ADB

Knowledge Solutions

Tools, methods, approaches to drive development forward and enhance its effects

Asian Development Bank

ADB

Knowledge Solutions

Tools, methods, approaches to drive development forward and enhance its effects

Asian Development Bank

ISBN 978-971-561-783-3
Publication Stock No. TIM090184

Cataloging-In-Publication Data

Asian Development Bank.
Knowledge solutions: tools, methods, approaches to drive development forward and enhance its effects.
Mandaluyong City, Philippines: Asian Development Bank, 2009.

1. Knowledge. 2. Asian Development Bank. I. Asian Development Bank.

6 ADB Avenue, Mandaluyong City
1550 Metro Manila, Philippines
Tel +63 2 632 4444
Fax + 63 2 636 2444
www.adb.org

For orders, please contact:
Department of External Relations
Fax +63 2 636 2648
adbpub@adb.org

Knowledge Solutions

Contents

Knowledge Solutions

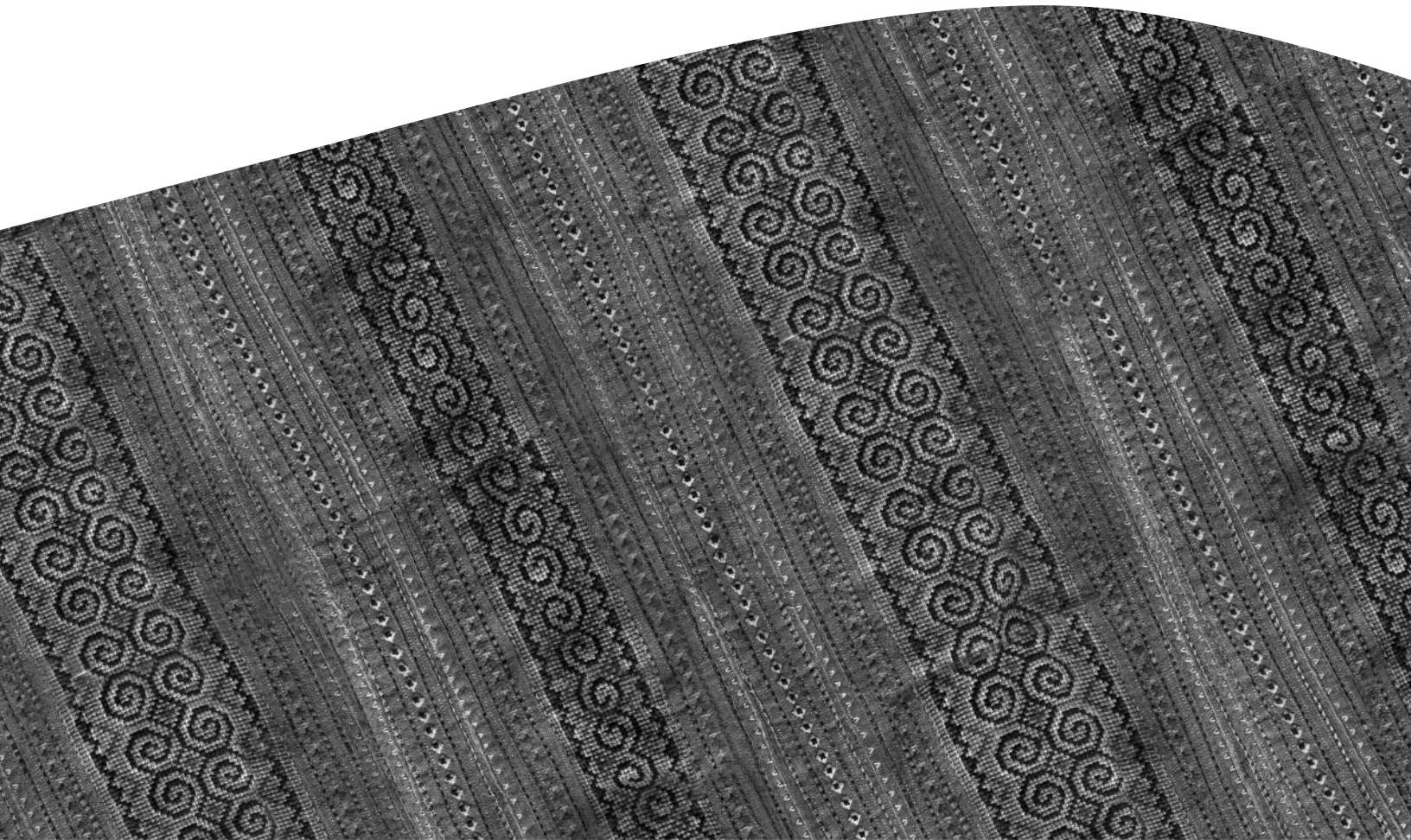
Foreword

Learning is the key to success—some would say survival—in today's organizations. Strategy 2020, ADB's long-term strategic framework for 2008–2020, argues emphatically that ADB must play a bigger part in putting the potential of knowledge solutions to work in Asia and the Pacific. *Knowledge Solutions*, of which this is a first compendium, are handy, quick reference guides to tools, methods, and approaches that propel development forward and enhance its effects. The series aims to boost competencies in the areas of strategy development, management techniques, collaboration mechanisms, knowledge sharing and learning, and knowledge capture and storage, all of them essential to knowledge management and learning. The series was launched in support of *Learning for Change in ADB*, which offers timely, practical guidance to support and energize organization, people, knowledge, and technology for learning, and help deliver thereby the increased development effectiveness that Strategy 2020 seeks.

Xianbin Yao
Director General
Regional and Sustainable Development Department
Asian Development Bank

Knowledge Solutions

Strategy Development



Auditing Knowledge

by Olivier Serrat

Knowledge audits help organizations identify their knowledge-based assets and develop strategies to manage them.

Definition

Developing a knowledge-sharing culture is a change process on the way to better organizational performance. To achieve that change, an organization needs a vision of where it wants to be and an accurate picture of where it is now—that is, its current reality. A knowledge audit is one way of taking that picture.

What is a knowledge audit? The traditional concept of an audit is an evaluation of a person, business, system, process, project, or product by an independent third party. Financial audits are well understood. They examine the financial statements of a company to check performance against standards. A knowledge audit works differently, and some demystification is called for. It is by and large—granted differing objects, breadth of coverage, and levels of sophistication—a qualitative review (or inventory, survey, check) of an organization's knowledge health at both the macro and micro levels. The defining feature of a knowledge audit is that it places people at the center of concerns: it purports to find out what people know, and what they do with the knowledge they have. It can be described as an investigation of the knowledge needs of an organization and the interconnectivity among leadership, organization, technology, and learning in meeting these. Put in a different way, a knowledge audit is an investigation of the strengths and weaknesses of an organization's knowledge, and of the opportunities and threats that face it.

Purpose

A knowledge audit can have multiple purposes, but the most common is to provide tangible evidence of what knowledge an organization needs, where that knowledge is, how it is being used, what problems and difficulties exist, and what improvements can be made. Although there can be no blueprint, a typical knowledge audit will—not necessarily at the same time or level of detail[1]—query the following:

- What are an organization's knowledge needs?
- What tacit and explicit knowledge assets does it have and where are they?
- How does knowledge flow within the organization, formally and informally, and to and from clients and relevant organizations?
- How is that knowledge identified, created, stored, shared, and used?
- What obstacles are there to knowledge flows, e.g., to what extent do its people, business processes, and technology currently support or hamper the effective movement of knowledge?
- What gaps and duplications exist in the organization's knowledge?

[1] The audit could span the whole organization, but preferably cover constituent parts of it. For the same reason that opinion polls do not sample the entire population, marginal returns diminish as the scale of related exercises increases. The same consideration applies to the number of questions that might be posed.

Deliverables

Deliverables from knowledge audits are multiple, and can impact organizational performance and the individuals and groups associated severally with it. Not all can be quantified. Regardless, to be of any use, benefits cannot just be shown; they must be realized. Specifically, depending on its thrust and coverage, a knowledge audit can be expected to:

- help the organization identify what knowledge is needed to reach its goals and support individual and group activities;
- recognize the knowledge created and help assess its value and contribution to organizational performance, thus making it more measurable and accountable;
- give tangible evidence of the extent to which knowledge is being effectively managed and indicate where changes for the better should be made;
- identify intellectual assets and facilitate the creation of an intellectual asset register;
- distinguish pockets of knowledge that are not being used to good advantage and therefore offer untapped potential;
- review the use of external knowledge and suggest ways in which it might be used to better effect;
- assess the use and effectiveness of knowledge products such as flagship publications, how valuable they are, and how they might be improved;
- circumscribe knowledge flows and current bottlenecks within those flows;
- make out present and future knowledge gaps;
- develop knowledge and social network maps of the organization;
- supply data and information for the development of knowledge management initiatives that are directly relevant to the organization's specific knowledge needs and current situation; and
- pinpoint quick wins that could be implemented easily to produce clear, tangible, and immediate benefits.[2]

Knowledge audits might be small and discreet. But they must all give a clear direction regarding what can be achieved and must engender a realistic expectation of what might then be done with requisite resources. They must also create active interest and highlight important facts to management. They will work best if their original purpose is discussed in some detail before the audit begins. Reporting may be done both through short written reports, presentations to managers—preferably one at the divisional level and another at the departmental level—and collation of detailed results for later use.

Constituents of Knowledge Audits

The typical constituents of knowledge audits, each of which can be conducted at different levels of complexity using a variety of tools,[3] are shown in the figure.[4] They are preferably, but not necessarily, in order: knowledge needs analysis, knowledge inventory analysis, knowledge flow analysis, and knowledge mapping. Throughout investigations, elements of knowledge, relationships, context, and external environment should be borne in mind, together with the fact that about 80% of an organization's knowledge is tacit—the greatest challenge lies in the audit of that.

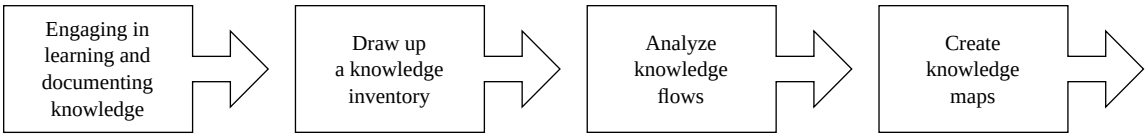
---

[2] Benefits can come in a range of forms and need not represent a radical overthrow of organizational structures and systems. They can include smoother induction of new employees; insights for coaching, mentoring, and training; more congenial working relationships between people across the organization; a more positive working environment; improved use of internal and external knowledge products and services; easier retrieval of data, information, and knowledge across the organization; enhanced quality and consistency of data, information, and knowledge; fewer obstacles to knowledge sharing; more efficient work processes; superior work flows; higher quality client service delivery; and better transfer of knowledge from departing employees to successors or replacements.

[3] The common tools used for knowledge audits are face-to-face and telephone interviews; structured, semi-structured, and unstructured questionnaires; workshops; focus group discussions; and online consultations. Other data and information can be gathered by referring to the documentation of the organization, conducting direct inspections, and examining the information and communications technology infrastructure, including the organization's website.

[4] Naturally, in a large and diverse organization, the dimensions and conduct of a knowledge audit will differ radically from that applicable to a small, less complex one.

Figure: Knowledge Audit Constituents



- **Identify Knowledge Needs.** The objective of knowledge needs analysis is to identify what tacit and explicit knowledge individuals, groups, and the organization possess; and what knowledge they might require in the future to perform better. The analysis can help an organization develop strategy. Besides shining light on bread-and-butter wants, it can also draw attention to staff skills and competency enhancement needs; opportunities for staff learning and development; organizational culture practices concerning leadership, collaboration, team work, and the performance management and rewards system; and staff relationship with management, peers, and subordinates.
- **Draw Up a Knowledge Inventory.** Knowledge inventory analysis is stock-taking to identify, locate, and document existing knowledge assets. It involves, to the extent possible, counting, indexing, and categorizing tacit and explicit knowledge. For explicit knowledge, the analysis might cover numbers, types, and categories of documents, databases, libraries, intranets, hyperlinks, and subscriptions to external knowledge resources; knowledge locations in the organization and in its systems; the organization and access of knowledge; the purpose, relevance, and quality of knowledge; and use of knowledge. For tacit knowledge, the analysis might relate to staff directories and academic and professional qualifications, skills and core competency levels and experience, staff learning and development opportunities, and leadership potential in employees. An organization will be able to identify knowledge gaps and areas of duplication by comparing the results of the knowledge inventory analysis with those of the knowledge needs analysis.
- **Analyze Knowledge Flows.** Knowledge flow analysis investigates how knowledge moves from where it is to where it is needed in an organization, revealing good and bad practices. The analysis determines how employees find the knowledge they must have, and how they share what knowledge they have. Knowledge flow analysis should examine people, business processes, and technology. Regarding people, this entails exploring attitudes toward—and experiences, beliefs, values, and skills in—knowledge sharing. In relation to business processes, one should look at how people go about their daily business and the extent to which identification, creation, storage, sharing, and use of knowledge forms part of that; policies and practices concerning knowledge flows, for instance, on data and information handling, management of records, or web publishing. For technology, there should be a focus on information and communications technology infrastructure, such as portals, content management, accessibility and ease of use, and current levels of usage.
- **Create Knowledge Maps.** Knowledge maps—whether they are real, Yellow Pages, or specially constructed databases—are communication media designed to help visualize the sources, flows, constraints, and sinks (losses or stopping points) of knowledge within an organization. They can specify, for instance, creators, critics, collectors, connectors, and users of knowledge. They are useful navigational guides to tacit and explicit knowledge and underscore importance, relationships, and dynamics, for example, within social networks. They can flip perspectives on knowledge from bottom-up to top-down, and focus knowledge management initiatives on the highest potential opportunities.

Further Reading

ADB. 2008. *Auditing the Lessons Architecture*. Manila.
Available: www.adb.org/documents/studies/auditing-lessons-architecture/IN371-07.asp

For further information

Contact Olivier Serrat, Head of the Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank (oserrat@adb.org).

Knowledge Solutions

Creating and Running Partnerships

by Olivier Serrat

Partnerships have a crucial role to play in the development agenda. To reach the critical mass required to reduce poverty, there must be more concerted effort, greater collaboration, alignment of inputs, and a leveraging of resources and effort. Understanding the drivers of success and the drivers of failure helps efforts to create and run them.

Enhancing Strategic Alliances

A partnership is a formal or informal agreement between two or more partners to work together to achieve common aims. For instance, multilateral and bilateral agencies can compensate for abilities and resources that fall far short of requirements by partnering with nongovernment organizations, both national and international. Such organizations are able to form close linkages and engender ownership and participation. Their consultative and participatory methods note and express stakeholder views that might otherwise not be entertained. This enables them to identify up-and-coming issues, respond rapidly to new circumstances, and experiment with innovative approaches. Therefore, partnering can improve the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of operations. However, few would-be partners fully consider the opportunities and constraints that are associated with the creation and running of partnerships. A frequent cliché relates to the need to avoid duplication and overlap. Habitually, extant memoranda of agreement are worded loosely.

Drivers of Success

The drivers of success include:

- Agreement that a partnership is necessary;
- Esteem and trust between different interests;
- The leadership of a respected individual (or individuals);
- The commitment of key interests developed through a clear and open process;
- The development of a shared vision of what might be achieved;
- Shared mandates or agendas;
- The development of compatible ways of working, which presupposes organizational flexibility;
- Good communication, perhaps with the help of facilitators;
- Collaborative decision making, with a commitment to achieving consensus;
- Effective organizational management; and
- Time to build the partnership.

Drivers of Failure

In opposition, the drivers of failure include:

- A history of conflict among key interests;
- One partner manipulates or dominates;
- Unrealistic goals and objectives;
- Differences of philosophy and ways of working;
- Poor communication;
- An unequal and unacceptable balance of power and control;
- An absence of common interests;
- Hidden or irreconcilable agendas; and
- Financial and time commitments that outweigh potential benefits.

Guidelines for Managers

In general:

- Informal partnerships work best when a project is specific and achievable.
- Where the project is complex and spans several years, it may be necessary to create formal partnership structures for decision making.
- It is not easy to tackle a wide range of issues through an informal partnership. It is better to address such matters through consultations.
- Simply setting up a partnership structure does not solve all problems. Partners still need to clarify the joint goal and objective, values, and interests, among others.
- Partnerships do not have to be equal but the partners do need to feel that they are involved to an appropriate degree.

Guidelines for Project Officers

The following suggests how project officers can make a start:

- Clarify the goal and objective behind forming a partnership.
- Identify the stakeholders and the key interests that can help or hinder the development of a project.
- Consider who one really needs as a partner and who would really want to be a partner: some stakeholders may only want to be consulted.
- Before approaching potential partners, make sure that you have support and agreement about working with others.
- Make informal contact with partners to understand their values and interests before formulating formal proposals.
- Communicate with your partners in a language they will understand, focusing on what they may want to achieve.
- Plan the partnership process over time.
- Use a range of methods to gather people in workshop sessions as well as in formal meetings.
- Encourage ideas from partners because ownership leads to commitment.
- Be trustworthy. One of the main barriers to creating and running successful partnerships lies in the attitudes that people bring to the process. To develop trust, it is necessary to draw out and deal with suspicions from past contacts; be open about what one is trying to achieve and about problems; be prepared to make mistakes and to admit to them; and deliver what one promises.

Creating and Running Partnerships

Since partnerships are formal or informal agreements to work together to achieve common aims, there can be no recipe for success. Whatever the working arrangements, and whatever phase of the partnership one is in, there will be problems: people will not read documents or come to meetings, colleagues will fail to deliver on promises, different interest groups will have conflicting aims, deadlines will be missed, and the champions behind the partnership may become scapegoats. Notwithstanding, the need to enhance strategic alliances calls on managers and project officers to:

- Advertise country strategies and programs and details of loan, grant, and technical assistance projects through media, such as the Internet, newsletters, and public meetings, and take care to give evidence of strategic integration.
- Map potential partners for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.
- Understand the priorities and skills of potential partners.
- Develop a partnership structure based on a clear purpose, trust, and agreement on responsibilities and accountability.
- Identify champions and communicate with them frequently.
- Build partner confidence through early participation in project work.
- Accept that partnerships need long-term support and make abilities and resources available.
- Develop a forward strategy for partnerships.
- Ensure appropriate monitoring of progress by the partnership.

The existence of commonalities of interest and memoranda of understanding offers only the promise of partnership. The onus of enhancing strategic alliances is on managers and project officers to integrate partnerships in annual operating outputs in the myriad ways that the multifarious nature of such associations dictates.

For further information

Contact Olivier Serrat, Head of the Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank (oserrat@adb.org).

Culture Theory

by Olivier Serrat

Culture theory strengthens the expectation that markets work, not because they are comprised of autonomous individuals who are free of social sanctions but because they are powered by social beings and their distinctive ideas, beliefs, values, and knowledge. It can contribute to understanding and promoting development where group relationships predominate and individualism is tempered.

