

## **Unit 05: The World Is IBM's Classroom**

When 10 IBM management trainees piled into a minibus in the Philippines for a weekend tour last October, the last thing they expected was to wind up local heroes. Yet that's what happened in the tiny village of Carmen. After passing a water well project, they learned the effort had stalled because of engineering mistakes and a lack of money. The IBMers decided to do something about it. They organized a meeting of the key people involved in the project and volunteered to pay \$250 out of their own pockets for additional building materials. Two weeks later the well was completed. Locals would no longer have to walk four miles for drinkable water. And the trainees learned a lesson in collaborative problem-solving. "You motivate people to take the extra step, you create a shared vision, you divide the labor, and the impact can be big," says Erwin van Overbeek, 40, who runs environmental sustainability projects for IBM clients.

While saving a village well wasn't part of the group agenda for that trip, it's the kind of experience the architects of IBM's Corporate Service Corps had in mind when they launched the initiative last year. Modeled on the U.S. Peace Corps, the program aims to turn IBM employees into global citizens. Last year, IBM selected 300 top management prospects out of 5,400 applicants. It then trained and dispatched them to emerging markets for a month in groups of 8 to 10 to help solve economic and social problems. The goal, says IBM's human resources chief, J. Randall MacDonald, is to help future leaders "understand how the world works, show them how to net-work, and show them how to work collaboratively with people who are far away."

Like most corporations, IBM trains managers in class-rooms, so this represents a dramatic departure. And while other companies encourage employees to volunteer for social service, IBM is the first to use such programs for management training, says Rosabeth Moss Kanter, a professor at Harvard Business School.

The program is growing rapidly. This year some 500 people will participate, and the list of countries will expand from five to nine, including Brazil, India, Malaysia, and South Africa. The teams spend three months before going overseas reading about their host countries, studying the problems they're assigned to work on, and getting to know their teammates via teleconferences and social networking Web sites. On location, they work with local governments, universities, and business groups to do anything from upgrading technology for a government agency to improving public water quality.

Participating in the program is not without its risks. Charlie Ung, a new-media producer from IBM Canada, got malaria while working in Ghana and spent a week in the hospital. Other

participants report encounters with wild dogs in Romania. IBM planners deliberately choose out-of-the-way places and bunk the teams in guest houses that lack such amenities as Western food and CNN. “We want them to have a transformative experience, so they’re shaken up and walk away feeling they’re better equipped to confront the challenges of the 21st century,” says Kevin Thompson, the IBMer who conceived of the CSC program and now manages it.

IBM concedes that one month overseas is a short stint, but it believes participants can pick up valuable lessons. Debbie Maconnel, a 45-year-old IT project manager in Lexington, Kentucky, says the trip prompted her to change her management style. She coordinates the activities of 13 people in the United States and 12 in India, Mexico, and China. She used to give assignments to the overseas employees and then leave them on their own. Now she spends more time trying to build a global team.

SOURCE: Excerpted from Steve Hamm, “The World Is IBM’s Classroom,”

BusinessWeek, March 12, 2009, <http://www.businessweek.com> .

### **Questions**

1. Based on the information given but in your own words, what are the training objectives for IBM’s Corporate Service Corps? Based on the information given, how well would you say the program is meeting those objectives? What additional measures would help you evaluate the program’s success?
2. Which of the training methods are incorporated into the Corporate Service Corps? How well suited are these methods to achieving IBM’s objectives?
3. Suggest some ways that IBM can help participants apply on the job what they have learned from their one-month service project.
4. Based on the information given and the content in the chapter of training, draft a training plan for IBM with specific training objectives mentioned in this case. The training plan must include at least some key parts including targeted audience, training content, training method, evaluation methods and make sure that they are fit and consistent with each other.