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Assessing the Effectiveness of Assistance in Capacity Development

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Assessing the Effectiveness of Assistance in Capacity Development

Abstract

{Excerpt} Feedback is a circular causal process whereby some portion of a system's output is returned to the input to control the dynamic behavior of the system. In organizations, feedback is the process of sharing observations, concerns, and suggestions to improve performance. In work that seeks to address the increasingly complex challenges of development, often with limited resources, feedback is essential to maximize development impact. Knowledge Solutions: Monthly Progress Notes asserts that the essential first steps of feedback are the processes of monitoring and evaluation. They identify challenges, recognize common constraints, and note that the submission of monthly progress notes on activities and accomplishments is too infrequently provided in the scope of projects and programs. There are opportunities too for more systematic capture and storage of feedback from executing agencies on the effectiveness of assistance in capacity development, prior to knowledge sharing and learning.

Capacity development is the process whereby people, organizations, and society as a whole unleash, strengthen, create, adapt, and maintain capacity over time. In 2005, the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness called for capacity development to be an explicit objective of the national development and poverty reduction strategies of partner countries. Bilateral and multilateral agencies, among others, have responded by elevating capacity development in their operations, and given attention to factors that drive success and factors that deter from it.

Keywords

Asian Development Bank, ADB, poverty, economic growth, sustainability, development

Comments

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Assessing the Effectiveness of Assistance in Capacity Development

by Olivier Serrat

Feedback is the dynamic process of presenting and disseminating information to improve performance.

Feedback mechanisms are increasingly being recognized as key elements of learning before, during, and after.

Assessments by executing agencies of the effectiveness of assistance in capacity development are prominent among these.

Rationale

Feedback is a circular causal process whereby some portion of a system's output is returned to the input to control the dynamic behavior of the system. In organizations, feedback is the process of sharing observations, concerns, and suggestions to improve performance. In work that seeks to address the increasingly complex challenges of development, often with limited resources, feedback is essential to maximize development impact. *Knowledge Solutions: Monthly Progress Notes* asserts that the essential first steps of feedback are the processes of monitoring and evaluation. They identify challenges, recognize common constraints, and note that the submission of monthly progress notes on activities and accomplishments is too infrequently provided in the scope of projects and programs. There are opportunities too for more systematic capture and storage of feedback from executing agencies on the effectiveness of assistance in capacity development, prior to knowledge sharing and learning.



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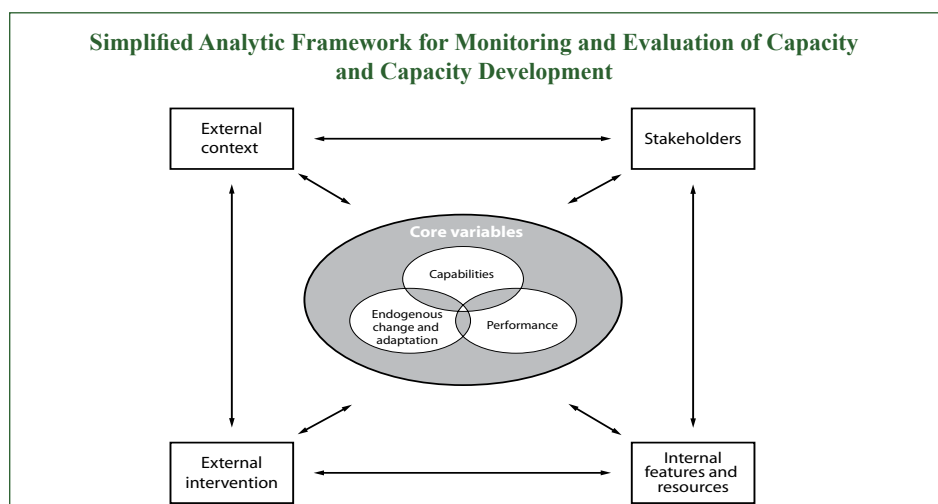
Capacity development is the process whereby people, organizations, and society as a whole unleash, strengthen, create, adapt, and maintain capacity over time. In 2005, the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness called for capacity development to be an explicit objective of the national development and poverty reduction strategies of partner countries. Bilateral and multilateral agencies, among others, have responded by elevating capacity development in their operations, and given attention to factors that drive success and factors that deter from it.

