

# Maliwada Consult Experience

Collegium  
Chicago Nexus

MALIWADA OPERATING VISION

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This is the operating vision chart from Maliwada. Last night somebody asked me to say a few words about getting an operating vision from the community. It's fun. That is the first thing I would say about getting an operating vision from the community. The entire Maliwada Document is a fine book. The cover is the color of the countryside - a beautiful rich brown color. This fine document was produced in five and one half days. It was literally just eleven days from the time the consult was over that this document was delivered to top political figures in the state of Maharashtra. An incredible accomplishment! We even traveled around the country for a couple days between the writing and the printing. The practical nature of an operating vision shows up in the column headings: political forums, public utilities, general construction of the village, farm production, the water supply, community health, small industry, commercial services, basic education, employable skills and communal forms. There are the eleven column headings on the chart. The things under the heading are nitty-gritty things that you would find anywhere if you were beginning in a brand new community in the midst of a dry land.

I really had no image ahead of time of how to get that kind of information from a village. One of my ex-professors wrote in his Christmas greeting, "I am sure that you will find much to learn from the community, but I doubt seriously that you will have the ears to hear." That certainly was my fear in going there. The way to get an operating vision from a community is to invest twelve years of your life and your being with the people. It was in 1964 when we first talked to Nehru. I don't remember when we first assigned somebody permanently to India but the Powells have been there five years and that is a long time! When you start listing the number of people who have been there over the last several years - colleagues from Australia, Canada, the United States and India you get a sense after the immense amount of being that we have invested in India. Charles Lingo, they say, knew everybody along Sankli Street. He would walk up and down the street and greet everybody by name. We have held at least twelve ITIs in India. There is no way that Maliwada could have happened without the expenditure that went into those ITIs. Our being was invested in that soil, in those people. The dreams that have been held for a long period of time were present. They called us forth to the kind of sensitivity that we needed to be in that situation.

Then there was massive expenditure in Maliwada before the consult began. I do not know how to even begin to describe it. Maliwada is a dusty patch in the road with mud huts lining a crooked main street. The street is rutted from the Monsoon rains which happen July through September. At this time of the year there are just about four inches of dust on the road but it is not as dry as in May. The mud huts are interspersed with tumbled-down walls from buildings that may be four, six, or eight hundred years old. When the pre-consult team arrived a month early there was no electricity in the village. There was not even a pump in any of the wells. There was not a building in the entire community that had been built within the last ten or fifteen years. Some brick buildings built by the government twenty years ago have tumbled

down. It is just a dusty normal off-the-road village in India. At mid-day it is rather quiet, with just a few cows, a few wild pigs, a few goats, a few kids wandering out in front of the houses.

Then twenty people (the pre-consult team) arrived and walked around. At the end of the main dusty street there was a pile of rubble. "It used to be a castle," the villagers said. There are huge blocks of stone from outside the village and walls about eight or ten feet high, the back of which have completely caved in to the center. It was a typical ruin, 600 years old with weeds and small trees growing here and there. That was the castle in which the consult was held! The stone walls are five feet thick and thus the pile of rock that was in the middle of the building was incredible. All this stone had to be cleared out. The sunken area in the middle was about four feet deeper than the rest of the area making a platform all around the outside. They raised the walls and built rooms out of the brick from the center. The building is square sixty feet. They cleared the rubble away from the well and put in windows and doors.

On the day that the consult started, there was a fine bricked-in courtyard in the middle of the building with a canvas roof over the top. There was enough space inside to seat 150 people comfortably, not the way we often seat people, but spaced out with delineated spaces for five teams. There were nice narrow tables made out of wood, fine folding chairs for everybody and four blackboards that covered the entire front. It was an incredible scene.