Rationale

Some needs are common to all people—at all times and in all places. They are the need to make a living, the need for social organization, the need for knowledge and learning, the need for normative and metaphysical expression, and the need for aesthetic manifestation. These nuts and bolts of everyday life work through the co-evolving realms of environment, economy, society, polity, and technology to make up systems of mutual sustainability or (in opposition) mutual vulnerability.

Since people (not economies) are the main object and ultimate purpose of endeavors to progress, a society's culture is not just an instrument of development cooperation: it is its basis. The marriage of economy and environment was overdue and has spawned a world agenda for that purpose. Likewise, the relationship between culture and development should be clarified and deepened in ways that are authentic, indigenous, self-reliant, sovereign, civilized, and creative.

Definition

Culture, defined in its broadest sense, is the totality of a society's distinctive ideas, beliefs, values, and knowledge. It exhibits the ways humans interpret their environments.

Applications

Culture theory is a branch of anthropology, semiotics, and other related social science disciplines such as political economy, in particular, but also sociology and communication (to name a few). It seeks to define heuristic concepts of culture. Hence, cultural studies often concentrate on how a particular phenomenon relates to matters of ideology, nationality, ethnicity, social class, and gender.[1] The potential for application is correspondingly vast—it follows that practitioners of culture theory draw from a diverse array of theories and associated practices and encompass many different approaches, methods, and academic perspectives.[2] And so, it remains relatively unstructured as an academic field that needs to move from "Let's" to "How." Taking culture into account should mean understanding how cultural dimensions enter utility and production functions of various kinds. In the case of development agencies and their partner countries, new processes of policy analysis and participatory management should surely be devised so that non-economic social sciences become full partners in the decision-making concerning the policy and investment decisions that guide business processes. Much remains to be done.

---

1 Increasingly, cultural studies also focus on the interface of information and communication technologies and society.

2 For instance, one branch of culture theory places a primary importance on the cultural institutions that are involved in the production, dissemination, and consumption of culture.

Characteristics

Therefore, approaches to cultural studies are likely to range widely. However, Ziauddin Sardar sees that most tend to share the following characteristics

- They aim to examine their subject matter in terms of cultural practices and their relation to power.
- They aim to understand culture in all its complex forms and to analyze the social and political contexts in which it manifests itself.
- They consider culture as both the object of study and the location of political criticism and action.
- They expose and attempt to reconcile knowledge divides to overcome the split between tacit cultural knowledge and objective (so-called universal) forms of knowledge.
- They are committed to an ethical evaluation of society, and to political action.

Benefits

Culture theory's holistic perspective, englobing the needs common to all people, does not lend itself to easy action. But, culture theory alone pays simultaneous and even attention to these needs and makes possible a focus on the whole and the parts, on contexts and contents, on values and value systems, and on strategic relationships between key variables, countries, blocs of countries, and human beings and the natural environment. And so, it yields conceptual insights and practical benefits and allows informed choices and intelligent decisions to be made about the future. It enables us, for instance, to deal better with complexity and fragmentation—the emphasis is on systems rather than on parts of systems. And it helps to ensure that economies are contextualized properly and pointed in the right direction. For those reasons, among others, they can be constrained and enriched by the larger cultures in which they are located. Consequently, they stop functioning as self-governing entities. Also, by focusing on the totality and innate worth of a given society, culture theory can minimize the ethnocentric bias that results from one's cultural conditioning.

Further Reading

Deborah Eade (Ed.). 2002. *Development and Culture: Selected Essays from Development in Practice*. Oxford: Oxfam GB in association with World Faiths Development Dialogue.

Lawrence Harrison and Samuel Huntington (Eds.). 2001. *Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress*. New York: Basic Books.

Ziauddin Sardar. 2004. *Introducing Cultural Studies*. Cambridge: Icon Books Ltd.

For further information

Contact Olivier Serrat, Head of the Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank (oserrat@adb.org).

Knowledge Solutions

Linking Research to Practice

by Olivier Serrat

The volume of research greatly exceeds its application in practice. Researchers must pay greater attention to the production of their research findings in a flexible range of formats in recognition of the varied needs of consumers.

Research is about both generation and dissemination of findings. In spite of this, disseminating research findings has often been an afterthought in busy research agendas. When the funding of a research program is considered, insufficient time and money are set aside to link research to practice. And, if efforts have in truth been made to incorporate dissemination into the earliest stages of planning, experience reveals that matching the research design to the characteristics of intended users is not easy. No matter what, research findings will simply not be used if the latter are ignored. And so, willy-nilly, research institutions have come to agree that they must find ways to relate research findings to practical applications in planning, policy making, program administration, and delivery of services. There is evidence that they are becoming better at this: some pay attention to the production of research findings in a wide range of formats in recognition of the variety of users. Notwithstanding, while important initiatives undoubtedly exist, research findings still do not inform practice to the extent that they should. For each research agenda, this calls for a dissemination policy, a dissemination plan, and a dissemination strategy. Dissemination tactics will then come into play.

Articulating a Dissemination Policy

A dissemination policy is the expression of a research institution's mission and values to its staff members and to the public. It establishes a common vision and the values and measures that will be engaged to achieve accessibility to information content. A dissemination policy can be an effective and economical instrument that links research to practice: rarely do research institutions explain how efforts at dissemination will be tied to utilization.

Drawing a Dissemination Plan

The most successful dissemination processes are usually designed before the start of a research agenda. Dissemination should produce a response—utilization of the research findings—on the part of users. In drawing a dissemination plan, researchers should consider at least the following major elements:

- **Impact and Outcomes:** What is the desired impact of dissemination?[1] What outcomes does the dissemination plan aim to accomplish? In what ways will users benefit?
- **Users:** Which users are most affected by the research? Which would be most interested in learning of the research findings? What are their scope and characteristics?
- **Information Content:** Does the information content match the users' expressed informational needs? Does the comprehension level required to understand the information content match the characteristics of the users? Is the information content reviewed through a quality control mechanism to ensure accuracy and relevance?
- **Medium:** What is the most effective dissemination method to reach each user group? What resources does each group typically access? What capabilities does each group have?
- **Execution:** When should each aspect of the dissemination plan occur? Who should be responsible for dissemination activities?
- **Obstacles:** What potential obstacles may interfere with access to or utilization of the research findings by each user group? What actions could be developed to overcome these obstacles?
- **Accomplishment:** How will accomplishment be described and measured? If data is to be gathered, who will gather it?

Table: Characteristics of An Effective Dissemination Plan

1.	The plan orientates itself to the needs of the users. It relies on appropriate form, language, and information content levels.
2.	The plan incorporates various dissemination methods, such as written, graphical, electronic, and verbal media. The methods include research summary documents; press releases; media coverage; flyers, posters, and brochures; letters of thanks to study participants; newsletters to study participants; events and conferences; and seminars. Each method calls for its own format and means of dissemination and includes both proactive and reactive channels—that is, it includes information content that users have identified as important and information content that users may not know to request but are likely to need. The dissemination methods are more likely to succeed when their packaging and information content has been influenced by appropriate inputs from the users.
3.	The plan draws on existing resources, relationships, and networks to the maximum extent possible. It also builds the new resources, relationships, and networks needed by users.
4.	The plan includes effective quality control mechanisms to ensure that the information content is accurate, relevant, and representative.
5.	The plan establishes linkages to resources that may be required to implement the information content, e.g., technical assistance.

Dissemination processes based on mechanical, one-way flow of written information have not been successful in encouraging adoption and implementation of research findings.

Developing a Dissemination Strategy

A dissemination plan outlines basic elements that must be implemented. A dissemination strategy can be understood in terms of how a research institution will address particular issues to ensure that dissemination leads to utilization. The most successful dissemination strategies will be broad-based and formulated so that the unexpected does not cause the dissemination plan to fail. The major issues related to a dissemination strategy include:

- **Users:** Is the readiness of the users to change limited? Are there needs for widely divergent formats and levels of information content? Is the number of trusted information sources limited?
- **Source:** Is the credibility of experience limited? Is the level of perceived competence low? Is the motive suspect?

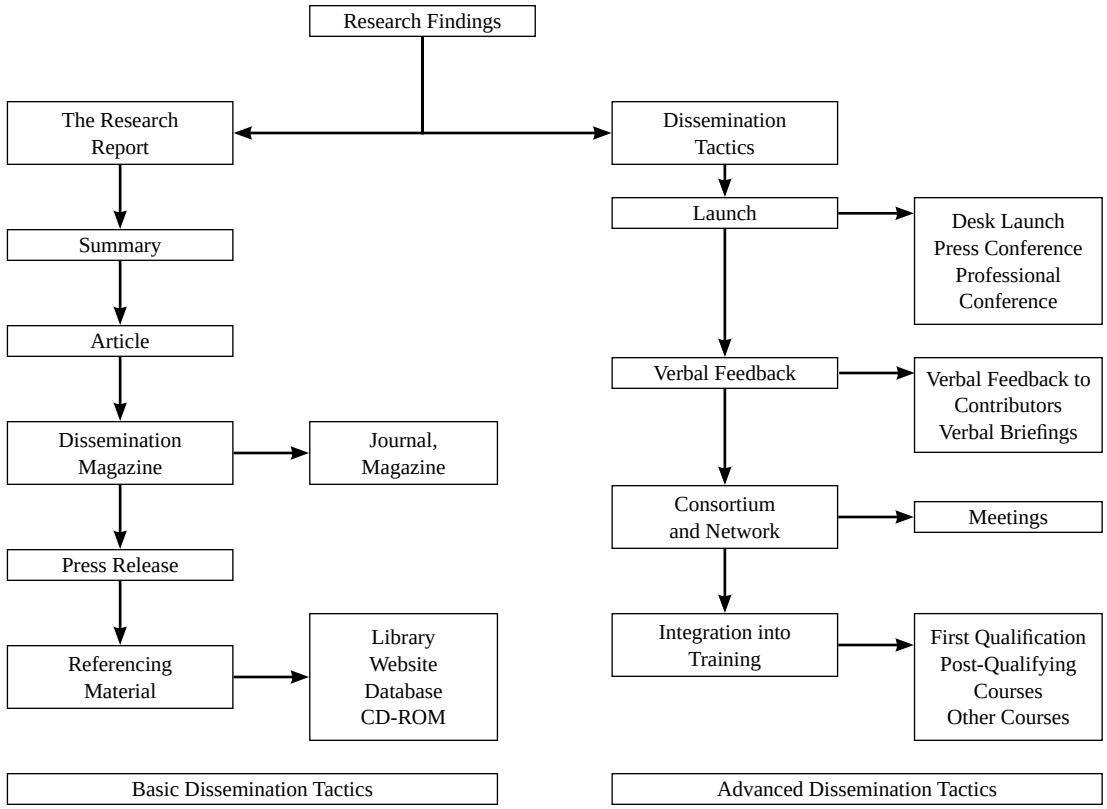
[1] The desired impact of dissemination is, simply, utilization. The basic reason to acquire and then disseminate new research-based information is to ensure that it is appropriately considered for use in making decisions, driving changes, or taking action designed to improve outcomes. The critical element of utilization is that the research finding must be thoroughly digested: the users must assimilate it in their understanding and experience.

- **Information Content:** Is confidence in the quality of research and its methodology low? Is the credibility of outcomes limited? Is the utility and relevance of the information content unclear? Are there cost implications to access to information content? Is the format of the information content non-user friendly?
- **Context:** Are there competing research findings? Does the general economic climate or circumstances favor adoption of research findings? Can the research findings find practical application in the field?
- **Medium:** Is the information content clear and attractive? Is the dissemination method flexible and reliable? Is the dissemination method cost-effective? Are the timeframes required to access the information content lengthy?

Applying Dissemination Tactics

Strategy is the overall effect one wishes to create; tactics are the method by which one wishes to achieve that effect. Dissemination tactics can be basic or advanced depending on the scale and complexity of the dissemination plan.

Figure: Possible Dissemination Tactics



Source: Adapted from Barnardo's. 2000. *What Works? Making Connections: Linking Research and Practice*.

For further information

Contact Olivier Serrat, Head of the Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank (oserrat@adb.org).

Knowledge Solutions

The Most Significant Change Technique

by Olivier Serrat

The Most Significant Change technique helps monitor and evaluate the performance of projects and programs. It involves the collection and systematic participatory interpretation of stories of significant change emanating from the field level—stories about who did what, when, and why, and the reasons why the event was important. It does not employ quantitative indicators.

Rationale

Development (as so much of knowledge and learning) is about change—change that takes place in a variety of domains.[1] To move towards what is desirable and away from what is not, stakeholders must clarify what they are really trying to achieve, develop a better understanding of what is (and what is not) being achieved, and explore and share their various values and preferences about what they hold to be significant change. Evaluation has a role to play. However, on the word of Albert Einstein, "Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted."

Definition

The Most Significant Change technique is a qualitative and participatory form of monitoring and evaluation[2] based on the collection and systematic selection of stories[3] of reported changes from development activities. The technique was developed by Rick Davies in the mid-1990s to meet the challenges associated with monitoring and evaluating a complex participatory rural development program in Bangladesh, which had diversity in both implementation and outcomes. The technique is becoming popular, and adaptations have already been made.

Benefits

The Most Significant Change technique facilitates project and program improvement by focusing the direction of work away from less-valued directions toward more fully shared visions and explicitly valued directions, e.g., what do we really want to achieve and how

[1] For instance, the domains might relate to changes in the quality of people's lives, the nature of their participation in development activities, or the sustainability of organizations.

[2] Qualitative monitoring and evaluation is about learning: it is dynamic and inductive and therefore focuses on questioning. The data is hard to aggregate. Goal displacement is not an issue. Quantitative monitoring and evaluation is about proving (accountability): it is static and deductive and therefore focuses on measurement. The data is easy to aggregate. Goal displacement can be a problem. The Most Significant Change technique is a form of monitoring because it occurs throughout the project cycle and provides information to help people manage that. Michael Quinn Patton has argued that evaluation findings serve three primary purposes: to render judgments, to facilitate improvements, and/or to generate knowledge—the Most Significant Change technique contributes to evaluation because it provides data on outcomes that can be used to help assess the performance of a project or program as a whole.

[3] Ideally, the stories will be 1–2 pages long in proforma.

will we produce more of it?[4] It can also help uncover important, valued outcomes not initially specified. It delivers these benefits by creating space for stakeholders to reflect, and by facilitating dynamic dialogue. As a corollary, project and program committees often become better at conceptualizing impact (and hence become better at planning). The unusual methodology of the Most Significant Change technique and its outcomes are a foil for other monitoring and evaluation techniques, such as logic models (results frameworks), appreciative inquiry, and outcome mapping—especially where projects and programs have diverse, complex outcomes with multiple stakeholders groups and financing agencies—to enrich summative evaluation with unexpected outcomes and very best success stories. What is more, the technique's reliance on participatory monitoring and evaluation can only enhance the chances that lessons will be learned and that recommendations will be acted upon.[5]

Process

The central process of the Most Significant Change technique is the collection and systematic selection of reported changes by means of purposive sampling with a bias in favor of success. This involves asking field staff to elicit anecdotes from stakeholders, focusing on what most significant change has occurred as the result of an initiative, and why they think that change occurred. These dozens, if not hundreds, of stories are passed up the chain and winnowed down to the most significant as determined by each management layer until only one story is selected—a story that describes a real experience, reviewed, defended, and selected by the people charged with the success of the project or program. Participants enjoy the process and usually bring to it a high level of enthusiasm—this owes mainly to the use of storytelling.[6]

Enablers

Four broad enabling contextual factors drive successful implementation of the Most Significant Change technique. These are

- Support from senior management.
- The commitment to the process of a leader.
- The development of trust between field staff and villagers.
- An organizational culture that prioritizes reflection and learning.
- Infrastructure that enables regular feedback of the results to stakeholders.
- Time to run several cycles of the technique.

Caution

The Most Significant Change technique is still evolving. Suggestions for improvements have been made,[7] while others look to adapt it to different contexts or to combine it creatively with other approaches. Further, although it can address what follows, the Most Significant Change technique should not be used to

- Capture expected change.
- Prepare stories for public relations.
- Understand the average experience of stakeholders.
- Generate an evaluation report for accountability purposes.
- Conduct a quick evaluation.
- Conduct retrospective evaluation of a completed project or program.

[4] The Most Significant Change technique differs from common monitoring and evaluation techniques in at least four respects: the focus is on the unexpected (rather than predetermined quantitative indicators that do not tell stakeholders what they do not know they need to know); information about change is documented in text, not numbers; major attention is given to explicit value judgments; and information is analyzed through a structured social process.

[5] Some have suggested that the technique could the technique could be improved by adding a process to formally incorporate the lessons learned from the stories into short-term and long-term project or program planning. This might be accomplished by requesting those who report stories to make recommendations for action drawing from the stories they selected.

[6] The advantage of stories is that people tell them naturally (indigenously). Stories can also deal with complexity and context and can carry hard messages (undiscussables) that people remember. However, they are not known for accuracy (truth).

[7] Some have suggested that the technique could be revised to elicit and include the voices of critics and non-participants, conduct en masse participatory analysis of stories, improve the feedback process, and establish a formal process for incorporating the insights gained into both short- and long-term project and program planning.

Box: Overview of Implementation Steps

What?	Why?
1. Getting started: establishing champions and getting familiar with the approach	• The plan orientates itself to the needs of the users. It relies on appropriate form, language, and information content levels.
2. Establishing "domains of change"	• The plan incorporates various dissemination methods, such as written, graphical, electronic, and verbal media. The methods include research summary documents; press releases; media coverage; flyers, posters, and brochures; letters of thanks to study participants; newsletters to study participants; events and conferences; and seminars. Each method calls for its own format and means of dissemination and includes both proactive and reactive channels—that is, it includes information content that users have identified as important and information content that users may not know to request but are likely to need. The dissemination methods are more likely to succeed when their packaging and information content has been influenced by appropriate inputs from the users.
3. Defining the reporting period	• The plan draws on existing resources, relationships, and networks to the maximum extent possible. It also builds the new resources, relationships, and networks needed by users.
4. Collecting stories of change	• The plan includes effective quality control mechanisms to ensure that the information content is accurate, relevant, and representative.
5. Reviewing the stories within the organizational hierarchy	• To make explicit what individuals and wider groups value as significant change • To broaden understanding of what is seen as significant change in a project or program as a whole • To abstract and synthesize common elements of significant change • To provide a source of evaluation information to stakeholders
6. Providing stakeholders with regular feedback about the review process	• To inform each subsequent round of story collection and selection • To effectively record and adjust the direction of attention and the criteria used to value events • To deepen organizational learning about the changes engendered by the project or program
7. Setting in place a process to verify the stories, if necessary	• To check that stories have been reported accurately and honestly • To provide an opportunity to gather more detailed information about events seen as especially significant
8. Quantification	• To include quantitative information as well as qualitative information • To quantify the extent to which the most significant changes identified in one location have taken place in other locations within a specific period • To monitor the monitoring system itself
9. Conducting secondary analysis of the stories en masse	• To identify main themes and differences among stories • To theorize about change • To encourage further publication via articles, conference papers, etc.
10. Revising the Most Significant Change process	• To revise the design of the Most Significant Change process to take into account what has been learned as a direct result of using it and the findings, conclusions, and recommendations from that

Further Reading

Rick Davies and Jess Dart. 2005. *The 'Most Significant Change' (MSC) Technique: A Guide to Its Use*. Manila. Available: www.mande.co.uk/docs/MSCGuide.pdf

ADB. 2008a. *Appreciative Inquiry*. Manila. Available: www.adb.org/documents/information/knowledge-solutions/appreciative-inquiry.pdf

——. 2008b. *Outcome Mapping*. Manila. Available: www.adb.org/documents/information/knowledge-solutions/outcome-mapping.pdf

——. 2008c. *Output Accomplishment and the Design and Monitoring Framework*. Manila. Available: www.adb.org/documents/information/knowledge-solutions/output-accomplishment.pdf

——. 2008d. *Storytelling*. Manila. Available: www.adb.org/documents/information/knowledge-solutions/storytelling.pdf

For further information

Contact Olivier Serrat, Head of the Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank (oserrat@adb.org).