In 2008, a special evaluation study of the Independent Evaluation Department in ADB on the effectiveness of ADB's capacity development assistance classified these positive and negative factors into four categories: (i) design and quality-at-entry factors within ADB's control, (ii) design and quality-at-entry beyond ADB's control, (iii) implementation factors within ADB's control, and (iv) implementation factors beyond ADB's control.) Since the success drivers in categories (i) and (iii) are design and quality-at-entry factors as well as implementation factors within ADB's control, they can be achieved through improvement in ADB's design and implementation practices for capacity development interventions. Since the success drivers in categories (ii) and (iv) are design and quality-at-entry factors as well as implementation factors beyond ADB's control, which are contextual or external level factors by nature, they tend to act as incentives (opportunities) to capacity development performance. However, the negative side of these factors will tend to act as risks or constraints (threats) to capacity development performance. The study noted that although ADB has no direct control over these risks, some of them should be identified and mitigation mechanisms formulated during the design stage with good diagnostics. In more challenging environments, it may be necessary to be more realistic by developing a phased approach to capacity development interventions, or deferring them until some of these risks are addressed.

Presumably, the findings of the study are relevant elsewhere. Further, much remains to be done to put the preconditions for such good practices in place. This does not necessarily call for reinvention of the wheel. Development agencies can, by doing less and doing it well, do better for capacity development. Simple knowledge management tools that harvest experience for subsequent sharing and use are at hand. With regard to the technical assistance modality that donors often use, the tool described below shows how to invite feedback on preparation, design, and implementation; the performance of consultants; the contribution to change management, policy development, and capacity building; and constraints to implementation.

Template

The questionnaire¹ laid out below provides guidance on the preparation by executing agencies of assessments of the effectiveness of capacity development in the form of a recommended format and a description of the contents required. Naturally, flexibility in the use of the questionnaire should be exercised as it is intended to introduce approximate conformance in the more obvious components of monitoring and evaluation. The figure below suggests that there are seven of these: (i) capabilities, (ii) endogenous change and adaptation, (iii) performance, (iv) external context, (v) stakeholders, (vi) external interventions, and (vii)



Source: European Centre for Development Policy Management. 2006. *Monitoring and Evaluation of Capacity and Capacity Development. Discussion Paper No. 58B*. Maastricht. Available: www.ecdpm.org/

¹ Source: Adapted from ADB. 1996. *Special Study on Assessment of the Effectiveness of Bank Technical Assistance for Capacity Building in Indonesia*. Manila.

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internal features and key resources. The assessment, completed at the end of a technical assistance, should be submitted by the executing agency to the donor concerned, and inform both the preparation of technical assistance completion reports and the formulation of next steps.

Assessing the Effectiveness of Assistance in Capacity Development: A Questionnaire for Executing Agencies

Technical Assistance Data				
TA Title				
TA Number				
Executing agency				
TA Amount				
Date Approved				
TA Objective				
Technical Assistance Preparation				
1. How high was the TA's objective in the Government's overall priorities at the time, as indicated, for instance in the Five-Year Development Plan at the time or later?	High	Medium	Low	Do not know
2. Was the TA's objective a high priority of the executing agency at that time?	Yes	No		Do not know
3. Who was the principal player in identifying the need for the TA?	ADB	Government	Executing agency	Do not know
4. How satisfactory was the process of developing the terms of reference for the TA in terms of adequate consultation with the staff of the executing agency?	Very satisfactory	Satisfactory	Not satisfactory	Do not know
4a. If not satisfactory: please cite the major reasons.				
5. Was a satisfactory process for institutional strengthening (i.e., enabling the executing agency itself to build on the outputs of the TA) developed before the TA was accepted by the executing agency (e.g., starting with a diagnostic analysis)?	Yes	No		Do not know
6. Before the start of the TA, did the executing agency realistically consider that by the end of the TA, it would gain the technical expertise to do the desired work itself?	Yes	No		Do not know
7. Were the major constraints, both inside and outside the executing agency, which could prevent the effective completion of the TA satisfactorily addressed prior to the terms of reference being finalized?	Yes	No		Do not know
7a. If yes, please indicate whether the constraints were	Internal		External	