We had a rule about not sitting together. The first morning we came in and sat every other seat. For many of us it was the first time we had seen the castle. There were about fifty-six consultants from outside of Maliwada. Actually, that first morning we decided to rearrange the tables at the last minute so we all had to re-seat ourselves in every other seat twice. There we sat looking at each other across the awkward empty spaces and wondering what was going to happen. It was 7:15 a.m. and everybody was suppose to come at 7:00 a.m. for breakfast. But we were reminded by some of our older hands that people in India tend to operate on a slower time schedule, so we were patient. Pretty soon a few villagers began to wander in and sit in the empty chairs between us. I can't imagine what they thought when they were ushered in and first saw all the empty spaces. Within thirty minutes the room was filled. There was not a seat left. We had to hustle to find places for everyone to sit down. I began to try to communicate with the people who sat near me in my single language and they in their two or three languages. Marathi is their native language but most of them spoke Hindi and possibly another dialect as well. Some of them of course also spoke English and translated everything into English for us. The room soon filled with excitement as the conversations started and then we started singing. Within thirty or forty-five minutes we had one corporate body ready to move into the consult. That is the beginning of building an operating vision!

An incredible investment was made by the community. A canopy was installed over the door and a huge red, green, yellow, and blue striped circus tent canvas was over the courtyard. As you came down the road toward Maliwada it looked like a fantastic carnival. About 50,000 rupees were spent on

re-doing that building and putting on that consult. That is a huge amount of money that was raised by the movement in India. (\$6000 - \$7000).

Later in the morning we broke into five teams: a business team, a health team, an education team, and a social services team. I was assigned to the business team. As we went out, we split in half because we thought twenty-eight people would be too large a group. Besides we could cover more territory if we split into units of fourteen. More than half of the group were villagers whose skills represented a very wide range. You wondered how these people could take a whole week from work to be in the consult. I wanted to ask them because a laborer earns about three rupees a day. (33¢). A woman gets two rupees a day. A skilled person like a mason earns eight rupees a day. (That is just under a \$1). Once in awhile they would disappear for a few hours to get things handled.

There were jeeps or buses for each team. One company had given us two buses to use all week. The government had given us a jeep with a driver. We had a couple of other jeeps and a taxicab. There was transportation to get wherever we needed to go. Every day we went out and talked to the people in the village. The first morning we were to discern the operating images of the villagers. We wondered what sort of questions to ask to get people to talk about their vision. One of the men in our group was a goldsmith. We asked if we could see his shop. As many of us as could fit into the front room of his house (about six) got in. There was a charcoal fire in a corner of the room with stones on each side of it and a couple of bars of iron across the top. There was a little locked case where he kept a few tools. That was his shop! We didn't know what questions to ask so we began, "Who do you make gold things for?" He said, "Anybody who wants them." "Do you make them up ahead of time?" "No, I buy the gold from my brother in Aurangabad when somebody asks me to make something." "Do you ever make any extra pieces?" "Well, yes, occasionally. When I do, my brother sells them in Aurangabad." We just began to talk to him about his business in this fashion. As we were talking in his front room, a huge crowd gathered outside the door. All the kids, a couple of goats, the women from across the street, and a couple of the men who were not in the consult but who were working in the street gathered and listened while he told us about the way he ran his business.

After a while someone suggested we go see the grain merchant who has a government grain store just down the street. Our colleagues did not even know there was a government grain store down the street. The merchant welcomed us in, and we went into his front room. He opened a side door which lead into an even smaller room. Only four of us could get into it. There was about ten 100 pound bags of grain (actually 50 kilos each). We asked him how he got the grain. He told us that he had to go into Aurangabad to get it. "How much do you get?" "Whatever the government has rationed for us." "How much do you pay for it?" "All different prices depending on the price the government sets." "How do you sell it?" He sold it for three paise more than he paid for it. (100 paise = 1 rupee = 11¢). That is not a very large margin on each kilo of grain! So you ask, "Is that enough to make a living?" and everybody burst out laughing. They knew it wasn't and that in fact he even loses more grain than that. "Well, why do you do it?" And a big smile like the very proud business smile of a tycoon who really has a gimmick spread across his

face. "I get to keep the bag and I can sell the bag for 3 rupees." The way the people buy grain in Maliwada is to bring a little pan which holds about a kilo. He makes about fifty sales out of a bag. Then he sells the bag for 3 rupees. That was the structure of his business. You begin to see that the whole structure of the government grain distribution was built on the basis of people keeping the bag. You began to get a sense of the complexity of the economic situation in India.