Outcome Mapping

by Olivier Serrat

Development is about people—it is about how they relate to one another and their environment, and how they learn in doing so. Outcome mapping puts people and learning first and accepts unexpected change as a source of innovation. It shifts the focus from changes in state, viz. reduced poverty, to changes in behaviors, relationships, actions, and activities.

Rationale

Development agencies must show that their activities make significant and lasting contributions to the welfare of intended beneficiaries. But they may well be trying to measure results that are beyond their reach: the impacts they cite as evidence are often the result of a confluence of events for which they cannot realistically get full credit. The questions that they cannot easily answer are

- How can assessment of impact move beyond attribution to documenting contributions to social change?
- How do you methodically and reasonably capture the richness of what is occurring in projects or programs?
- How do you effectively involve stakeholders in monitoring and evaluation of projects or programs?
- How do you effectively integrate monitoring and evaluation into projects or programs from the planning stage?
- How do you decide what to monitor and evaluate?
- How do you notice, explain, and respond to unexpected results?

Outcome mapping exposes myths about measuring impacts and helps to answer such questions. A project or program that uses the framework and vocabulary of outcome mapping does not claim the achievement of development impacts, nor does it belittle the importance of changes in state. Rather, it focuses on its contributions to outcomes (that may in turn enhance the possibility of development impacts—the relationship is not inevitably a direct one of cause and effect.) More positively, because outcome mapping limits its concerns to those results that fall strictly within a project or program's sphere of influence, development agencies can become more specific about the actors they target, the changes they expect to see, and the strategies they employ.[1]

Definition

Outcome mapping is a (still evolving) method for planning, monitoring, and evaluating development activities that aim to bring about social change. It was developed in 2001 by the International Development Research Centre to clarify what human, social, and environmental betterment projects or programs hope to contribute and then focus monitoring and evaluation on factors and actors within their direct sphere of influence. The fundamen-

[1] Characteristically, for example, the evaluation of a water purification project focuses on whether water quality has improved. Outcome mapping also examines whether the beneficiaries maintaining the system now have and use the knowledge and skills, tools, and other resources needed to keep it running in the long term, for instance, by monitoring contaminant levels, changing filters, or bringing in experts when needed.

Box: A Glossary of Outcome Mapping Terms

Boundary Partners. Individuals, groups, or organizations with whom the project or program interacts directly and whom it hopes to influence.

Evaluation Plan. A short description of the main elements of an evaluation study to be conducted.

Intentional Design. The planning stage of outcome mapping at which a project or program gathers consensus on the macro-level changes it wants to influence and the strategies to be used.

Mission. An ideal description of how the project or program intends to support the achievement of the vision. The mission states the areas in which the project or program will work but does not list all the activities in which it will engage.

Monitoring Priorities. A process by which data and information are systematically and regularly collected on a project or program over time.

Organizational Practices. Eight separate practices by which a project or program remains relevant, innovative, sustainable, or connected to its environment. The practices are

- prospecting for new ideas, opportunities, and resources;
- seeking feedback from key informants;
- obtaining the support of your next highest power;
- assessing and (re)designing products, services, systems, and procedures;
- checking up on those already served to add value;
- sharing your best wisdom with the world;
- experimenting to remain innovative; and
- engaging in organizational reflection.

Outcome Challenges. The description of the ideal changes a project or program intends to influence in the behavior, relationships, actions, and activities of a boundary partner.

Outcome Journal. A data and information collection tool for monitoring the progress of a boundary partner in achieving progress markers over time.

Performance Journal. A data and information collection tool for monitoring how well a project or program is carrying out its organizational practices.

Progress Markers. A set of graduated indicators of changed behaviors of a boundary partner that focus on the depth or quality of the change.

Strategy Journal. A data and information collection tool for monitoring the strategies a project or program uses to encourage change in the boundary partner.

Strategy Map. A matrix that categorizes six strategy types (causal, persuasive, and supportive; each aimed at a specific individual or group and at a specific individual or group's environment) that a project or program employs to influence the boundary partner. Strategies are aimed at either the boundary partner or the environment in which the boundary partner operates.

Vision. A description of the large-scale economic, political, social, or environmental changes that the project or program hopes to encourage.

Source: Summarized and adapted from Sarah Earl, Fred Carden, and Terry Smutylo. 2001. *Outcome Mapping: Building Learning and Reflection into Development Programs*. Ottawa, Canada: International Development Research Centre. Available: www.idrc.ca/en/ev-9330-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html

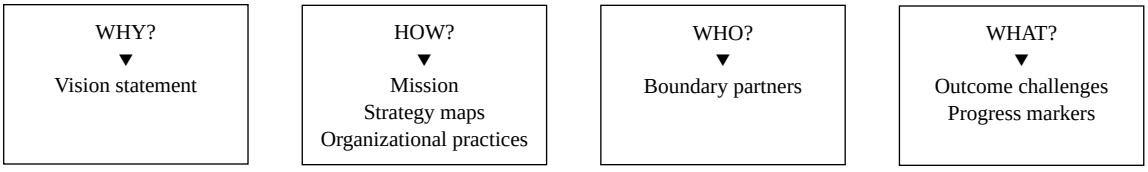
tal premise of outcome mapping is that for each change in state there are correlating changes in behavior that are best encouraged if continuing responsibility has been devolved to local people and local institutions.

The Stages of Outcome Mapping

The full process of putcome mapping involves three stages of thinking:

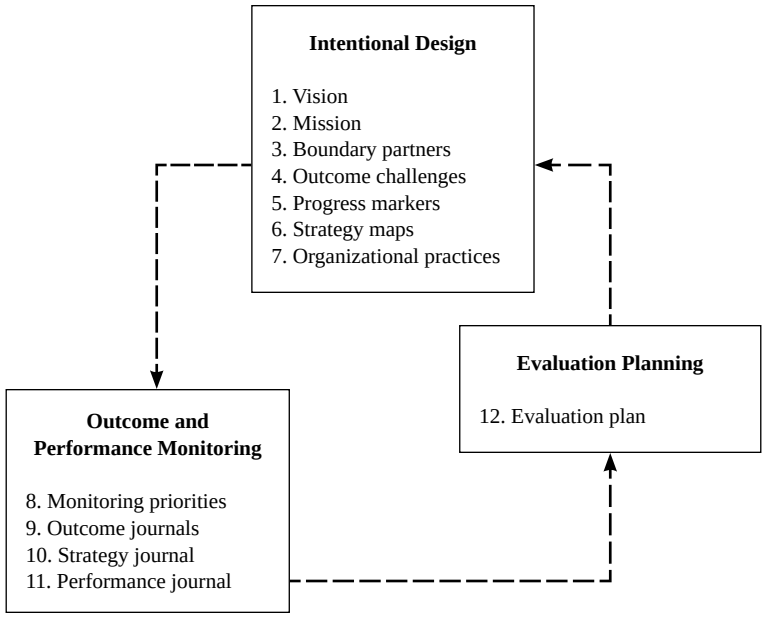
- **Intentional Design.** This stage helps the project or program design team clarify and reach consensus on the macro-level changes it would like to support and to plan appropriate strategies. The design team should clearly express the long-term, downstream impacts that it is working towards, bearing in mind that the project or program will not achieve them single-handedly. These desired impacts will provide reference points to guide strategy formulation and action plans, rather than serve as mere performance indicators. Progress markers, which will be used to track performance, should be developed for each boundary partner. They will identify the incremental—and often upstream—changes that the project or program sensibly hopes to influence, prompt behavioral change, and build the foundations of sustained social change. After clarifying what changes the project or program hopes to influence, the design team should select activities that maximize the likelihood of success. In short, the intentional design stage articulates answers to four questions: why? how? who? what?
- **Outcome and Performance Monitoring.** This stage provides a framework for monitoring actions and the progress of the boundary partners towards outcomes. The performance monitoring framework builds on the progress markers, strategy maps, and organizational practices developed at the intentional design stage. There are three data and information collection tools: an outcome journal to monitor boundary partner actions and relationships, a strategy journal to monitor strategies and activities, and a performance journal to monitor the organizational practices that keep the project or program relevant and viable. These tools will provide workspace and processes and help the design team reflect on the data and information that it has collected and how these can be used to improve performance.
- **Evaluation Planning.** This stage helps the design team set priorities to target evaluation resources and activities where they will be most useful. Evaluation planning outlines the main elements of the evaluations to be conducted.

Figure 1: The Four Basic Questions of the Intentional Design Stage



Source: Terry Smutylo. 2005. Outcome Mapping: A Method for Tracking Behavioural Changes in Development Programs. *Institutional Learning and Change Brief No. 7*. Available: www.cgiar-ilac.org/files/publications/briefs/ILAC_Brief07_mapping.pdf

Figure 2: The Three Stages and Twelve Steps of Outcome Mapping



Source: Terry Smutylo. 2005. Outcome Mapping: A Method for Tracking Behavioural Changes in Development Programs. *Institutional Learning and Change Brief No. 7*. Available: www.cgiar-ilac.org/files/publications/briefs/ILAC_Brief07_mapping.pdf.

Benefits

People involved in national and local policy-making, staff and consultants of development agencies, and field personnel can use outcome mapping. Used prospectively, it can help

- Understand and influence more effectively human and ecological well-being
- Plan and measure social change in projects or programs
- Foster social and organizational learning
- Identify individuals, groups, and organizations with whom one might work directly to influence behavioral change
- Bring stakeholders into the planning and monitoring and evaluation processes
- Strengthen partnerships and alliances
- Plan and monitor behavioral change and the strategies to support those changes
- Monitor the internal practices of projects or programs so that they remain effective
- Design an evaluation plan to examine particular issues more precisely

The Importance of Participation

Outcome mapping is based on principles of participation and iterative learning. It is usually initiated through a participatory workshop led by an internal or external facilitator who is familiar with the methodology. It purposefully includes those implementing the project or program in the design and in data and information collection to encourage ownership, use of findings, and adaptation. It is a consciousness-raising, consensus-building, and empowering methodology. The process for identifying the macro-level changes, selecting the monitoring priorities, and designing the evaluation plan is intended to be participatory: wherever feasible, it should involve the full range of stakeholders. Engagement means that stakeholders will derive benefit and be credited for fulfilling their development roles; projects and programs will be credited for their contributions to this process.

Further Reading

Sarah Earl, Fred Carden, and Terry Smutylo. 2001. *Outcome Mapping: Building Learning and Reflection into Development Programs*. Ottawa, Canada: International Development Research Centre. Available: www.idrc.ca/en/ev-9330-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html.
Outcome Mapping Learning Community. Available: www.outcomemapping.ca/
Evaluation @ IDRC: International Development Research Centre. Available: www.idrc.ca/evaluation/

For further information

Contact Olivier Serrat, Head of the Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank (oserrat@adb.org).

Reading the Future

by Olivier Serrat

Scenario-building enables managers to invent and then consider in depth several varied stories of equally plausible futures. They can then make strategic decisions that will be sound for all plausible futures. No matter what future takes place, one is more likely to be ready for and influential in it if one has thought seriously about scenarios. Scenario planning challenges mental models about the world and lifts the blinders that limit our creativity and resourcefulness.

Rationale

The future will not happen just because one wishes hard. It requires action now. Because nothing lasts forever and no product or service sells itself for long, small businesses and large organizations (individuals too, for that matter) have no alternative but to forerun the future, endeavor to shape it, and balance short-term and long-term objectives. This means that the short term calls for strategic decisions just as much as the long term. And so, strategic planning stands for the unremitting process of making decisions systematically with the greatest intelligence of their futurity, organizing the resources and efforts needed to carry them out, and measuring outcomes against expectations with feedback and self-control. Only then can one avoid extending carelessly past and present trends.

Readjusting Mindsets

More often than not, however, strategic planning holds out only one scenario that underplays the unpredictability of the world. That future stands for the set of assumptions implicit to blind spots. Yet, the point is not to pick an ideal future, hope that it will come to pass, or even strive to create it. Nor is it to find the most probable future and bet the house on it. Rather, it is to make decisions that will be suitable for all plausible futures. That is why the challenge is to develop a small set of distinct scenarios covering the main areas of uncertainty—and in so doing define direction without confining it.

Thinking the Unthinkable

A scenario is an internally consistent view of the future. Scenario analysis is the process of generating and analyzing a small set of scenarios. This exercise stretches mental models, enhancing perception of events as part of a pattern, and leads to better thinking about the future. Scenario analysis involves discrete steps (explained by Peter Schwartz in *The Art of the Long View*).

- **Uncovering the Focal Issue.** For small businesses and large organizations alike, "What should our business be?" is usually the first (and natural) question. If not, the focal issue should be what keeps one awake at night.
- **Making Out Key Factors.** Once the focal issue has been decided on, the next step is to identify the key factors in one's environment. What will managers want to know when they have to make choices? What will be seen as success or failure?
- **Listing Driving Forces.** Then, after the key factors have been identified, the third step involves listing candidates for prime movers (driving forces) that will impact the key factors. They lie in society, technology, economics, politics, and the natural environment. This is, without doubt, the most research-intensive stage of the process of generating and analyzing scenarios; it requires much information hunting and gathering.

- **Ranking Driving Forces.** Next, comes the ranking of driving forces based on two main criteria—the degree of importance vis-à-vis the focal issue, and the degree of uncertainty surrounding each driving force. The outcome of such ranking will, effectively, draw the lines along which scenarios differ. However, if scenarios are to serve as learning tools, the lessons that they teach must be fundamental to the resolution of the focal issue. So, the driving forces must also be few to curtail generation of scenarios around every conceivable uncertainty.
- **Fleshing Out Scenarios.** The scenario skeletons can then be fleshed out with regard to the key factors in one's environment and the driving forces identified. Every one of them should be given some attention in each scenario.
- **Drawing Implications.** Once the scenarios have been fleshed out, it is time to return to the focal issue and examine how it comes across in each scenario. What vulnerabilities have been revealed? Is a strategy robust across all scenarios? And, if it looks robust in only one instance, then it qualifies as a gamble.
- **Selecting Indicators.** Last, it is important to know quickly which of the several scenarios is closest to the course of history as it plays out. And so, one must identify indicators to monitor. Fortunately, the coherence built into the scenarios makes easy the selection of indicators.

Abandoning Stale Pursuits

The end result of building scenarios is not an accurate picture of tomorrow but better thinking about the future. And, since scenarios provide a context for decisions, better thinking should lead to more robust decisions. Still, just as important as the permanent process of making decisions about what things to do is planned and systematic abandonment of the old that no longer fits purpose, conveys satisfaction, or makes a contribution. As events unfold, it is therefore necessary to continue to review existing products and services (as well as processes and distribution channels). Do they still fit the realities of society, technology, economics, politics, and the natural environment? And, if not, how can one discard them, or at least stop devoting more resources and efforts? Otherwise, the best definition of the focal issue will turn out to have been a thankless exercise. Energy will be used up in defending yesterday.that people bring to the process. To develop trust, it is necessary to draw out and deal with suspicions from past contacts; be open about what one is trying to achieve and about problems; be prepared to make mistakes and to admit to them; and deliver what one promises.

Further Reading

Peter Schwartz. 1996. *The Art of the Long View: Planning for the Future in an Uncertain World*. New York: Doubleday.

For further information

Contact Olivier Serrat, Head of the Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank (oserrat@adb.org).

Social Network Analysis

by Olivier Serrat

Power no longer resides exclusively (if at all) in states, institutions, or large corporations. It is located in the networks that structure society. Social network analysis seeks to understand networks and their participants and has two main focuses: the actors and the relationships between them in a specific social context.

Rationale

The information revolution has given birth to new economies structured around flows of data, information, and knowledge. In parallel, social networks[1] have grown stronger as forms of organization of human activity.[2] Social networks are nodes of individuals, groups, organizations, and related systems that tie in one or more types of interdependencies: these include shared values, visions, and ideas; social contacts; kinship; conflict; financial exchanges; trade; joint membership in organizations; and group participation in events, among numerous other aspects of human relationships.[3] Indeed, it sometimes appears as though networked organizations outcompete all other forms of organization[4]—certainly, they outpace vertical, rigid, command-and-control bureaucracies. When they succeed, social networks influence larger social processes by accessing human, social, natural, physical, and financial capital, as well as the information and knowledge content of these. (In development work, they can impact policies, strategies, programs, and projects—including their design, implementation, and results—and the partnerships that often underpin these.) To date, however, we are still far from being able to construe their public and organizational power in ways that can harness their potential. Understanding when, why, and how they function best is important. Here, social network analysis can help.

---

1 The term was coined by John Barnes in 1954.

2 Information and communication technologies explain much but not all. The other agents that have catalyzed social networks include globalization; the diversification of policy making to include more nongovernmental actors, e.g., civil and nongovernment organizations, under the banner of good governance; growing recognition of the importance of social capital; and practical applications in knowledge management and organizational learning.