7b.	If no, please list the major constraints not addressed. (See Annex for a sample of constraints and problems.)				
Technical Assistance Design					
8.	How satisfactory was the design of the TA to achieve its objective?	Very satisfactory	Satisfactory	Not satisfactory	Do not know
8a.	If satisfactory, please list strengths.	If not satisfactory: please list weaknesses.			
9.	How important was the TA's objective to the work of the executing agency?	Very Important	Important	Not Very Important	No Opinion
9a.	In what way were they important? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From a technical point of view • From an institutional strengthening point of view 				
10.	Did the design seek to transfer skills to the executing agency by the end of the TA?	Yes	No		Do not know
10a.	If yes, how satisfactory was the approach to technology and skills transfer? ¹	Very satisfactory	Satisfactory	Not satisfactory	Do not know
10b.	If not satisfactory, please state in what way.				
11.	Did the senior management of the executing agency play a major role in the design of the TA?	Yes	No		Do not know
Technical Assistance Implementation					
12.	Were appropriate counterpart staff available to participate in the TA and benefit from it? ²		No		Do not know
12a.	If yes, were the counterpart staff and trainees released as required without jeopardizing other high priorities of the executing agency?		No		Do not know
12b.	When were counterpart staff made available for the TA?	From The Outset	Shortly After The Beginning	Late In The Project	Not At All
12c.	Was the counterpart approach to skills transfer effective?	Yes	No		Do not know
12d.	If no, please cite the major reasons.				
13.	Were recommendations made under the TA to improve the functioning of the executing agency?	Yes	No		Do not know
13a.	If yes, were the recommendations appropriate?	Yes	No		Do not know
13b.	If yes, were the recommendations accepted?	Yes	No		Do not know
13c.	If yes, how substantially were the recommendations acted upon?	Significantly	Partially		Not At All
14.	Did the TA do any staff training?	Yes	No		Do not know

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14a.	If yes, approximately how many staff were planned to be trained and how many were actually trained?	Planned to be trained		Actually trained	
14b.	What level of long-term improvement in staff performance did the training produce?	Marked improvement	Some improvement	No improvement	Do not know
15.	Were the trainers	Very competent?	Competent?	Not very competent?	Do not know
16.	Was the training	Just long enough?	Slightly too short?	Too short?	Do not know
17.	At the end of the TA, how well could the counterparts and trainees, without further technical assistance, perform the tasks they were supposed to perform?	Very satisfactory	Satisfactory	Not satisfactory	Do not know
17a.	If not satisfactory, please cite the major reasons.				
18.	How satisfactorily was the TA's objective achieved?	Very satisfactory	Satisfactory	Not satisfactory	Do not know
18a.	Please identify one significant and enduring outcome directly resulting from the implementation of the TA's objective.				
19.	Did the senior management of the executing agency play a major role in the implementation and general guidance of the TA?	Yes	No	Do not know	
19a.	If no, did the lack of involvement have an adverse effect on the outcomes of the TA?	Yes	No	Do not know	
20.	Would the TA have been more effective if staff in central agencies had been more involved?	Yes	No	Do not know	
20a.	If yes, please explain in what way.				
21.	Did women working in the executing agency benefit from the TA?	Yes	No	Do not know	
21a.	If yes, please indicate approximately how many and in what way.				
22.	Please list the major problems with TA implementation. (See Annex for a sample of constraints and problems.)				
Performance of Consultants					
23.	Please rate the overall performance of the consultants.	Very satisfactory	Satisfactory	Not satisfactory	Do not know
23a.	In terms of technical competence.	Very satisfactory	Satisfactory	Not satisfactory	Do not know
23b.	In terms of training and skills transfer.	Very satisfactory	Satisfactory	Not satisfactory	Do not know

24.	How well did the consultants understand the needs of the executing agency?	Very well	Satisfactory	Not satisfactory	Do not know
25.	Please rate how well the consultants adapted their technical competencies to the needs and competencies of the executing agency.	Very satisfactory	Satisfactory	Not satisfactory	Do not know
26.	How culturally sensitive was the work of the consultants?	Very sensitive	Sensitive	Not sensitive	Do not know
27.	How well did the consultants understand the professional needs of the people working in the executing agency?	Very satisfactory	Satisfactory	Not satisfactory	Do not know
28.	Did the consultants pay any special attention to the needs of the women working in the executing agency?	Yes	No		Do not know
29.	Did the consultants	Help The Executing agency To Do Things	Do Things For The Agency		Do not know
30.	Would you employ the consultants again?	Yes	No		Do not know
30a.	If no, please explain why.				
Institutional Development					
31.	Please rate the contribution of the TA in the improvement of the following:				
31a.	Management competencies of the executing agency (i.e., is the executing agency better managed as a result of the TA?)	Major	Minor	None at all	Do not know
31b.	Policy capacity of the executing agency	Major	Minor	None at all	Do not know
31c.	Operating systems of the executing agency (i.e., did the TA improve budget, planning, information systems, and procedures on a sustainable basis?)	Major	Minor	None at all	Do not know
31d.	Organizational efficiency of the executing agency (i.e., has productivity of the executing agency increased as a direct result of the TA?)	Major	Minor	None at all	Do not know
31e.	Technical competencies of staff working in the executing agency	Major	Minor	None at all	Do not know
31f.	Operational effectiveness of the executing agency (i.e., does the executing agency provide a better quality of service for the Government?)	Major	Minor	None at all	Do not know