The questions got easier after this. We asked the villagers what new businesses were needed in Maliwada. They all agreed that somebody could start a kerosene shop. Now Maliwada has only about seventy or eighty houses in it and a population of about 1300 people. You said to yourself, "Now do you really need a separate shop to sell kerosene? Why don't you buy a five gallon can of kerosene and a funnel and sell it yourself?" So you asked "Why do you need a separate shop to sell kerosene?" "It is a very difficult business." "What do you mean, 'difficult'?" "Well, first you have to register with the government, then you have to get on the allocation list. It takes about a year to get on the ration list before they will begin to allocate kerosene to you. Then you don't know whether you will get the kerosene or not so you have to go in and wait in lines." Then you got a sense of the complexity of doing business in India. There is nobody in the two villages who has a kerosene shop. Kerosene is something that you have to scramble for, everybody on his own, in Aurangabad, which is eight miles away. When we pushed further on what new businesses were needed in Maliwada, they said that there was a great opportunity for a bakery.

As we wandered down a little dusty side street we walked through the Harijan community. That is the untouchable community. They are all living very much along those caste lines. Although it is not talked about, we all knew when we went into that section of the community. The untouchables don't use the same wells. The Harijan wells all go dry about April and May. We asked, "What happens then?" "It gets a little ugly around the village." We don't know what that means, but those structures, those lines are still there in the community.

On the way back, followed by our large entourage of children, the conversations got very active. Occasionally we got some of our Indian guardians to translate in order to pick up more images of what possibilities there were. We ran into a little three-year old girl standing there spinning her hand. She had a rope in her hand and down about six feet away was her mother who had this rope going through her hand. She was feeding fibers in from an old pile of hemp, and out the other side of her hand came this beautiful rope, uniform like a machine made it. She continued spinning her hand and having a three-year old spinning a rope around at the other end. We began to ask questions. Then the man went inside of the house and came back dragging armfuls of rope. They sat down on the ground and attached it to a board, a piece of tree with three holes in it that had been pegged to the ground. The holes were very smooth and worn. He took three sticks and poked them in. Then he tied the three handles together. He started going round and round with his hand with the three ropes on the end. Those

ropes had already been braided together so they were each three strands. The other fellow went down to the end and tied the three together and just stood there holding them. Then they started to slide a yoke down, and out the end came the finest quality braided rope I have ever seen in my whole life. In a period of twenty minutes a fine length of rope was made right in front of our eyes. We thought we had found the first industry in Maliwada! So we asked, "Why do you spend your whole time as a family making rope?" "Because people need rope." "How do you decide how much to make?" "Well, we make just enough for what people need." "Do you even make any more?" They laughed. "Everybody knows how to make rope." You began to try to fit this together. How in the world do they decide how much rope to make? "Who needs rope?" you ask. "Everyone." Yet they don't make a lot of it. He didn't have a whole house full of rope. He had two or three pieces there. "Where do you get your raw material?" Laughter again. "Everybody knows where you get that, it is all around you." "Who goes and picks it up?" "Sometimes we have time to pick it, other times we buy it from the kids or other people who pick it up." "Are there different qualities of it?" He goes in and shows us different qualities of it. "Can you make things out of it?" Then he frowned a bit and said "Yes, some people do, but we don't with this stuff." The complexity of this little rope business in the family overwhelmed us at this point. How in the world do they decide how much to buy, how much to make and how was he able to be in the consult all week anyway if he depended upon rope-making to support his family?

After lunch, we went out again asking more questions. Our team went to the adjacent village about a mile away. Both villages are under the same panchayat. All the business community is there. We went up the main street and talked to business men about their business. They seemed very satisfied with it. They did not see any reason for any change. We got a sense of the difference between the two communities that are politically one yet obviously two separate communities, when you encounter them. We could not figure out why all the stores were over in Abdimundi. Except for one little cigarette shop and one government grain store, Maliwada had none. We asked why. People have to walk a mile or two every day from one village to the other to buy all their food and walk back again. Why doesn't one of the merchants in Abdimundi move to Maliwada? You go down the street and there are six grain merchants all selling the same thing right next to each other. What keeps them there? We could not find out. When we asked why they all said, "Well, everybody comes to Abdimundi to shop." People come from other villages as well as Maliwada. This is a regional shopping center. It was fascinating. We were never able to get hold of the complexity of the way life is organized there. You had this list of questions in the back of your mind that you didn't even know who to ask, but you kept listening for any data that might enable you to fit it all together.