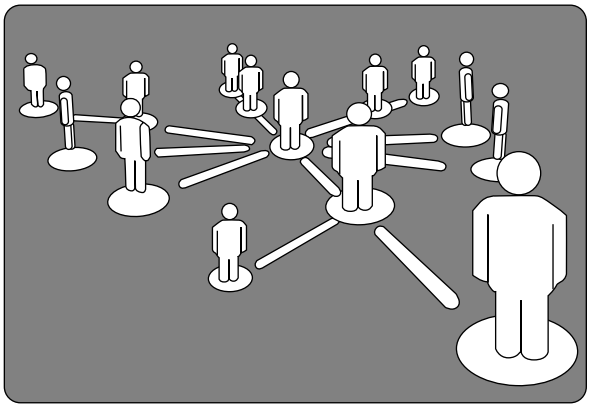
3 "Social networks" is an umbrella term that covers many forms and functions, with each node having distinct relative worth. (Sometimes, nodes are used to represent events, ideas, or objects.) Communities of practice are an important form. Others include policy and advocacy networks that work on problem identification and agenda setting, policy formulation, policy implementation, and policy monitoring and evaluation; private-public policy networks; knowledge networks; etc. (Increasingly, social networks are social communities of the web, connected via electronic mail, websites and web logs, and networking applications such as Twitter, FaceBook, Lotus Quickr, or LinkedIn.) Functions differ too, with nodes behaving as filters, amplifiers, investors and providers, convenors, community builders, and/or facilitators.

4 In such instances, their strengths arise among others from (i) a unifying purpose and clear coordination structure; (ii) multiple, interactive communications (spanning both horizontal and vertical dimensions) that encourage simultaneous action, (iii) dynamism and creativity (owing to multiple, interactive communications between members), (iv) consensus (born of like-minded actors who rally around shared interests or a common issue), (v) strength in numbers, (vi) the quality and packaging of evidence, (vii) sustainability, and (viii) representativeness.

Definition

The defining feature of social network analysis is its focus on the structure of relationships, ranging from casual acquaintance to close bonds.[5] Social network analysis assumes that relationships are important. It maps and measures formal and informal relationships to understand what facilitates or impedes the knowledge flows that bind interacting units, viz., who knows whom, and who shares what information and knowledge with whom by what communication media (e.g., data and information, voice, or video communications).[6] (Because these relationships are not usually readily discernible, social network analysis is somewhat akin to an "organizational x-ray".) Social network analysis is a method with increasing application in the social sciences and has been applied in areas as diverse as psychology, health, business organization, and electronic communications. More recently, interest has grown in analysis of leadership networks to sustain and strengthen their relationships within and across groups, organizations, and related systems.

Figure 1: A Social Network



Source: Rachael King. 2006. CEO Guide to Technology: Social Networks—Who's Harnessing Social Networks? *BusinessWeek*. Available: http://images.businessweek.com/ss/06/09/ceo_socnet/source/1.htm

Benefits

We use people to find content, but we also use content to find people. If they are understood better relationships and knowledge flows can be measured, monitored, and evaluated, perhaps (for instance) to enhance organizational performance. The results of a social network analysis might be used to:

- Identify the individuals, teams, and units who play central roles.
- Discern information breakdowns[7], bottlenecks[8], structural holes, as well as isolated individuals, teams, and units.
- Make out opportunities to accelerate knowledge flows across functional and organizational boundaries.
- Strengthen the efficiency and effectiveness of existing, formal communication channels.
- Raise awareness of and reflection on the importance of informal networks and ways to enhance their organizational performance.
- Leverage peer support.
- Improve innovation and learning.
- Refine strategies.

Development work, for one, is more often than not about social relationships. Hence, the social network representation of a development assistance project or program would enable attention to be quickly focused (to whatever level of complexity is required) on who is influencing whom (both directly and indirectly).

---

5 This is in contrast with other areas of the social sciences where the focus is often on the attributes of agents rather than on the relations between them.

6 In contrast, an organization chart shows formal relationships only—who works where, and who reports to whom. Ten years ago, Henry Mintzberg and Ludo Van der Heyden therefore suggested the use of "organigraphs" to map an organization's functions and the ways people organize themselves in it. See Henry Mintzberg and Ludo Van der Heyden. 1999. Organigraphs: Drawing How Companies Really Work. *Harvard Business Review*. September-October: 87–94.

7 Breakdowns in information occur most often at one or more of five common boundaries: (i) functional (i.e., breakdowns between individuals, teams, or units; (ii) geographic i.e., breakdowns between geographically separated locations); (iii) hierarchical (i.e., breakdowns between personnel of different levels), (iv) tenure (i.e., breakdowns between long-time personnel and new personnel); and (v) organizational (i.e., breakdowns among leadership networks).

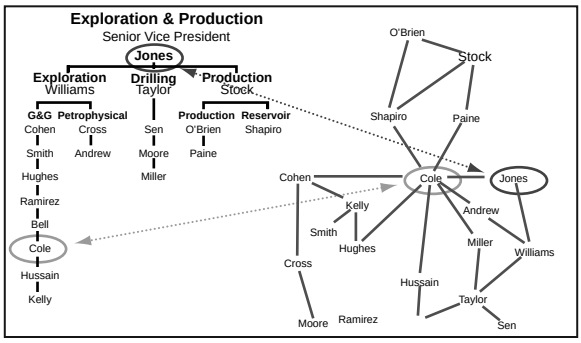
8 Bottlenecks are central nodes that provide the only connection between different parts of a network.

(Outcome mapping is another method that attempts to shifts the focus from changes in state, viz., reduced poverty, to changes in behaviors, relationships, actions, and activities.) Since a social network perspective is, inherently, a multi-actor perspective, social network analysis can also offset the limitations of logic models (results frameworks).

Process

Typically, social network analysis relies on questionnaires and interviews to gather information about the relationships within a defined group. The responses gathered are then mapped. (Social network analysis software exists for the purpose.)[9] This data gathering and analysis process provides baseline information against which one can then prioritize and plan interventions to improve knowledge flows, which may entail recasting social connections.

Figure 2: Formal versus Informal Structure in a Petroleum Organization



Source: Rob Cross, Andrew Parker, Laurence Prusak, and Stephen Borgatti. 2001. Knowing What We Know: Supporting Knowledge Creation and Sharing in Social Networks. *Organizational Dynamics*. Vol. 30, No. 2, pp. 100–120. Elsevier Science, Inc.

Notwithstanding the more complex processes followed by some, which can entail sifting through surfeits of information with increasingly powerful social network analysis software, social network analysis encourages at heart participative and interpretative approaches to the description and analysis of social networks, preferably with a focus on the simplest and most useful basics. Key stages of the basic process will typically require practitioners to

- Identify the network of individuals, teams, and units to be analyzed.
- Gather background information, for example by interviewing senior managers and key staff to understand specific needs and issues.
- Define the objective and clarify the scope of the analysis, and agree on the reporting required.
- Formulate hypotheses and questions.
- Develop the survey methodology
- Design the questionnaire, keeping questions short and straight to the point. (Both open-ended and closed questions can be used.)[10]
- Survey the individuals, teams, and units in the network to identify the relationships and knowledge flows between them.
- Use a social network analysis tool to visually map out the network.
- Review the map and the problems and opportunities highlighted using interviews and/or workshops.
- Design and implement actions to bring about desired changes.
- Map the network again after a suitable period of time. (Social network analysis can also serve as an evaluation tool.)

[9] Sociograms, or visual representations of social networks, are important to understand network data and convey the result of the analysis. Free and commercial social network analysis tools are at hand, each with different functionality. They include UCINET, Pajek, NetMiner, and Netdraw. In each case, the graphics generated are based on three types of data and information: (i) the nodes that represent the individuals, groups, or organizations being studied; (ii) the ties that represent the different relationships among the nodes (which may be insufficient, just right, or excessive); and (iii) the attributes that make up the different characteristics of the individuals, groups, or organizations being studied. Key measurements apply to the centrality of the social network analyzed; the make-up of its various subgroups (which can develop their own subcultures and negative attitudes toward other groups); and the nature of ties (viz., direction, distance, and density).

[10] Typical questions are: Who knows who and how well? How well do people know each other's knowledge and skills? Who or what gives people information about xyz? What resources do people use to find information about xyz? What resources do people use to share information about xyz?

Further Reading

ADB. 2008. *Building Communities of Practice*. Manila. Available: www.adb.org/documents/information/knowledge-solutions/building-communities-practice.pdf
International Network for Social Network Analysis. 2008. Available: www.insna.org

For further information

Contact Olivier Serrat, Head of the Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank (oserrat@adb.org).

The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach

by Olivier Serrat

The sustainable livelihoods approach improves understanding of the livelihoods of the poor. It organizes the factors that constrain or enhance livelihood opportunities, and shows how they relate. It can help plan development activities and assess the contribution that existing activities have made to sustaining livelihoods.

Livelihoods

A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets, and activities required for a means of living. It is deemed sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities, assets, and activities both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base.

The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach

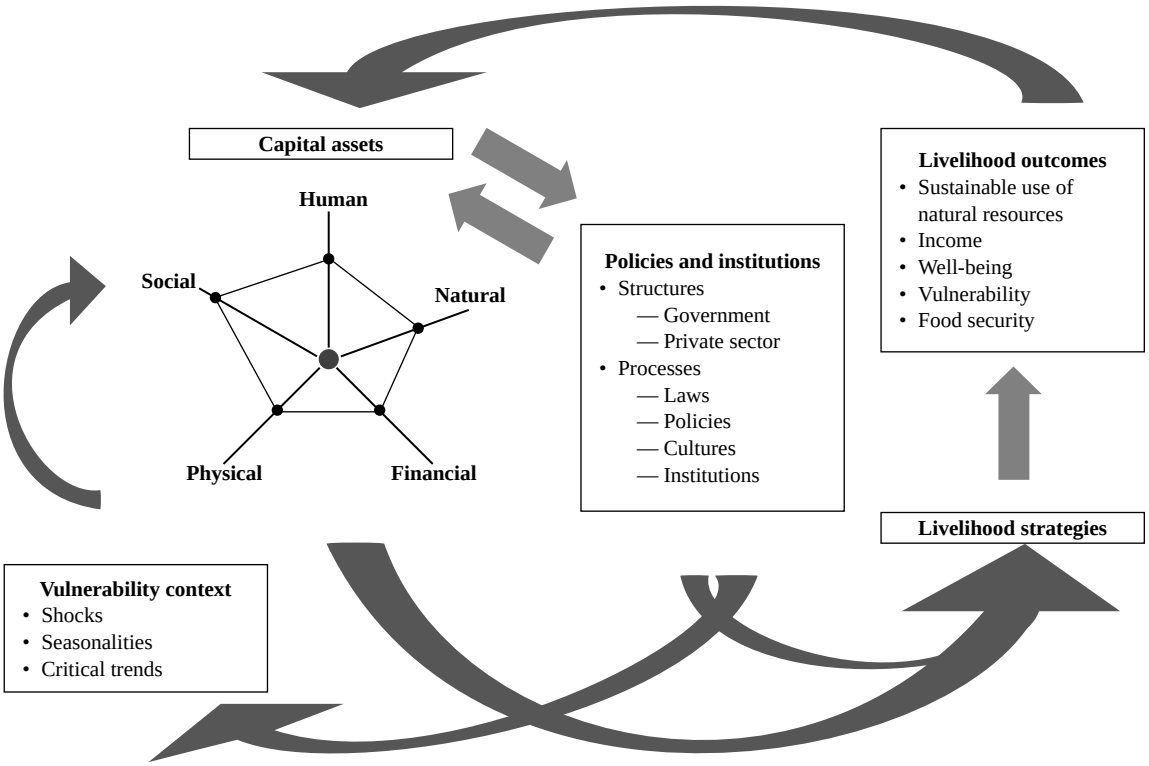
The sustainable livelihoods approach is a way of thinking about the objectives, scope, and priorities for development activities. It is based on evolving thinking about the way the poor and vulnerable live their lives and the importance of policies and institutions. It helps formulate development activities that are

- People-centered
- Responsive and participatory
- Multilevel
- Conducted in partnership with the public and private sectors
- Dynamic
- Sustainable

The sustainable livelihoods approach facilitates the identification of practical priorities for actions that are based on the views and interests of those concerned but they are not a panacea. It does not replace other tools, such as participatory development, sector-wide approaches, or integrated rural development. However, it makes the connection between people and the overall enabling environment that influences the outcomes of livelihood strategies. It brings attention to bear on the inherent potential of people in terms of their skills, social networks, access to physical and financial resources, and ability to influence core institutions.

Appreciative inquiry—originally developed as a tool for industry to avoid negative approaches to problem solving—extends this constructive outlook. Appreciative inquiry is a highly inclusive process that maximizes the positive (as opposed to minimizing the negative) in which a community takes responsibility for generating and gathering information and then forms strategies based on the most positive experiences of the past.

Figure: The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework



Source: Department for International Development of the United Kingdom.

Capital Assets

The sustainable livelihoods framework helps to organize the factors that constrain or enhance livelihood opportunities and shows how they relate to one another. A central notion is that different households have different access livelihood assets, which the sustainable livelihood approach aims to expand. The livelihood assets, which the poor must often make trade-offs and choices about, comprise:

- **Human capital,** e.g., health, nutrition, education, knowledge and skills, capacity to work, capacity to adapt
- **Social capital,** e.g., networks and connections (patronage, neighborhoods, kinship), relations of trust and mutual understanding and support, formal and informal groups, shared values and behaviors, common rules and sanctions, collective representation, mechanisms for participation in decision-making, leadership
- **Natural capital,** e.g., land and produce, water and aquatic resources, trees and forest products, wildlife, wild foods and fibers, biodiversity, environmental services
- **Physical capital,** e.g., infrastructure (transport, roads, vehicles, secure shelter and buildings, water supply and sanitation, energy, communications), tools and technology (tools and equipment for production, seed, fertilizer, pesticides, traditional technology)
- **Financial capital,**[1] e.g., savings, credit and debt (formal, informal), remittances, pensions, wages.

[1] Financial capital tends to be the least available livelihood asset of the poor. Indeed, it is because the poor lack it that the other types of capital are so important to them.

Vulnerability Context

Vulnerability is characterized as insecurity in the well-being of individuals, households, and communities in the face of changes in their external environment. People move in and out of poverty and the concept of vulnerability captures the processes of change better than poverty line measurements. Vulnerability has two facets: an external side of shocks, seassonalities, and critical trends; and an internal side of defenselessness caused by lack of ability and means to cope with these. The vulnerability context includes

- shocks, e.g., conflict, illnesses, floods, storms, droughts, pests, diseases
- seasonalities, e.g., prices, and employment opportunities
- critical trends, e.g., demographic, environmental, economic, governance, and technological trends.

Policies and Institutions

Livelihood strategies and outcomes are not just dependent on access to capital assets or constrained by the vulnerability context; they are also transformed by the environment of structures and processes. Structures are the public and private sector organizations that set and implement policy and legislation; deliver services; and purchase, trade, and perform all manner of other functions that affect livelihoods.

Processes embrace the laws, regulations, policies, operational arrangements, agreements, societal norms, and practices that, in turn, determine the way in which structures operate. Policy-determining structures cannot be effective in the absence of appropriate institutions and processes through which policies can be implemented. Processes are important to every aspect of livelihoods. They provide incentives that stimulate people to make better choices. They grant or deny access to assets. They enable people to transform one type of asset into another through markets. They have a strong influence on interpersonal relations. One of the main problems the poor and vulnerable face is that the processes which frame their livelihoods may systematically restrict them unless the government adopts pro-poor policies that, in turn, filter down to legislation and even less formal processes.

Livelihood Strategies and Outcomes

Livelihood strategies aim to achieve livelihood outcomes. Decisions on livelihood strategies may invoke natural-resource based activities, non-natural resource based and off-farm activities, migration and remittances, pensions and grants, intensification versus diversification, and short-term versus long-term outcomes, some of which may compete. (One of the many problems of development is that projects and programs, while favoring some,can disadvantage others.)[2] Potential livelihood outcomes can include more income, increased well-being, reduced vulnerability, improved food security, more sustainable use of the natural resource base, and recovered human dignity, between which there may again also be conflict.

Implications

The sustainable livelihoods approach encourages thinking out of the box. It frees development practitioners from conventional approaches that are often restricted to identifying problems and finding solutions. It invites them to look at contexts and relationships so that development activities can become more process-oriented. It compels them to look for multiple entry points and to move beyond a homogenous “community” view and a narrow sectoral perspective. It represents an important shift away from the focus on project inputs and outputs and the assumed mechanical links between them. In particular, the sustainable livelihoods approach stresses the importance of understanding institutions by mapping the institutional framework and linking the micro to the macro and the formal to the informal. Therefore, it calls for a new style of policy appraisal that moves from universal prescriptions to context-specific approaches that allow alternative, local perspectives to reveal themselves in the policy framework.

[2] There is no quick fix for this problem. Its existence underlines the need to give choice and opportunities to the poor and build their ability to take advantage of these, and extend safety nets for those who still cannot achieve their livelihood objectives in a competitive environment.

Caveat

The sustainable livelihoods approach is only one way of organizing the complex issues that surround poverty. It must also be made appropriate to local circumstances and local priorities.

Box: Sustainable Livelihoods Frameworks—Strengths and Weaknesses

Strength	Weakness
Seeks to understand changing combinations of modes of livelihood in a dynamic and historical context	Underplays elements of the vulnerability context, such as macroeconomic trends and conflict
Explicitly advocates a creative tension between different levels of analysis and emphasizes the importance of macro- and micro-linkages	Assumes that capital assets can be expanded in generalized and incremental fashion
Acknowledges the need to move beyond narrow sectoral perspectives and emphasizes seeing the linkages between sectors	Does not pay enough attention to inequalities of power
Calls for investigation of the relationships between different activities that constitute livelihoods and draws attention to social relations	Underplays the fact that enhancing the livelihoods of one group can undermine those of another

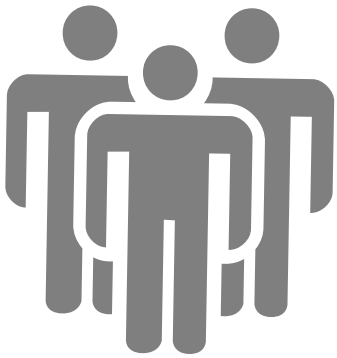
Further Reading

Livelihoods Connect. 2008. Available: www.livelihoods.org/index.html.
ADB. 2004. *Tonle Sap Initiative Brochures: Tonle Sap Sustainable Livelihoods*. Manila. Available: www.adb.org/Projects/Tonle_Sap/Tonle-Sap-200412.pdf.

