















Business Edge makes business management training available to thousands of entrepreneurs worldwide

Business Edge, the Mekong Private Sector Development Facility's business management training initiative has made management training available and affordable for tens of thousands of entrepreneurs in the Mekong Region. Since 2003, nearly 200,000 *Business Edge* self-study workbooks have been sold, and over 7,000 learners have taken part in *Business Edge* workshops in Vietnam, Cambodia and Lao PDR. *Business Edge* resources have also been translated and localized for thousands of additional learners in IFC Project Development Facilities in China, North Africa and the Middle East.

Business management training has been an important part of MPDF's work since shortly after the Facility was set up in 1997. In an early needs assessment by MPDF, business owners rated development of managerial capacity as their second most important need after access to financing. These results were not surprising given that the three countries were making the transition from centrally-planned to market economies, and business management training was only available to small numbers of full-time university students.

Over the years MPDF's approach to management training has evolved to suit the needs of the market in three quite different countries, and to scale up to reach as many as possible. Although initial two-week training programs were popular, MPDF switched to self-study workbooks because these would reach many more entrepreneurs by allowing them to learn at their own pace and for a low cost.

The workbooks MPDF has developed cover the key aspects of management – human resources, finance, marketing, production/operations, quality assurance and personal productivity. When these sold well in Vietnam, they were translated and localized for Cambodia and Lao PDR. In 2003, with the start of MPDF's second phase, the *Business Edge* brand was born with an attractive logo, newspaper ad campaigns, promotional seminars, and point-of-sale materials to make the workbooks stand out in bookstores.

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- Canada 
- Finland 
- IFC 
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- Japan 
- Netherlands 
- New Zealand 
- Norway 
- Sweden 
- Switzerland 
- United Kingdom 

In 2004, *Business Edge* evolved again by developing 1- and 2-day workshops. These met demand from managers in Vietnam who, in addition to workbooks, wanted short workshops which would allow them to ask questions and exchange experiences. The workshops also proved more appealing in Cambodia and Lao PDR where people were less accustomed to learning from manuals.

To ensure that *Business Edge* workshops are delivered as effectively as possible, *Business Edge* requires trainers to take a rigorous training program. This covers principles of adult learning, techniques that maximize application back on the job, and training specific to course topics. Following the TOT program, *Business Edge* master trainers observe trainers in action and only certify those that meet required standards.

The latest innovation of *Business Edge* is the International Management Qualification (IMQ). This appeals to managers who want the opportunity to earn recognized qualifications for their *Business Edge* learning. The IMQ is currently offered jointly with the Institute of Leadership and Management, a widely-recognized certification body from the United Kingdom. The program totals approximate 15 days spread out over about 17 weeks, and includes an evaluated assignment designed to solve a real problem faced by the learner's company.

In a February 2005 evaluation, *Business Edge* workshops rated highly with participants. Of the 709 learners surveyed, 67% said they had successfully applied their new knowledge and skills back on the job, and 45% said the workshops led to improvements in their firms. When asked about quality, 80% of respondents said they would refer others to BE programs, and 81% considered the workshops good value for the money. Of those respondents who had authority to change management practices, nearly 25% reported that *Business Edge* training had helped them to increase productivity, quality, and operational efficiency. Other benefits reported were increased management capabilities and confidence, cost reductions, improvements in the working environment, and employee satisfaction. Although the latter benefits are difficult to quantify, they were widely acknowledged by respondents.

Mekong Private Sector Development Facility

IFC-MPDF is a multi-donor funded initiative set up by the International Finance Corporation in 1997 in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Lao PDR, to reduce poverty through sustainable private sector development. The Facility works through six interrelated programs that seek to improve the business environment; develop the financial sector; improve managerial capacity; and increase sustainable business practices in three sectors that are central to economic growth and poverty reduction – tourism, agribusiness, and garments. IFC-MPDF's donors are the Asian Development Bank, Australia, Canada, Finland, IFC, Ireland, Japan, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

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