In the evening the consultants left and rode thirteen kilometers up the hill to Khoultabad to the government guest house. Originally we were supposed to have met in Aurangabad, but at the last minute plans were changed and they offered a guest house as an alternative. It was an incredible alternative. It was on top of one of the buttes overlooking the whole valley, just a half mile above the Ellora Caves. A path ran right down to the cave.

You could take a break, go down and look at these seventh to 13th century caves. We went up that evening and cleaned up a bit. Then at 6:30 p.m. two busloads of villagers came up to join us for dinner. None of them had ever been in that guest house before. Nobody was allowed there except the upper echalon. Another incredible happening in their day! We ate in our team spaces which were scattered throughout the building. It was another great meal and a great conversation. Then we worked on the operating vision, getting out the data you see on the chart. After twelve years of investment in India, after that incredible investment in the castle.

after the great care structuring the room, after the fine meal, after the obvious excitement and awe of the consultants and the villagers who discovered that people were interested in their life, after wandering through the village and visiting with the people, THEN, you had a conversation about the operating vision. The brainstorm was easy. There was not anyone who did not participate. The problem was getting it all written down fast enough. By the time they all got back in the bus at 9:00, a flood of data was left for the consultants to gestalt and put on a list and translate into English and Hindi for the whole group to work with in the morning.

Everyday the timeline was the same. The next day was contradictions. Can you imagine what it meant to that village to send ten to fifteen groups across the countryside daily? The agriculture group drove all through the farm area in their bus. They talked to farmers and looked at crops. Everyone was impacted directly with the presence of the teams. You have all experienced the anxiety of leading a workshop or being in a workshop and wondering if the right questions are being asked. After the first forty-five minutes of the consult's opening meal that anxiety was never experienced again. You just had to stand up and say "Let's write down some of the things you saw today." You had to be ready with a magic marker to write because people were going to tell what was going on and what they were excited about no matter what you asked.

At the same time there was a fine tuning of the method. There was concern about how to shortcut the methods and how to move quickly. Relative to manual procedures, some outrageous methods were used for gestalting. The person receiving the data was putting it up in any old place on a huge board. I was thinking to myself, "Now just a minute, why are you putting it up in that column?" But there was just not time for that. You got the data up and hoped that the workshop leader had his mind on what was going on so that something could be discerned from the data. That was all you had to do so the next step could be taken. "Move it, move it, move it," is what consultants are about, not "refine it, refine it, refine it." The time for refinement is when you write the document. There is nothing in the Maliwada document that the consultants made up or that is from the consultants' life experience. It comes from the village life experience. I can honestly say I would not have believed that ahead of time. My image, after beginning to see similiar paragraphs in the other documents was that they are all the same with minor variations on the surface. Not so! Every word comes out of the villagers' lives as we encountered them and as they encountered us. It was an amazing sort of data-gathering "happening."

Pulling together the document was the hardest work I have ever done in my life. Five and a half days of writing. I was assigned to work on contradictions. There were only nine contradictions. Nine paragraphs and twelve people. Do you have any idea how many times twelve people can rewrite nine paragraphs in five days? That was the place of refining. We found it very difficult to "move it." Document writing was just hard, grinding work.

The document is the fruition of the Maliwada consult. It is crucial. In one sense it is the end of the demonstration project. For if you would name the single overwhelming contradiction in India in the village it would be a lack of unity or co-operation or co-operative action. There is no way you could ever write a document in five days without the very writing being a demonstration of co-operation. The other depth contradiction in India is fragmented planning. An example would be the timeline for building a house. One year the foundation is built. The next year is a bad year. A wall is built the following year. Then a bad year. Another wall the next year, etc. Eight years to build a house! To publish a document in nine days is an impossible task. Then, to be able to publish and deliver this document to the government offices before we left the country was an incredible sign. An incredible happening! We just had to lay the document on the table. That is what the consultants' job is: to demonstrate that the demonstration is already happening; to bring off the first sign. In India the document was that first sign.