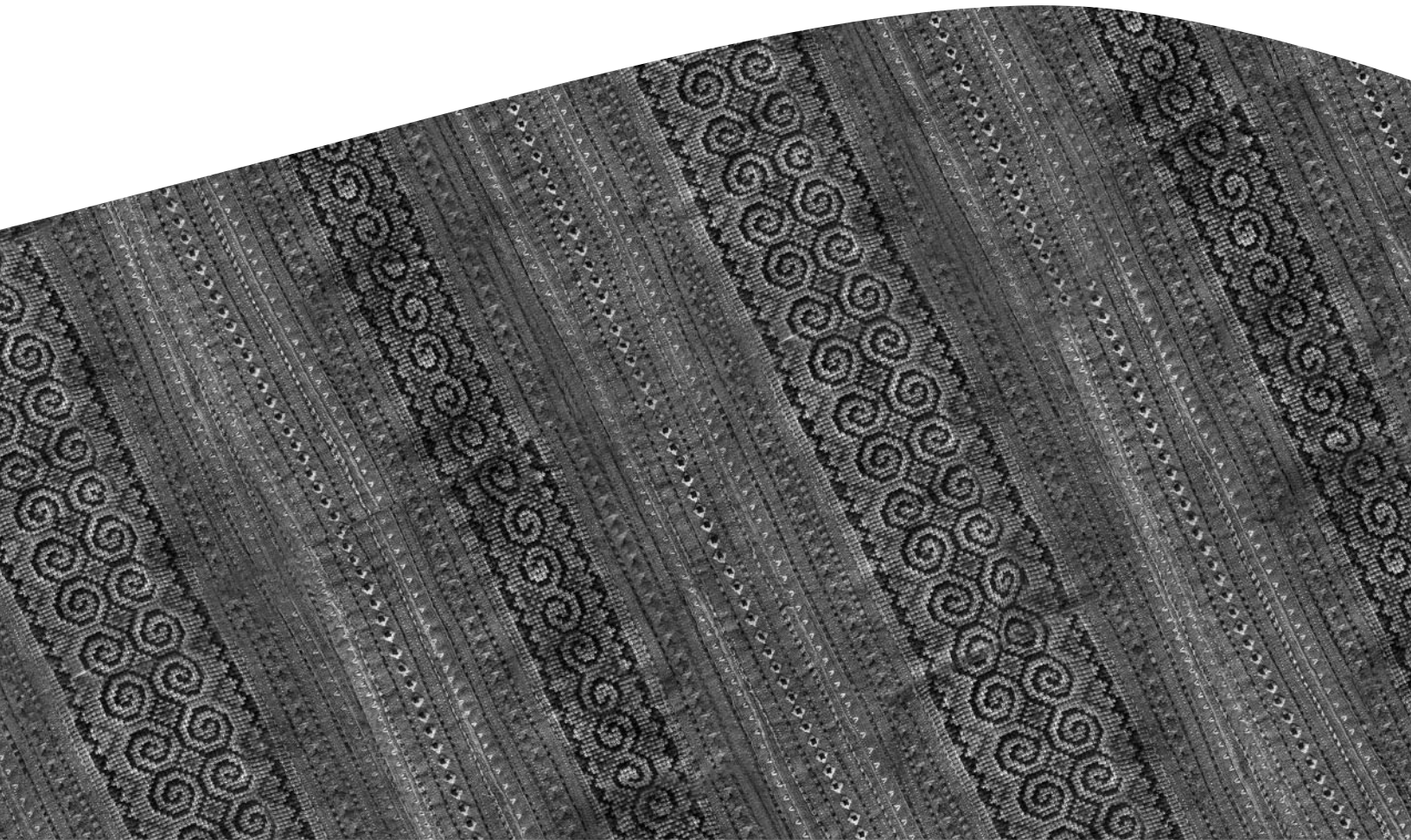
For further information

Contact Olivier Serrat, Head of the Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank (oserrat@adb.org).

Knowledge Solutions



Management Techniques



Conducting Effective Meetings

by Olivier Serrat

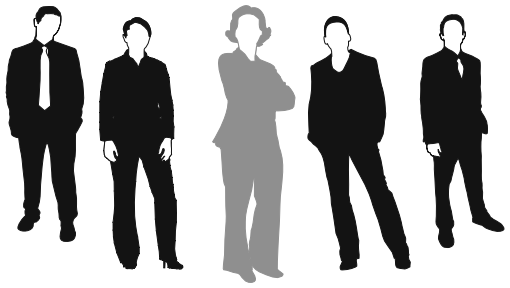
Meetings bring people together to discuss a predetermined topic. However, too many are poorly planned and managed, and therefore fail to satisfy objectives when they do not simply waste time. The operating expenses of time wasted include related meeting expenditures, salaries, and opportunity costs.

Background

When did you last join a work-related meeting[1] that was productive and fun from beginning to end? That is, a meeting that had lucid objectives[2] and a well-designed agenda; engaged all participants all the time; made them laugh; reached decisions; clarified follow-up actions; and secured commitment to achieve expected, positive, and constructive outcomes? Can you remember?

Managing Meetings

Meetings are essential in any form of human enterprise. These days, they are so common that turning the resources they tie up into sustained results is a priority in high-performance organizations. This is because they are potential time wasters: the other persons present may not respect their own time as much as you have come to respect yours, and it is therefore unlikely that they will mind wasting your time.[3] Generic actions before, during, and after can make meetings more effective.



[1] This issue focuses only on programmed meetings of more than two persons.

[2] Possible aims might be to engage in joint consultation, develop support for action, and resolve problems.

[3] Time is a precious asset. (Charles Darwin held that a man who dares to waste 1 hour has not discovered the value of life.) Therefore, it is important to develop a personal sense of time, both to save and spend it wisely. In organizations, the activities that consume time include committees, working groups, and task forces; interviews; discussions; learning and development; telephone conversations; typing; reading; inspecting; traveling; and thinking. It is illuminating to keep a time log and find what a comparatively small percentage of one's time is actually absorbed by the top-priority tasks on one's "to-do" list.

Generic Tips for Meeting Management

Before	During	After
Make sure you need a meeting by asking what would happen if it were not held.	Arrange skilled facilitation to smooth the process of the meeting and deal with conflict, start on schedule, and manage time to keep the meeting focused and moving.	Publish within 24 hours, but preferably on the same working day, concise and definite minutes that record the items discussed, the decisions of the meeting, the actions agreed, and the owners of these. In some cases, the minutes may include the main arguments or steps leading to the decisions.
Develop (and prepublish) a strategic agenda (and related papers) with easily understood objectives listed in order of importance, articulate the process to reach these, and plan the meeting and its ground rules.	Introduce the topics for discussion, use the prework delivered for the meeting, and keep debates relevant to the stated objectives.	Arrange effective meeting follow-up, i.e., who will do what by when.
Ensure appropriate participation at the meeting, with attention to good decision makers and problem solvers, for a maximum of 12 persons but if possible fewer.	Ensure everyone's thoughts and ideas are heard to keep them interested and empowered, use humor to alleviate tension, gain consensus, and involve each participant in actions toward explicit outcomes.	Agree on accountability for preparations toward the next meeting if one is necessary.
Plan, assign, and distribute prework before the meeting.	Recognize degrees of feelings and changes of opinion, check for quorum, summarize key points of agreement and disagreement, explain rulings, check understanding and acceptance, create an effective follow-up plan, state responsibilities, gain commitment, and close the meeting on time (or even before time) on a positive note and with a sense of gathering.	Evaluate the meeting process for continuous improvement, for example, regarding ground rules, timing and scheduling, agendas, and the drafting of minutes.

Notes: Before calling a meeting,consider whether the matter might not be dealt better by telephone, electronic mail, or meetings with individuals. Often, 10 minutes spent with six persons individually are more productive than gathering them in a room for 1 hour. If a meeting is to be held, the objectives should be clear, specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time bound. Preferably, they should also be agreed, challenging, consistent, worthwhile, and participative. Time-honored rules are to raise hands (stay in order) except for points of clarification or process; refrain from interrupting the speaker; keep to the subject; be concise (and avoid repeating others); and be respectful and polite. These days, electronics are to be put on silent mode and no telephone calls are allowed unless one steps out. "Parking lots", i.e., posts on a wall, can be used for issues not on the agenda.

The Chairperson's Role

A good chairperson is essential to the conduct of effective meetings. In any order, expectations are that the chairperson will stimulate and inspire (not dictate), have the right answers, make decisions, and get things done. But what exactly are those skills and qualities that make someone a good chairperson? He or she must be authoritative yet flexible; impartial and impersonal; a quick thinker and an attentive listener; capable of succinct expression; ready to clarify views that have not been well expressed; mature and tolerant; equipped to handle disruption and inappropriate behavior; and courteous, but brisk and business-like. Humor can be a useful tool, if only to calm rising tempers. To manage difficult meetings, an essential characteristic of a good chairperson must surely be "helicopter vision."[4]

Different Kinds of Meetings

To practice with effect the generic tips for meeting management given above, a chairperson must also act on the knowledge that different kinds of meetings take place in working life. Each has its own nature and challenges (even though any one may have attributes of two or three of these). The kinds of meetings are

- **Briefings.** A briefing is called to direct or instruct. Such meetings are used to give information and instruction to subordinates, clear up misunderstandings, and integrate ideas and views where appropriate.
- **Advisory meetings.** An advisory meeting is called to share information. Such meetings are used to seek advice about a problem, inform participants about ideas, and listen to their views.
- **Committee meetings.** A committee meeting gathers interest groups to decide on matters of common concern. Such meetings are characterized by a sense of authority, compromise, and the resolution of differences by voting.
- **Council meetings.** A council meeting is held by persons of equal status to contribute to a matter at hand. Such meetings are typified by group accountability, the resolution of differences through discussion, and consensual decisions.
- **Negotiations.** A negotiation also sees interest groups gather but decisions are through bargaining, not voting. Such meetings are differentiated by quid pro quo decisions from sides having different but overlapping aims, with each seeking to achieve the best possible terms for itself.

> *When I give a lecture, I accept that people look at their watches, but what I do not tolerate is when they look at it and raise it to their ear to find out if it stopped.*
>
> —Marcel Achard
>
> *He who knows most grieves most for wasted time.*
>
> —Dante
>
> *Success depends upon previous preparation, and without such preparation there is sure to be failure.*
>
> —Confucius
>
> *When the outcome of a meeting is to have another meeting, it has been a lousy meeting.*
>
> —Herbert Hoover
>
> *Time is the scarcest resource; and unless it is managed, nothing else can be managed.*
>
> —Peter Drucker

Further Reading

ADB. 2008. *Conducting Successful Retreats.* Manila. Available: www.adb.org/documents/information/knowledge-solutions/conducting-successful-retreats.pdf

———. 2009. *Conducting Effective Presentations.* Manila. Available: www.adb.org/documents/information/knowledge-solutions/conducting-effective-presentations.pdf

John Adair. 1988. *Effective Time Management.* Pan Books.

[4] "Helicopter vision" is the ability and motivation to examine problems from a different perspective with concurrent attention to their details, place problems within a broader context by detecting relationships with systems of wider scope, and formulate and deliver one's work accordingly but based on a personal vision.

Knowledge Solutions

For further information

Contact Olivier Serrat, Head of the Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank (oserrat@adb.org).

The Five Whys Technique

by Olivier Serrat

When confronted with a problem, have you ever stopped and asked "why" five times? If you do not ask the right question, you will not get the right answer. The Five Whys is a simple question-asking technique that explores the cause-and-effect relationships underlying problems.

Rationale

For every effect there is a cause. But the results chain between the two is fairly long and becomes finer as one moves from inputs to activities, outputs, outcome, and impact.[1] In results-based management,[2] the degree of control one enjoys decreases higher up the chain and the challenge of monitoring and evaluating correspondingly increases.

In due course, when a problem appears, the temptation is strong to blame others or external events. Yet, the root cause of problems often lies closer to home.

For Want of a Nail

For want of a nail the shoe is lost;

For want of a shoe the horse is lost;

For want of a horse the rider is lost;

For want of a rider the battle is lost;

For want of a battle the kingdom is lost;

And all for the want of a horseshoe nail.

- George Herbert

The Five Whys Technique

When looking to solve a problem, it helps to begin at the end result, reflect on what caused that, and question the answer five times.[3] This elementary and often effective approach to problem solving promotes deep thinking through questioning, and can be adapted quickly and applied to most problems.[4] Most obviously and directly, the Five Whys technique relates to the principle of systematic problem-solving: without the intent of the principle, the technique can

[1] Inputs, activities, and outputs are within the direct control of an intervention's management. An outcome is what an intervention can be expected to achieve and be accountable for. An impact is what an intervention is expected to contribute to.

[2] Results-based management is a life-cycle management philosophy and approach that emphasizes results in integrated planning, implementing, monitoring, reporting, learning, and changing. Demonstrating results is important for credibility, accountability, and continuous learning, and to inform decision-making and resource allocation.

[3] Five is a good rule of thumb. By asking "why" five times, one can usually peel away the layers of symptoms that hide the cause of a problem. But one may also find one needs to ask "why" fewer times, or conversely more.

[4] Root cause analysis is the generic name of problem-solving techniques. The basic elements of root causes are materials, equipment, the man-made or natural environment, information, measurement, methods and procedures, people, management, and management systems. Other tools can be used if the Five Whys technique does not intuitively direct attention to one of these. They include barrier analysis, change analysis, causal factor tree analysis, and the Ishikawa (or fishbone) diagram.

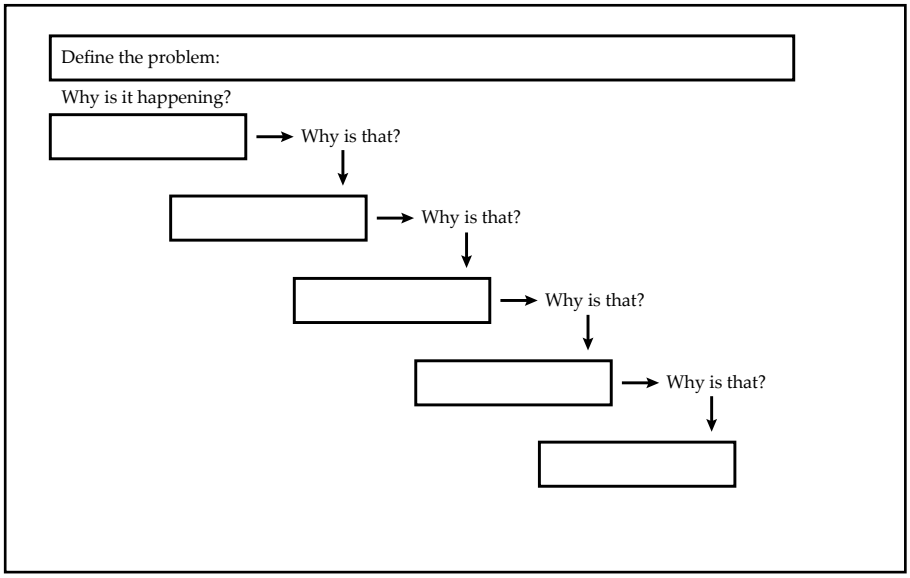
only be a shell of the process. Hence, there are three key elements to effective use of the Five Whys technique: (i) accurate and complete statements of problems,[5] (ii) complete honesty in answering the questions, (iii) the determination to get to the bottom of problems and resolve them. The technique was developed by Sakichi Toyoda for the Toyota Industries Corporation.

Process

The Five-Whys exercise is vastly improved when applied by a team and there are five basic steps to conducting it:

- Gather a team and develop the problem statement in agreement. After this is done, decide whether or not additional individuals are needed to resolve the problem.
- Ask the first "why" of the team: why is this or that problem taking place? There will probably be three or four sensible answers: record them all on a flip chart or whiteboard, or use index cards taped to a wall.
- Ask four more successive "whys," repeating the process for every statement on the flip chart, whiteboard, or index cards. Post each answer near its "parent." Follow up on all plausible answers. You will have identified the root cause when asking "why" yields no further useful information. (If necessary, continue to ask questions beyond the arbitrary five layers to get to the root cause.)
- Among the dozen or so answers to the last asked "why" look for systemic causes of the problem. Discuss these and settle on the most likely systemic cause. Follow the team session with a debriefing and show the product to others to confirm that they see logic in the analysis.
- After settling on the most probable root cause of the problem and obtaining confirmation of the logic behind the analysis, develop appropriate corrective actions to remove the root cause from the system. The actions can (as the case demands) be undertaken by others but planning and implementation will benefit from team inputs.

Five Whys Worksheet



[5] By repeating "why" five times, the nature of the problem as well as its solution becomes clear.

Caveat

The Five Whys technique has been criticized as too basic a tool to analyze root causes to the depth required to ensure that the causes are fixed. The reasons for this criticism include:

- The tendency of investigators to stop at symptoms, and not proceed to lower-level root causes.
- The inability of investigators to cast their minds beyond current information and knowledge.
- Lack of facilitation and support to help investigators ask the right questions.
- The low repeat rate of results: different teams using the Five Whys technique have been known to come up with different causes for the same problem.

Jeff Bezos and Root Cause Analysis

[The author explains how while he worked for Amazon.com in 2004 Jeff Bezos did something that the author still carries with him to this day. During a visit the Amazon.com Fulfillment Centers, Jeff Bezos learned of a safety incident during which an associate had damaged his finger. He walked to the whiteboard and began to use the Five Whys technique.]

Why did the associate damage his thumb?

Because his thumb got caught in the conveyor.

Why did his thumb get caught in the conveyor?

Because he was chasing his bag, which was on a running conveyor.

Why did he chase his bag?

Because he had placed his bag on the conveyor, which had then started unexpectedly.

Why was his bag on the conveyor?

Because he was using the conveyor as a table.

And so, the root cause of the associate's damaged thumb is that he simply needed a table. There wasn't one around and he had used the conveyor as a table. To eliminate further safety incidences, Amazon.com needs to provide tables at the appropriate stations and update safety training. It must also look into preventative maintenance standard work.

Source: Adapted from Shmula. 2008. Available: www.shmula.com/

Clearly, the Five Whys technique will suffer if it is applied through deduction only. The process articulated earlier encourages on-the-spot verification of answers to the current "why" question before proceeding to the next, and should help avoid such issues.

Further Reading

ADB. 2007. *Guidelines for Preparing a Design and Monitoring Framework.* Manila. Available: www.adb.org/documents/guidelines/guidelines-preparing-dmf/guidelines-preparing-dmf.pdf

——. 2008a. *Output Accomplishment and the Design and Monitoring Framework.* Manila. Available: http://www.adb.org/documents/information/knowledge-solutions/output-accomplishment.pdf

——. 2008b. *The Reframing Matrix*. Manila. Available: www.adb.org/Documents/Information/Knowledge-Solutions/the-reframing-matrix.pdf

——. 2009a. *Monthly Progress Notes.* Manila. Available: www.adb.org/documents/information/knowledge-solutions/monthly-progress-notes.pdf

——. 2009b. *Assessing the Effectiveness of Assistance in Capacity Development.* Manila. Available: www.adb.org/documents/information/knowledge-solutions/

For further information

Contact Olivier Serrat, Head of the Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank (oserrat@adb.org).

Focusing on Project Metrics

by Olivier Serrat

The need to ensure that scarce funding is applied to effective projects is a goal shared by all. Focusing on common parameters of project performance is a means to that end.

