

Once it is determined that an outside consultant should be retained, one of the first problems that arises is the lack of adequate criteria for selecting effective consultants. Basically, users of consultants services in developing countries have arrived at only one criterion which is almost uniformly valid - this is the record of performance in previous development consulting assignments.

One of the few depth research efforts to establish reasons for success or failure of individuals in overseas assignments does suggest five attributes that contribute to successful performance in any overseas assignment.

Results of a survey of American government employees, missionaries, and businessmen working overseas show that technical skill, belief in mission, cultural empathy, assense for politics and organizational ability provide

consistent correlations with effectiveness in an overseas situation. The survey, conducted by Harlan Cleveland, Garard J. Mangone and John Clarke Adams, is reported in the book "The Overseas Americans".

While the study was confined to Americans working in other countries, it does provide some documented guidelines for predicting effectiveness. All but the first indicator are very subjective, however, and are difficult to assess without interviewing a candidate in considerable depth or possessing more knowledge about his background and previous performance than is contained in the usual personal history form.

It is generally agreed that technical competence should be the foremost criteria for selection of a consultant. However, this does not mean that a given specialist must be the most highly qualified person available from the standpoint of his technical training and theoretical background.

Equally important to the effectiveness of a technical consultant is his ability to relate his knowledge and experience to the problems of a specific development assignment. The assignment may differ greatly from his previous work situations in its inherent constraints and surrounding environment as well as in the types of solutions that are feasible. Some of the most highly qualified experts have been practical failures in development consulting assignments because of their inability to adapt their expertise to the framework of a different level of development.

Often, the theoretically ideal solution would be impossible to apply under existing conditions. The author in designing an agricultural marketing information system for the Republic of Korea, applied three criteria in arriving at a suggested design. First, the proposed system should be adapted to the environment in which it must function, that is it should take into account the physical, economic, cultural and political restraints within the environment.

Second, the system should be based as much as possible on already existing structures designed to serve a similar purpose. And third, it should be designed with built-in mechanisms that will induce change to reflect changes in the surrounding environment.

Successful innovations must be rooted in the already existing culture. It is almost a truism to say that no outside consultant is going to make any fundamental cultural changes.

The consultant can help set in motion forces that will eventually lead to cultural change, or he may capitalize on shifts in culture that are already in progress. But he is not going to initiate major changes by himself. The consultant who cannot grasp this elemental fact, and who refuses to adapt his problem solutions to the existing situation is doomed to failure. This of course does not mean that a consultant cannot change existing patterns, but these patterns must be amenable to change.

Another important criteria in selection of consultants is the ability of the consultant to develop genuine empathy with the people of the host country, particularly those people with whom he must work. The consultant must be able to motivate his associates to accept and implement the programmes which he suggests if he is to consider his assignment a success.

Perhaps the most important key to the effectiveness of the development consultant, given his professional competency and ability to adapt that competency to the needs of the consulting assignment, is his personal attitude toward the people of the host country. He must feel genuine respect toward them. He should not only be friendly, but also open and receptive toward their overtures of friendship, as well as their ideas. These attitudes are extremely important and any attempt to counterfeit them is soon spotted by host country personnel.

Professional competency is of primary importance in a development assignment. But without the ability to relate his knowledge to the problem at hand, and gain acceptance for himself and his ideas in the host country, the most highly qualified specialist is useless in a development assignment.

Unfortunately, it is generally easier to gauge professional competence than to evaluate the ability to adapt professional knowledge to development situations and to generate genuine empathy with people in other countries. Prior accomplishment in overseas service, as well as experience in agricultural extension work at land grant colleges in the United States or other background which requires acting as an agent of change may be an indication of suitability for overseas technical consulting work. An extended job interview if skillfully conducted should provide some insight into a person's attitude toward people of other races and cultures.

V. SUMMARY

The two essential steps in solving a development problem through the use of technical consultants are, first, identifying the problem and second, selecting the right consultant for the job.

The first step must be performed adequately or the difficulty of finding and effectively using the right consultant will be compounded.

Selection of a consultant too often consists of hit or miss recruiting methods that miss in too high a proportion of cases. Some better means must be found for identifying and recruiting technical consultants for use in developing countries.