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31g.	Planning, monitoring and control of the executing agency	Major	Minor	None at all	Do not know
32.	Did the TA result in the development of any performance indicators?	Yes	No		Do not know
32a.	If yes, are those performance indicators still being used?	Yes	No		Do not know
32b.	If no, can you suggest performance indicators to assess the long-term effectiveness of the TA?				
32c.	Over time, has the performance rating on the basis of these indicators	Improved	Remained the same	Declined	Do not know
General					
33.	To achieve the best sustainable results for the executing agency, was the length of time for the TA	Just Right	Slightly too short	Far too short	Do not know
33a.	If too short, please explain why it was too short.				
34.	Do the majority of the counterparts still work in the executing agency?	Yes	No		Do not know
34a.	If no, do they still work in the public sector?	Yes	No		Do not know
34b.	If no, broadly, why did they leave the executing agency and the public sector?				
35.	Do the majority of trainees still work in the public sector?	Yes	No		Do not know
35a.	If no, broadly, why did they leave the executing agency and the public sector?				
36.	Have the facilities created under the TA continued to receive funding even after TA completion?	Yes	No		Do not know
37.	Did public service rules and procedures constrain the full effectiveness of the TA?	Yes	No		Do not know
37a.	If yes, please explain in what way.				
38.	Were there any incentives to encourage executing agency officers to participate in training provided under the TA?	Yes	No		Do not know
38a.	If yes, please describe the incentives.				
39.	How could TA implementation be improved?				
40.	Would earlier reform of central agencies and their rules and procedures have improved the effectiveness of the TA?	Yes	No		Do not know

40a.	If yes, please explain in what way.				
41.	Have the benefits of the TA been sustainable?	Yes	No	Do not know	
41a.	If no, please cite the major reasons.				
42.	Please rate the performance of the ADB in TA preparation, administration, and supervision.	Very satisfactory	Satisfactory	Not satisfactory	Do not know
42a.	If not satisfactory, please explain in what way.				
42b.	Please rate the ADB's responsiveness and flexibility.	Very satisfactory	Satisfactory	Not satisfactory	Do not know
42c.	If not satisfactory, please explain in what way.				
43.	In retrospect, please rate the long-term effectiveness of the TA on the executing agency.	Successful	Partly successful	Unsuccessful	Do not know
Annex: Sample of Constraints and Problems in Implementation					
		Question 7b		Question 22	
1.	Shortage of counterpart staff and trainees / staff had no time.				
2.	Lack of managerial skills / inadequate technical know-how.				
3.	Management / financial / organizational problems within the executing agency and within the government itself.				
4.	Sociopolitical / cultural / geographic and demographic factors.				
5.	Unclear or absent policy / legislation / guidelines / control mechanisms.				
6.	Inadequate database / inaccurate data generated / ineffective or poor management information system.				
7.	Lack of incentives, support services, infrastructure, and facilities.				
8.	Lack of coordination / communication / overlapping functions / disputes among concerned implementing agencies / task network.				
9.	Lack of capital / funds / delay in release of government counterpart funds.				
10.	Delay in recruitment of consultants / poor performance of consultants				
11.	Training				
11a.	Was too difficult or too short.				

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11b.	Was not relevant to work / did not provide skills usable in the prevailing circumstances.		
11c.	Did not interest the trainees / did not offer incentives.		

Further Reading

ADB. 2005–2006. *Technical Assistance for Capacity Building of the Inland Fisheries Research and Development Institute II*. Manila. Available: www.adb.org/documents/tars/cam/tar-cam-36634b.pdf.

Also view the questionnaire on effectiveness of ADB assistance in capacity building for *Capacity Building of the Inland Fisheries Research and Development Institute II*. Available: www.adb.org/projects/tonle_sap/reports/tsri-09.pdf.

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Asian Development Bank

ADB, based in Manila, is dedicated to reducing poverty in the Asia and Pacific region through inclusive economic growth, environmentally sustainable growth, and regional integration. Established in 1966, it is owned by 67 members—48 from the region. In 2007, it approved \$10.1 billion of loans, \$673 million of grant projects, and technical assistance amounting to \$243 million.

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Knowledge Solutions are handy, quick reference guides to tools, methods, and approaches that propel development forward and enhance its effects. They are offered as resources to ADB staff. They may also appeal to the development community and people having interest in knowledge and learning.

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