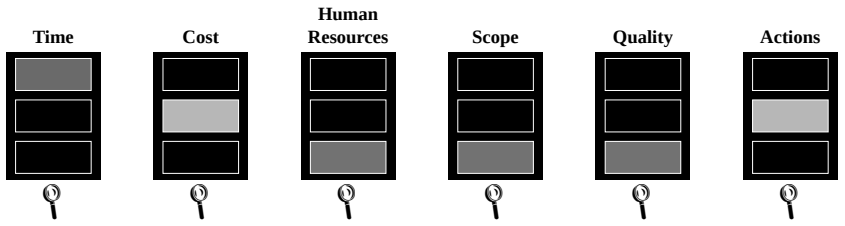
Six parameters are always given weight in methodologies for project management. They are

- Time
- Cost
- Human Resources
- Scope
- Quality
- Actions

By gauging performance against these parameters, an image of the parts of a project that are in order and of those that are not can be formed. Is the activity on schedule? Is the activity within budget? How many human resources are being expended? Is the activity's scope in line with original expectations? Is project personnel analyzing and fixing problems with quality actions? Are actions outstanding? If all lights are green, performance will be highly satisfactory in all areas. If one or more are orange, the activity will have one or more potential problems. A red light will signal a parameter that requires urgent attention.

Based on project documents, such as the design and monitoring framework, indicative activities schedule, and cost tables, as well as participatory mechanisms, review missions can assess the attainment of (usually quantified) benchmarks for each parameter by means of project metrics using the activity dashboard depicted below.

Figure: Activity Dashboard



For further information

Contact Olivier Serrat, Head of the Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank (oserrat@adb.org).

Growing Managers, Not Bosses

by Olivier Serrat

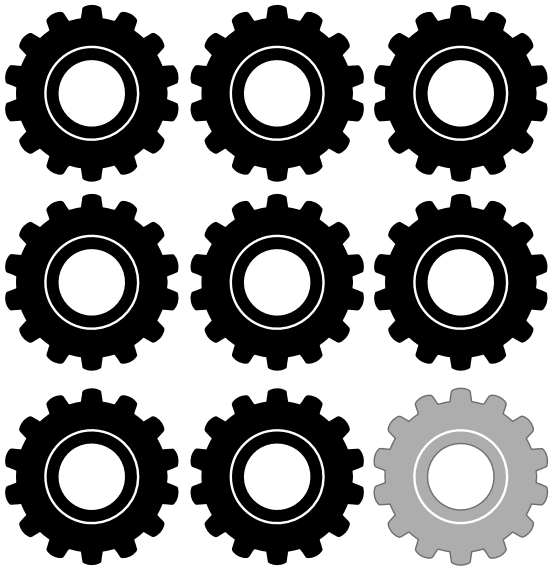
In the 21st century, managers are responsible for the application and performance of knowledge at task, team, and individual levels. Their accountability is absolute and cannot be relinquished. In a changing world, successful organizations spend more time, integrity, and brainpower on selecting them than on anything else.

Imagine

Your organization has the right strategy. It also has the right structure (since that follows strategy). Are you happy? Not yet. You do not have enough of the right stuff.

The Right Stuff

The right stuff are inspiring, caring, infusing, and initiating managers who go about their business quietly, on the word of Henry Mintzberg. Warren Bennis, always keen on leaders, sees them as white knights who can somehow herd cats. Most people would be happy with either variety. Indeed, they would be happy with any of the prototypical characters drawn in management textbooks.



But the fact is that such high-caliber material is not available for nearly all organizations.

So it is important to make the most of what organizations do have and to spend, therefore, more time, integrity, and brainpower on making people decisions than on anything else. There are good reasons for this: experience shows that one in three promotions ends in failure, that one in three is just about effective, and that one in three comes to pass right. The quality of promotion and staffing decisions reveals the values and standards of management and whether it takes its duties seriously.

Managerial Responsibility

> *Ninety percent of what we call "management" consists of making it difficult for people to get things done.*
>
> —Peter Drucker

To whom do these decisions relate? Let us look at what is required. In the 21st century, managers are responsible for the application and performance of knowledge at task, team, and individual levels. This accountability is absolute and cannot be relinquished. Once upon a time, the standard duties of managers were to set objectives, organize, communicate, energize, measure accomplishments, and develop people. Excepting the smallest organizations, they must now also know how to integrate worldwide phenomena into strategic decisions, take greater risks more often over longer periods, visualize their organization as a whole and blend their function within it, manage by objectives, inspire and motivate knowledge workers, build cohesive teams, and communicate information rapidly and succinctly. Some necessary generic attributes are enthusiasm, integrity, toughness, fairness, humanity, humility, and confidence. Without a doubt, management and its requirements are more complex and there is no room for safe mediocrity.

Manager Development

It follows, then, that managers must be groomed and developed for strategic, operational, and team leadership. (The long-standing, false dichotomy between managers and leaders is on its last legs: management is a role, leadership an attribute.) As luck would have it, however, the art of manager development is in its infancy. Mistaken beliefs abound: manager development is not about attending courses; it is not about finding potential; it is not about promotion or replacement planning; and it is definitely not a means to change personality. Its sole purpose is to make a person effective. For this reason, manager development must deal with the structure of management relations, with tasks, with the management skills that a person needs, and with the changes in behavior that are likely to sharpen existing skills and make them more operative. In sum, if managers are to be grown, the elements of identity that should be cultivated relate to quality (what a manager has to be), function (what a manager has to do), and situation (what a manager has to know).

Growing Managers

Human resource management needs to change. Too often, what passes for management of human resources has little to do with human resources and even less with management. Detractors say that most human resource divisions would be hard-pressed to prove that they are making a real difference. As a minimum, it should be recognized that the majority of people want to work productively and that managing them is the responsibility of their manager, not that of a human resource specialist. But there are vital roles that are best carried out by human resource divisions. One of them is growing managers, not bosses. There are implications for training, selection, coaching and mentoring, giving people who merit it the chance to manage, education for management and leadership, and strategies for manager development.

Afterword

These days, people do not so readily accept as manager someone whose credentials they do not admire. If persons are promoted because they are politicians, others will deride management for forcing them to become politicians, too. They will stop performing or they will quit. This should matter very much. When rewards and perquisites go to mere cleverness, obsequiousness, or nonperformance, an organization declines in tune with these attributes.

Further Reading

ADB. 2008. *Managing Knowledge Workers*. Manila. Available: www.adb.org/documents/information/knowledge-solutions/managing-knowledge-workers.pdf

John Adair. 2005. *The John Adair Handbook of Management and Leadership.* Viva Books Private Limited.

For further information

Contact Olivier Serrat, Head of the Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank (oserrat@adb.org).

Managing by Walking Around

by Olivier Serrat

Management by walking around emphasizes the importance of interpersonal contact, open appreciation, and recognition. It is one of the most important ways to build civility and performance in the workplace.

Background

The hallmarks of the modern organization are satellite offices, remote offices, home offices, virtual offices, hotelling facilities, and the electronic mail that underpins—and promotes—these. Today, knowledge workers receive few telephone calls and electronic mail is their communication vehicle of choice. (The use of videoconferencing is growing, too.) After all, why should they walk around if they can type, point, and click? At the receiving end, managers are known to collect more than 150 messages each day. Yet, as knowledge workers on the rise tote up electronic status, they also distance themselves from colleagues.

Managing by walking around was popularized by Tom Peters[1] and Robert Waterman in the early 1980s because it was (already then) felt that managers were becoming isolated from their subordinates. At Hewlett-Packard, where the approach was practiced from 1973, executives were encouraged to know their people, understand their work, and make themselves more visible and accessible. Bill Hewlett and Dave Packard's business philosophy, centered on deep respect for people and acknowledgment of their built-in desire to do a good job, had evolved into informal, decentralized management and relaxed, collegial communication styles. Theirs was the opposite of drive-by management.

[1] Peters saw managing by wandering around as the basis of leadership and excellence and called it the technology of the obvious.

Rationale

> *If you wait for people to come to you, you'll only get small problems. You must go and find them. The big problems are where people don't realize they have one in the first place.*
>
> –W. Edwards Deming
>
> *A desk is a dangerous place from which to view the world.*
>
> —John le Carré

The basic principle is that command-and-control is ineffective in modern organizations. Nothing is more instructive than seeing what actually transpires in the real world and learning from that. Management by walking around is a leadership technique that has stood the test of time and can be used by any manager. Except for virtual organizations[2]—and most of us still do not work through these even if we interface variously with them—face-to-face interaction remains a sure way to receive and give feedback wherever managers see staff regularly. Why? Because it is staff, not managers, who create an organization's products and deliver its services, and appreciation of that can only come from knowing what happens on the ground. Because people live to be part of something, and being intimately in touch opens up more lines of informal communication[3] and produces stronger team dynamics and performance. The human touch still works best.

Approach

Managing by walking around requires personal involvement, good listening skills, and the recognition that most people in an organization want to contribute to its success. It should not be forced and cannot be a charade. It works if you display sincerity and civility and are genuinely interested in staff and their work. Try to

1. Wander about as often as you can, but recurrently and preferably daily.
2. Relax as you make your rounds.
3. Share and invite good news.
4. Talk about family, hobbies, vacations, and sports.
5. Watch and listen without judgment.
6. Invite ideas and opinions to improve operations, products, services, etc.
7. Be responsive to problems and concerns.
8. Look out for staff doing something right, and give them public recognition.
9. Project the image of a coach and mentor, not that an inspector.
10. Give people on-the-spot help.
11. Use the opportunity to transmit the organization's values.
12. Swap value and legacy stories.
13. Share your dreams.
14. Have fun.

Benefits

Managing by walking around does not just cut through vertical lines of communication. It also

1. Builds trust and relationships.
2. Motivates staff by suggesting that management takes an active interest in people.
3. Encourages staff to achieve individual and collective goals.
4. Strengthens ability to drive cultural change for higher organizational performance.
5. Refreshes organizational values.

---

[2] Virtual organizations are organized entities, whether corporate or charitable, that do not exist in any one central location but instead exist solely through the Internet. There are social, psychological, ethical, and technical implications to the nature and rise of these, better discussed elsewhere.

[3] In high-performance organizations, the intensity of communications is unmistakable. It usually starts with an insistence on informality.

6. Makes work less formal.
7. Creates a healthy organization.

Further Reading

ADB. 2008a. *Managing Knowledge Workers.* Manila. Available: www.adb.org/documents/information/knowledge-solutions/managing-knowledge-workers.pdf

———. 2008b. *Storytelling*. Manila. Available: www.adb.org/documents/information/knowledge-solutions/storytelling.pdf

———. 2009. *Working in Teams*. Manila. Available: www.adb.org/documents/information/knowledge-solutions/working-in-teams.pdf

David Packard. 1995. *The HP Way: How Bill Hewlett and I Built Our Company*. HarperCollins Publishers.

For further information

Contact Olivier Serrat, Head of the Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank (oserrat@adb.org).

Managing Knowledge Workers

by Olivier Serrat

A knowledge worker is someone who is employed because of his or her knowledge of a subject matter, rather than ability to perform manual labor. They perform best when empowered to make the most of their deepest skills.

Rationale

Assumptions about people working in organizations are less and less tenable. One misleading notion is that they are subordinate employees retained around the clock; another is that they rely on their organization for livelihood and career. One hundred years ago, in the United States and Europe, the largest single group of workers labored in agriculture. Sixty years later, it consisted of technical, professional, and managerial people. Today, it is made up of knowledge workers who may practice at an organization but might not be its employees. And, if they are in full-time employment, fewer and fewer are subordinates.

What of it? Observers make out that working habits are shifting from lifetime employment in a single organization to portfolio work. Knowledge workers produce and distribute ideas and information rather than goods or services. They are individuals with different aspirations from the hierarchy-conscious personnel of the past; they are also mobile and they do leave. Hiring talented people is difficult. Keeping them is more difficult still. So, to plug the drain of intellectual capital in a competitive knowledge economy, knowledge workers should be treated as an asset rather than as a cost. Preferably, they should be managed as though they were partners (or at least volunteers).

Managing Talent

Making knowledgeable people perform is not a matter of making them work harder or more skillfully. Naturally, they are dedicated and such interventions are beside the point. Rather, the managerial task relates to removing obstacles to performance and then channeling efforts into areas that will contribute to the accomplishment of an organization's objective. For that reason, managing talented workers for performance is best understood as a process of influence. To begin, establish a framework in terms of culture, structure, and style of management in which the talent of knowledge workers can flourish. In exercising this process, accommodate these people's preferred ways of working. The result is that knowledge workers understand, identify with, and see how their own contribution can be enhanced. They put their best abilities to the test. They challenge and achieve. To build such a framework,

- Recognize outstanding talent wherever it is found.
- Establish clear task objectives and performance standards in consultation with each knowledge worker.
- Extend incentives, rewards, and reinforcements that meet the motivational patterns of each knowledge worker.
- Provide opportunities for improvement.

As organizations redesign in the knowledge economy, they will have to quickly address the elemental issue of motivation. Consider the major rewards typically provided to workers for effort (irrespective of the type of worker). Wages, for instance, cannot be consumed at work. Fringe benefits (such as leave, health and medical insurance, pay for overtime, or proceeds from stock purchase plans) yield satisfaction only when workers leave the organization. And, sadly, promotion often means little more than a bigger office, a resounding title, or a special parking place. Is it surprising then that so many workers perceive their job to be a form of punishment? The field of motivation is still wide open: but the organizations that thrive will have (more appetizing) menus of benefit options from which knowledge workers can choose.

...With Knowledge Managers

Certainly, knowledge workers require knowledge managers, not bosses. These new-era managers need to set and enforce on themselves exacting standards for their performance of those functions that determine ability to perform. Time and again, traditional managers exercise no leadership at all but only position power. Many reach the top by being tough and self-affirmative or by being the kind of person that others feel safe in following or promoting. Yet managing knowledge workers requires that managers themselves act as good follower and team player as well as leader and technologist. Since the process of influencing the performance of knowledge workers is mainly developmental, they need also to hone skills in appraising, coaching, mentoring, and providing feedback. One measure of their effectiveness will be by the quality of the (internal and external) relationships that they create.

The knowledge economy is pruning status, power, and upward mobility from the managerial role. From now on, would-be new-era managers will be asked to reply convincingly to a simple question: Why should a knowledge worker want to be managed by you?

For further information

Contact Olivier Serrat, Head of the Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank (oserrat@adb.org).

Notions of Knowledge Management

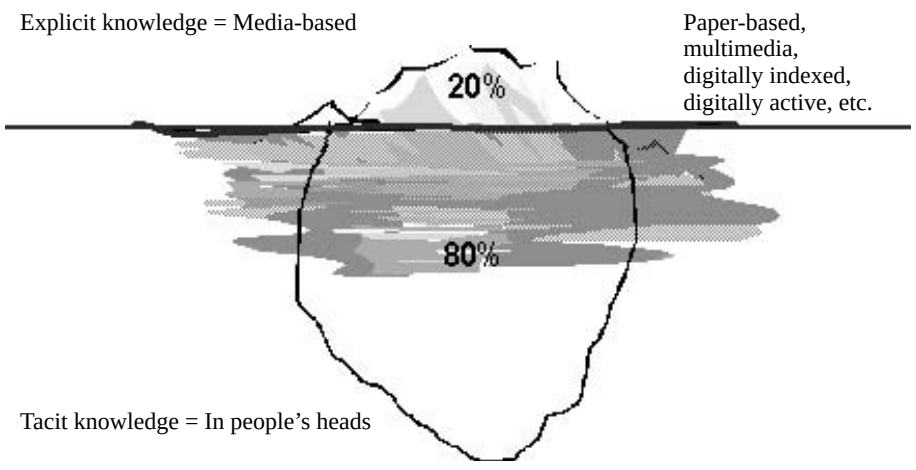
by Olivier Serrat

Knowledge management is getting the right knowledge to the right people at the right time, and helping them (with incentives) to apply it in ways that strive to improve organizational performance.

What is Knowledge?

Data are facts, and information is interpreted data. Knowledge is created and organized by flows of information, shaped by their holder. It is tacit or explicit. Tacit knowledge is nonverbalized, intuitive, and unarticulated knowledge that people carry in their heads. It is hard to formalize and communicate because it is rooted in skills, experiences, insight, intuition, and judgment, but it can be shared in discussion, storytelling, and personal interactions. It has a technical dimension, which encompasses skills and capabilities referred to as know-how. It has a cognitive dimension, which consists of beliefs, ideals, values, schemata, or mental models. Explicit knowledge is codified knowledge that can be expressed in writing, drawings, or computer programs, for example, and transmitted in various forms. Tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge are mutually complementary forms of meaning. Figure 1 exemplifies the iceberg metaphor used to describe the hidden nature of tacit knowledge.

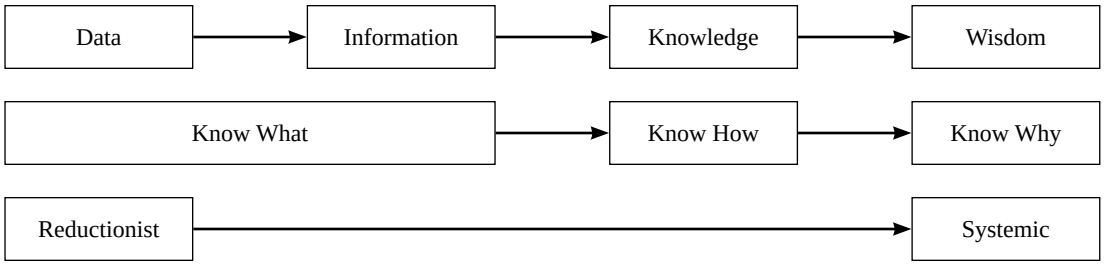
Figure 1: Knowledge Assets



Model of Learning Progression

Forms of meaning such as data and information are more rudimentary than knowledge. Knowledge is more rudimentary than wisdom. Data and information are associated with forms of knowing that are specific and limited. Knowledge is systemic and integrates reason, values, intellect, and intuition. The typical model of learning progression locates knowledge in relation to other forms of meaning. Figure 2 describes stages in human learning.

Figure 2: Model of Learning Progression



Knowledge Agents

Most models of knowledge management assume four agents of knowledge, namely the individual, the group, the organization, and the inter-organizational domain. They view knowledge and its creation as a spiral process from the individual to the group, the organization, and sometimes the inter-organizational domain. Figure 3 shows that each agent holds distinct forms of knowledge and performs work that the others cannot. Figure 4 reveals how knowledge is generated by interplay.