One such method might be through establishment of a data bank containing vital information on consultants who have been prescreened by a responsible agency, possibly a subunit of the United Nations. In order to function effect-

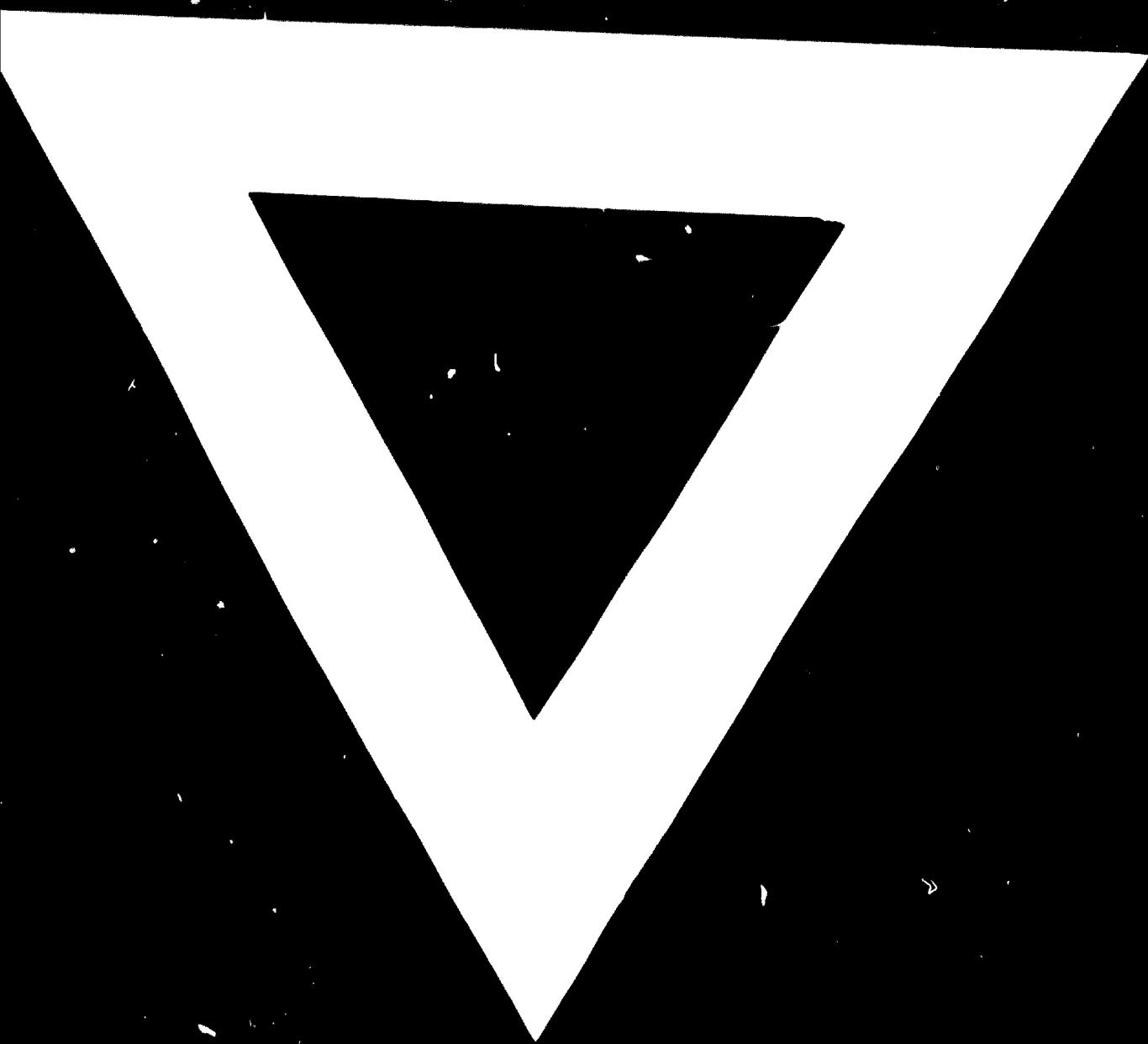
ively, this data bank would also have to contain evaluations of a consultant's performance in previous development consulting assignments.

Such a data bank would greatly facilitate identification of consultants. It could also serve as the core of a future development edifice which would utilize career professionals assisted by technical specialists recruited for short-term assignments; and which would draw together some of the present proliferation of development assistance programmes.

One of the initial steps in establishing better methods of selection and utilization of consultants would be improvement of communications and coordination between those agencies presently supplying consultants to the developing nations. This workshop could well represent another step in gaining this improved coordination.

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