Figure 3: Knowledge Agents

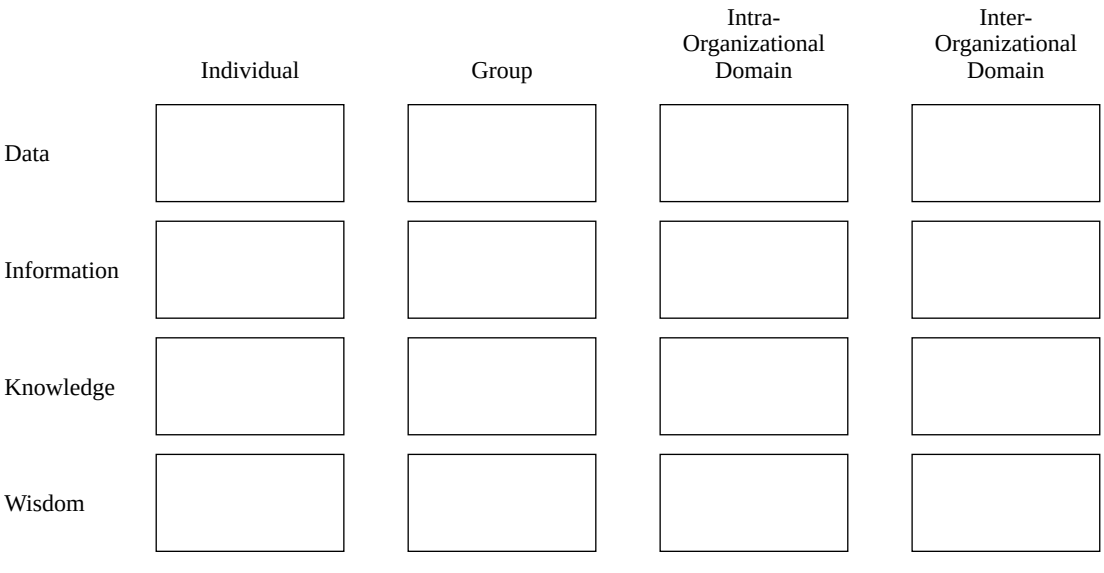
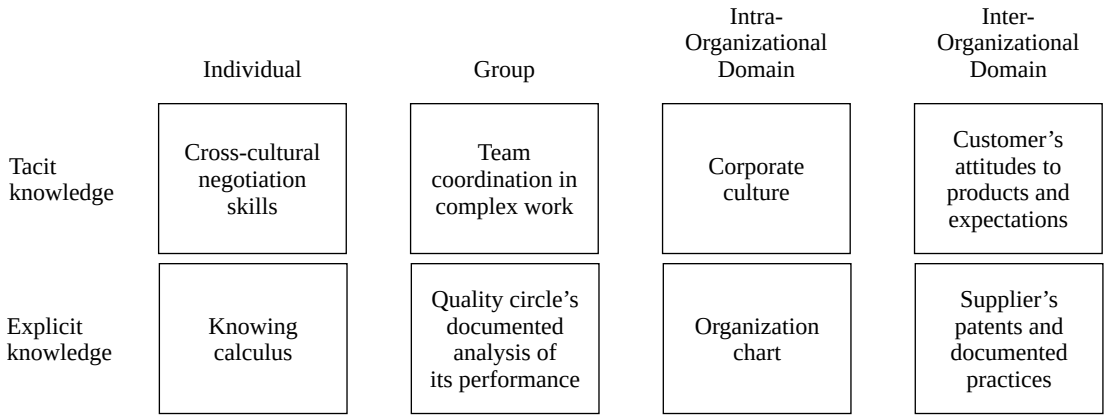


Figure 4: Knowledge Management Model



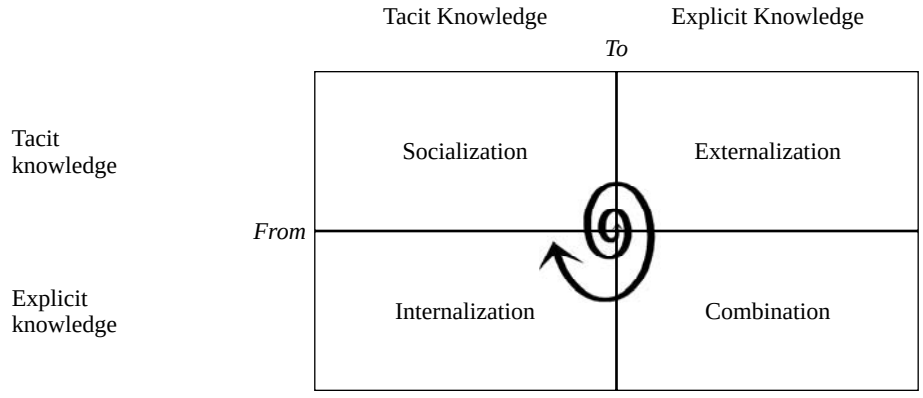
Source: Hedlund, G. and Nonaka, I. 1993. Models of Knowledge Management in the West and Japan. In Lorange, P. et al, eds. *Implementing Strategic Processes: Change, Learning, and Cooperation*. Macmillan: London.

Modes of Knowledge Creation

In large organizations, knowledge is created through continuous dialogue on tacit and explicit knowledge via four patterns of interactions: **socialization**, **externalization**, **combination**, and **internalization**.

Figure 5 frames the process of knowledge creation. Socialization is the process of creating common tacit knowledge through interactions including observation, imitation, or apprenticeships. Externalization is the process of articulating tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge by means of metaphors, analogies, or sketches. Combination is the process of assembling new and existing explicit knowledge into systemic knowledge such as a set of specifications for the prototype of a new product. Combination involves combining explicit knowledge through meetings and conversations or using information systems. Internalization converts explicit knowledge into tacit knowledge. Externalization converts tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge.

Figure 5: Modes of Knowledge Creation



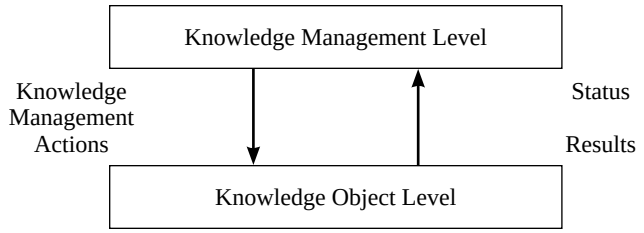
Source: Adapted from Nonaka, Ikujiro. 1994. A Dynamic Theory of Organizational Knowledge Creation. *Organization Science* (5:1), 14–37.

There are five conditions to encouraging the process of knowledge creation: intention, autonomy, creative chaos, redundancy, and requisite variety. Managers must be committed to accumulating, exploiting, and renewing the knowledge base within the organization and be able to create management systems that will facilitate the process. New ideas usually develop at the individual level, rather than at the group or organization levels, and the individuals generating it must be given scope to follow their initiatives. This process of exploration can be encouraged by creative chaos, where flux and crisis cause people to reconsider precepts at a fundamental level. Incentives can then be given to exchange knowledge rather than ration or hoard it. The organization should be made to be conducive to this.

Knowledge Management Levels

Management implies a set of activities directed at an object. Figure 6 defines two aspects of knowledge management: a knowledge management level dealing with a knowledge object level.

Figure 6: Levels in Knowledge Management



If knowledge is an organizational asset, as resource-based views of organizations suggest, its management will need to live up to objectives that are common to all resources. Typically, these objectives endeavor to make sure that the resource is delivered at the right time, available at the right place, present in the right shape, obtained at the lowest possible cost, and of the required quality. Apart from the question of how to achieve this, it must be understood that knowledge does have properties that set it apart from other resources. It is intangible and difficult to measure, volatile, and embodied in agents with wills. It is not consumed in a process; conversely, it can increase with use. It cannot always be bought on the market; on the contrary, its development can require lead time. It is nonrival in that it can be used by different processes simultaneously. And, its use can have wide-ranging impacts.

Knowledge Management Architecture

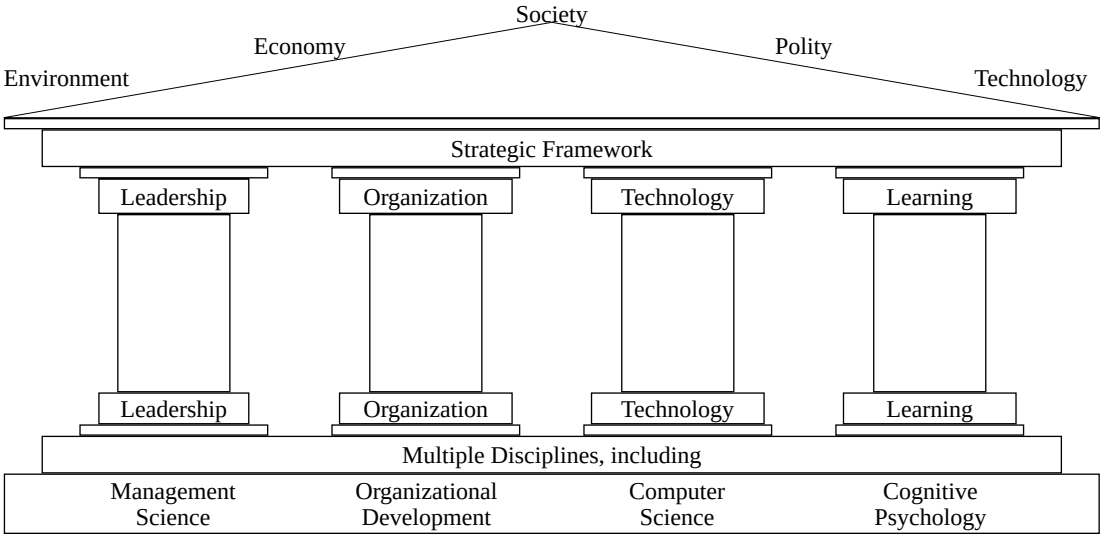
The architecture of knowledge management must be strengthened in support of organization-wide initiatives. Figure 7 shows its four pillars to be leadership, organization, technology, and learning. Figure 8 exemplifies the need to seek balanced interconnectivity.

- **Leadership.** Leadership develops the strategies necessary to position for success in an environment. Those strategies determine vision and must align knowledge management with business tactics to drive the values of knowledge management throughout the organization. Focus must be placed on building executive support. Successful implementation of a knowledge management strategy requires champions at or near the top of an organization.
- **Organization.** Respect for knowledge must pervade an organization. Introducing knowledge management requires organizational change, and knowledge management inevitably acts as a catalyst to transform the organization's culture. The increasing value placed on capable people, rising job complexity, and the universal availability of information on the Internet are fundamental changes contributing to attempts to leverage

knowledge management solutions. To begin to change an organization, knowledge management must be integrated into business processes and connected to changes in organizational culture.

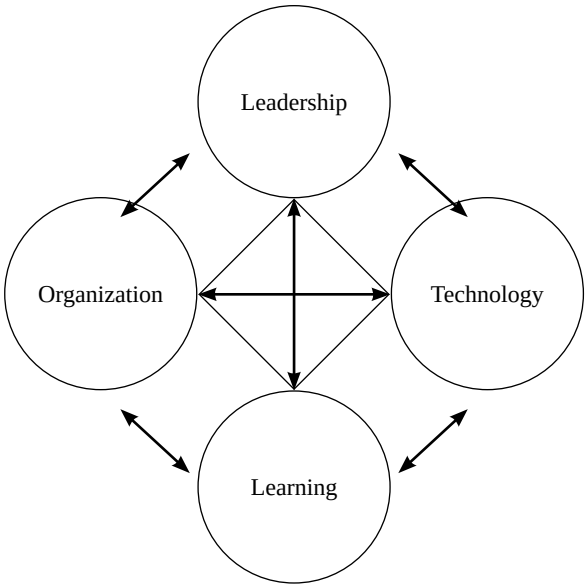
- **Technology.** Knowledge management tools are essential to achieving knowledge management strategies. However, any technical solution must add value to the process and achieve measurable improvements. Properly assessing and defining information technology capabilities is essential, as is identifying and deploying best-of-breed knowledge management tools to match and align with the organization's requirements. Ten processes that must be built collectively make up full-function knowledge management:
  - capture and store,
  - search and retrieve,
  - send critical information to individuals or groups,
  - structure and navigate,
  - share and collaborate,
  - synthesize,
  - profile and personalize,
  - solve or recommend,
  - integrate, and
  - maintain.
- **Learning.** People are responsible for using knowledge management tools in support of organizational performance. Organizational learning must be addressed with approaches such as increasing internal communications, promoting cross-functional teams, and creating a learning community. Learning is an integral part of knowledge management. In this context, learning can be described as the acquisition of knowledge or a skill through study, experience, or instruction. Organizations must recognize that people operate and communicate through learning that includes the social processes of collaborating, sharing knowledge, and building on each other's ideas. Managers must recognize that knowledge resides in people and that knowledge creation occurs through the process of social interaction.

Figure 7: Knowledge Management Architecture



Source: Adapted from Stankosky, Michael 2000. A Theoretical Framework. *KM World*. Special Millennium Issue.

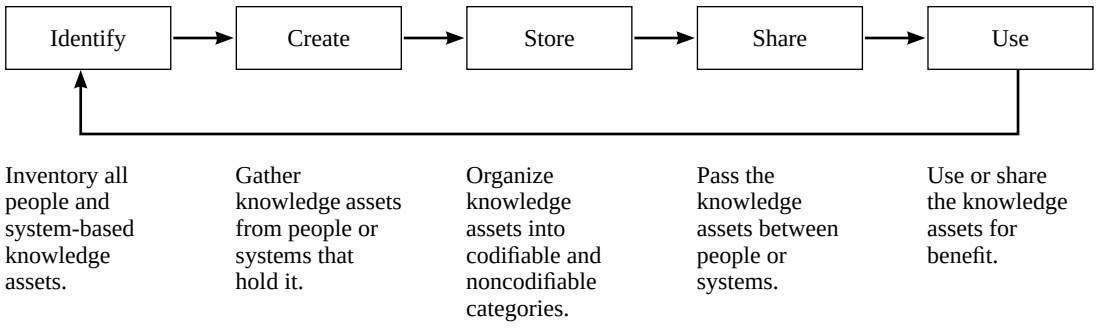
Figure 8: Balanced Knowledge Management



Core Knowledge Activities

Knowledge management activities can be described in relation to many different disciplines and approaches but almost all focus on five basic activities: identify, create, store, share, and use. Figure 9 interprets the routine associated with core knowledge activities.

Figure 9: Core Knowledge Activities

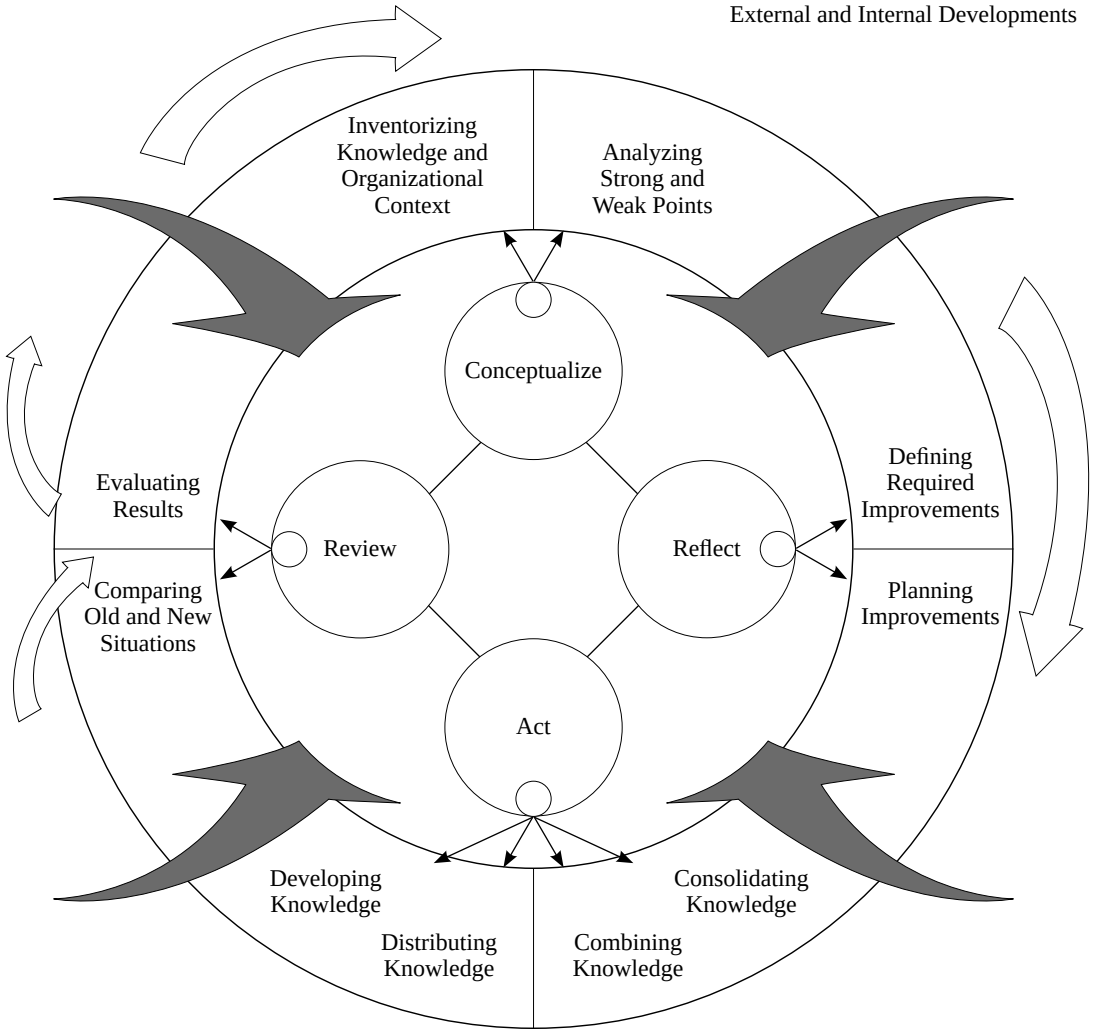


Knowledge Management Activities

Treating knowledge as a resource opens up promising opportunities for knowledge management activities. These can be split into four categories, each impacting a particular time segment of the knowledge management cycle. They relate to reviewing, conceptualizing, reflecting, and acting.

Reviewing involves checking what has been achieved in the past and what the current state of affairs is. Conceptualizing entails sitting back, trying to grasp the state of knowledge in the organization, and analyzing the strong and weak points of its knowledge architecture. Reflecting calls for directing toward improvements by selecting the optimal plans for correcting bottlenecks and analyzing them for risks that might accompany their implementation. Acting is the actual effectuation of the plans selected. Figure 10 delineates the knowledge management cycle and the methods and techniques that drive it.

Figure 10: Knowledge Management Cycle



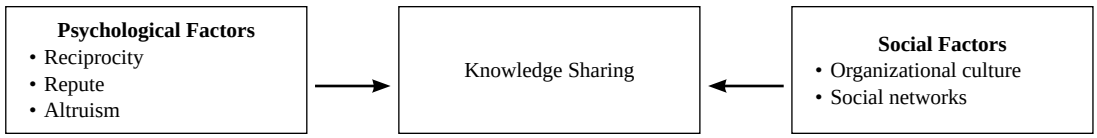
Most of the time, the actions will be one or a combination of generic operations that involve developing knowledge, i.e., buying knowledge, establishing learning programs; distributing knowledge, i.e., channeling knowledge to the points of action, preparing manuals, connecting networks; combining knowledge, i.e., finding synergies, reusing existing knowledge; and consolidating knowledge, i.e., preventing knowledge from disappearing, instituting tutoring programs, establishing knowledge transfer programs.

Cultural Roadblocks to Knowledge Management Success

Culture has been characterized as the glue that holds organizations together. It can, for instance, be a critical success factor in the execution of strategy. It can play a crucial role in determining the success or failure of operations. At the micro level, there are close relationships between organizational culture, employee satisfaction, and job commitment and turnover. As one might expect, organizational culture plays a pivotal role in knowledge management.

Organizational culture is shaped by many factors, some of which can be changed while others are intractable. Organizations adapt to their external environments by designing responsive structures and systems, adopting relevant technologies, and harvesting appropriate skills and qualities. Though constrained by their external environments, organizations make choices that, collectively, eventually define their cultures. These choices are influenced by the mission, values, and norms of each organization and the assumptions of its leaders. In due course, the choices will also define the success or failure of knowledge management initiatives. Thus, knowledge is inextricably bound to human cognition, and its management will occur within a structured psychological and social context. Figure 11 juxtaposes the psychological and social barriers that impact knowledge sharing.

Figure 11: Barriers Affecting Knowledge Sharing



Psychological Factors

Knowledge represents a source of power to people. By sharing valuable knowledge with a colleague, one runs the risk of diminishing one's value in an organization; potentially, one is no longer indispensable. There are three conditions under which, as an employee, one will share knowledge: reciprocity, repute, and altruism. One's time and energy are finite and one will more often than not take the time to help a colleague if one is likely to receive valuable knowledge in return, either now or in the future. In addition, it is in one's interest to be viewed as an expert in an organization; if one does not have a reputation for expertise, one's knowledge cannot represent a source of power. Likewise, before sharing, one needs to be certain that colleagues will acknowledge the source of knowledge and will not claim credit for it. But, in a process akin to self-gratification, there is also the need to talk to others about subjects that one finds fascinating and important.

Following resource-based views of organizations, which identify knowledge as potentially the primary source of sustainable competitive advantage, one can imagine that there are internal markets for knowledge within organizations. Knowledge is exchanged between buyers and sellers, with reciprocity, repute, and altruism functioning as payment mechanisms. Trust, however, is an essential condition to the smooth functioning of such a market. This trust can exist at an individual level, through close working relationships between colleagues, or at group and organization levels, by the creation of a cultural context that encourages and rewards knowledge sharing and discourages and penalizes knowledge hoarding.

Social Factors

Organizational culture, and the social networks that frame it, is the most frequently cited roadblock to knowledge management success. Based on understanding of psychological factors, the onus is on leadership to drive people-focused knowledge management and move from old to new knowledge management paradigms. People are more likely to understand and energetically support an initiative when they observe leadership behavior that is both credible and supportive. Box 1 summarizes the differences between what may be termed industrial and knowledge cultures.

Box 1: Industrial and Knowledge Culture Paradigms

Industrial Culture
- Limited information distribution
- Many management levels
- Uneven responsibility
- Rules based
- Structured
- Risk averse
- Inward orientation
- Occasional training
- Financial focus
- Political

Knowledge Culture
- Wide information distribution
- Few management levels
- Shared responsibility
- Principles based
- Unstructured
- Able to take some risks
- Outward orientation
- Continuous learning
- Marketing focus
- Open

The table below makes observations on organization and culture, and suggests what might lie a little beyond the knowledge culture. One may appreciate that
- cultures are not static (there is movement from left to right);
- individuals who are absorbed in a particular culture tend to find the culture to the right a little meaningless and the culture to the left almost valueless;
- transition from one culture to another is not smooth; and
- the concepts of control, responsibility, and contribution provide interesting analytical links between cultures.

Table: Organization and Culture

	Feudal Culture	Industrial Culture	Knowledge Culture	Creativity Culture
Organization	Territorial	Hierarchies	Networks	Flows
Focus	Land	Profit	Customer	Innovation
Culture	Domination Control	Control Responsibility	Responsibility Contribution	Contribution Creativity
Key Measure	Quantity	Efficiency	Effectiveness	Quality of Life

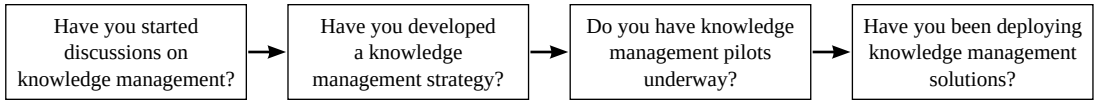
Assessing the Behavior–Performance Continuum

Within any organization there may also be a variety of cultures—shaped by characteristic differences in professional orientation, status, power, visibility, and other factors. Understanding these cultures in terms of their expected behaviors helps to appreciate why organizational units can exhibit behaviors that are opposite to the organization's expressed mission, values, and norms. At a more pressing level, behaviors can also temper what cooperation is displayed in a group. Thus, cultures create behaviors, some of which can result in obstructive (or at least nonconstructive) interactions that limit knowledge sharing and, in the fullness of time, hold back knowledge management. Assessing the behavior-performance continuum of key stakeholders in knowledge management initiatives will spell the difference between success or failure. It transcends the notion of knowledge flows that is fundamental to knowledge management initiatives and has deep implications for fostering ownership among those involved in associated efforts.

Early Pathways to Progress

Figure 12 poses simple questions to locate an organization's progress toward knowledge management. Box 2 highlights early pathways to progress.

Figure 12: Where Are You in the Journey?



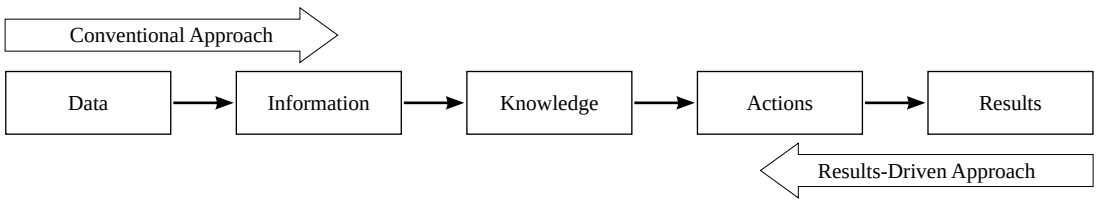
Box 2: Early Signposts to Knowledge Management

- Knowledge products and services are strategic and must be accounted for and valued accordingly.
- Knowledge management requires integration and balancing of leadership, organization, technology, and learning in an organization-wide setting.
- Knowledge management must both meet the requirements of and conditions for success and the desired benefits and expectations of the organization.
- Organizational culture affects knowledge management, especially at the lower levels.
- Streamlined organizations with strong organizational cultures have a higher chance of success in knowledge management.
- An atmosphere of trust is a precondition to knowledge sharing.
- Proposals for knowledge management should include both soft and hard measures if managers are to support knowledge management initiatives.
- The success factors for knowledge management are dominated by management concerns for people, process, and outcome orientation. They are interspersed throughout the knowledge management architecture of leadership, organization, technology, and learning.

Getting Results from Knowledge Management

First and foremost, knowledge management is about results. Figure 2 described the typical model of learning progression under which data are analyzed to generate information, information is placed in context to produce knowledge, and evaluated knowledge begets wisdom (or informed actions). However, there are limits to looking upstream and concentrating on the supply of knowledge. It can result in the creation of unfocused data and information whereby strategy is blindly driven by technology. It is also helpful to examine the desired results and deduce what knowledge will be required to accomplish them. Figure 13 demonstrates how awareness of the stages in human learning can be exercised to imbed the relationships between forms of meaning to focus on results. It reinforces the idea that knowledge management is primarily a matter of people, process, and outcome orientation.

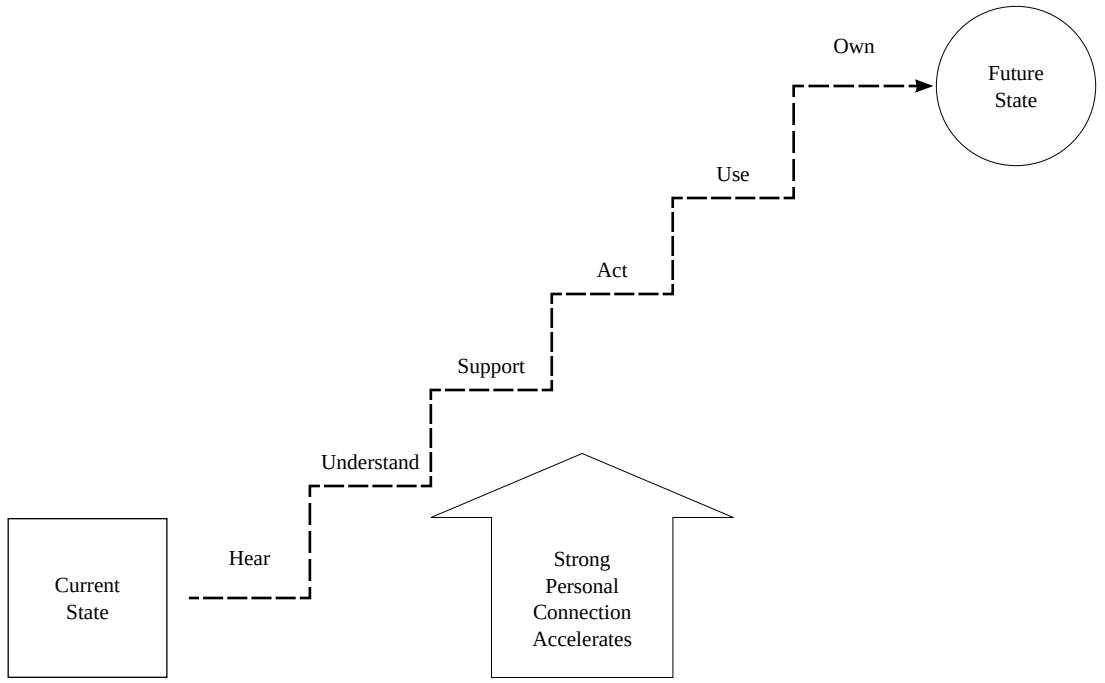
Figure 13: A Results-Driven Knowledge Management Model



Building Commitment

As part of an approach to managing change programs, it is helpful to observe the stages that people live through before committing to a new way of working. From simple awareness, they must first hear, then understand the change. Based on the actions of leaders and peers, they then opt to support the change and can be seen to act in the desired manner. Commitment is built when they use the new way of working in regular activities and finally own the change in their environment. At every stage, commitment is fragile and invokes active sponsorship from leaders. Figure 14 illustrates the process of committing to change.

Figure 13: A Results-Driven Knowledge Management Model



Further Reading

ADB. 2007. *Learning Lessons in ADB*. Manila.
Available: www.adb.org/documents/reports/learning-lessons-adb/strategic-framework-2007-2009.asp
——. 2008. *Auditing the Lessons Architecture*. Manila.
Available: www.adb.org/documents/studies/auditing-lessons-architecture/IN371-07.asp

For further information

Contact Olivier Serrat, Head of the Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank (oserrat@adb.org).

Output Accomplishment and the Design and Monitoring Framework

by Olivier Serrat

The design and monitoring framework is a logic model for objectives-oriented planning that structures the main elements in a project, highlighting linkages between intended inputs, planned activities, and expected results.

Logic models (results frameworks) neither guarantee a good project (or program) design nor replace other instruments of project management. But they help to analyze problems; identify desired outcomes; establish a logical hierarchy of means by which the desired outcomes will be reached; identify clusters of outputs; determine how accomplishments might be monitored and evaluated, and planned and actual results compared; flag the assumptions on which a project is based and the associated risks; summarize a project in a standard format; build consensus with stakeholders; and create ownership of the project.

Table 1: The Design and Monitoring Framework

Design Summary	Performance Targets and Indicators	Data Sources and Reporting Mechanisms	Assumptions and Risks
Impact: The broader impact of the project at a sectoral and national level	Measures of the extent to which the project has contributed to the impact	Sources of information and ways to gather and report it	Assumptions and risks at the impact level are beyond the control of the project but essential to attainment of the impact
Outcome: The expected outcome at the end of the project	Conditions at the end of the project indicating that its outcome has been achieved	Sources of information and ways to gather and report it	Assumptions and risks at the outcome level are those that relate to attainment of outcome targets
Outputs: The direct results of the project (works, goods, and services)	Measures of the quantity and quality of outputs and the timing of their delivery	Sources of information and ways to gather and report it	Assumptions and risks at the output level are those that are external and beyond the control of the project implementers but essential for successful attainment of the outputs
Activities with Milestones: The tasks executed to deliver the outputs identified			**Inputs:** The various resource categories required to undertake the project should be identified

They also support creative analysis. It is a rare project that unfolds exactly according to plan. During project implementation, one must pay close attention to the cause-and-effect relationships between inputs, activities with milestones, outputs, outcome, and impact. Repeatedly, one must make certain that inputs for activities are deployed successfully. Or one must adjust the means of attaining the outcome, including the definition of outputs, the mix of activities, and the indicators needed to measure accomplishment of the newly defined performance targets. Administration can become complex and it helps to have structure. Because of this, it is useful to deepen and extend typical logic models, for example, using the tool depicted below. (It lists only two targets per output). For each output, one can examine methodically whether targets are being achieved, how the activities are being implemented, and how activities might be improved. One can then itemize individual action plans, which should be monitored constantly.

Table 2: Analysis of Output Accomplishment and Improvement of Activities

Output			Nº
Targets			Nº
			Nº
Is the output being accomplished?	Yes	Partially	No
Are the targets being achieved?			
Nº			
Nº			
How are the targets being implemented?			
Strength		**Weakness**	
Nº	Nº		
Nº	Nº		
How can the activities be improved?			
Proposed Change		**Justification**	
Nº	Nº		
Nº	Nº		
Action plan to improve the activities			
Action		**Target Date**	
Nº	Nº		
Nº	Nº		

Systematic analysis of output accomplishment leads to telling improvements in relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability, thereby achieving impact. It clarifies materially the chain of causality in a design and monitoring framework.

Further Reading

ADB. 2007. Guidelines for Preparing a Design and Monitoring Framework. Manila.
Available: www.adb.org/documents/guidelines/guidelines-preparing-dmf/guidelines-preparing-dmf.pdf

For further information

Contact Olivier Serrat, Head of the Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank (oserrat@adb.org).

Picking Investments in Knowledge Management

by Olivier Serrat

What can be measured is not necessarily important and what is important cannot always be measured. When prioritizing investments in knowledge management, common traps lie waiting. They are delaying rewards for quick wins, using too many metrics, implementing metrics that are hard to control, and focusing on metrics that tear people away from business goals.

The Limitations of Traditional Metrics

How can investments in knowledge management be picked? This is no easy matter. What can be measured is not necessarily important and what is important cannot always be measured. Not surprisingly, despite the wide implementation of knowledge management initiatives, a systematic and comprehensive assessment tool to prioritize investments in knowledge management in terms of return on investment is not available. This owes to the difficulty of demonstrating direct linkages between investments in knowledge management and organizational performance, most of which can only be inferred, and the fact that the miscellany of possible knowledge management initiatives calls for both quantitative and qualitative approaches. This is indeed the rationale behind the Balanced Scorecard introduced by Robert Kaplan and David Norton in 1992, whose qualities make it quite useful as a knowledge management metric.

Common Traps

When prioritizing investments in knowledge management, common traps lie waiting. They are

- delaying rewards for quick wins,
- using too many metrics,
- implementing metrics that are hard to control, and
- focusing on metrics that tear people away from business goals.

Until the state of the art is better developed, it is in the final analysis recommended to consider knowledge management initiatives as a portfolio of well-balanced investments.

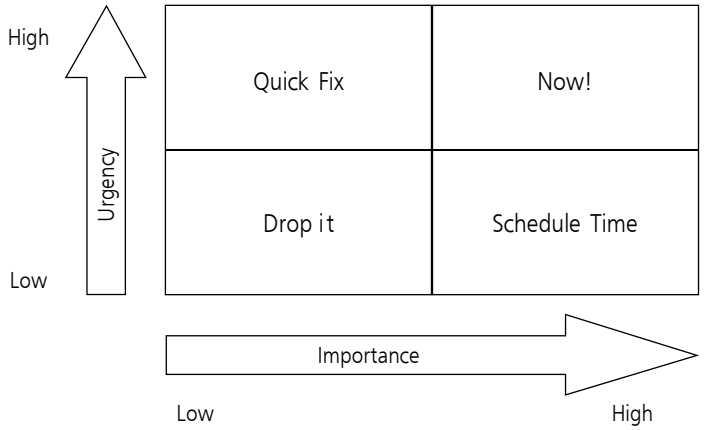
A Purposeful Medley of Insights

Figures 1–8 present a purposeful medley of insights that can help pick investments in knowledge management. They cover in turn

- a time management approach to full agendas that focuses on importance and urgency;
- generic features of a portfolio of knowledge management initiatives;
- ways to map knowledge management initiatives by knowledge agent, form of knowledge, and core knowledge activity;
- four broad aspects that sustain an innovative organization;
- five areas of value creation in knowledge products and services;
- ways to locate knowledge management initiatives in an options space;
- a multi-staged review process to underpin knowledge product and service development; and
- an approach to strategic management that balances the financial perspective.

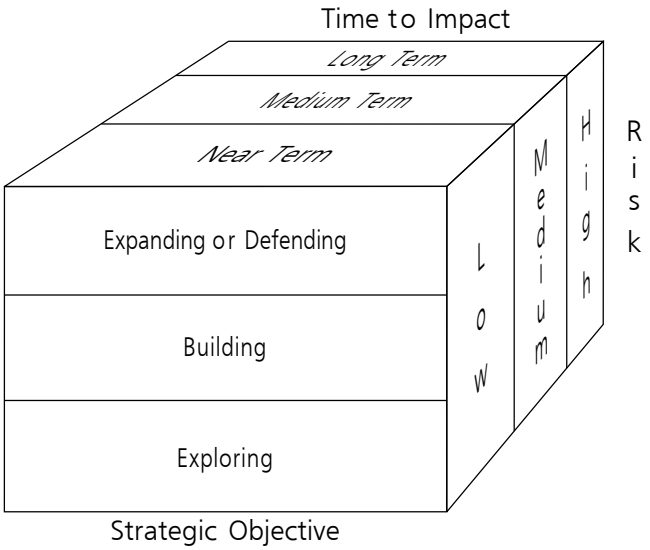
In the spirit of learning, readers are invited to ponder the usefulness of each depending on context.

Figure 1: Eisenhower Matrix



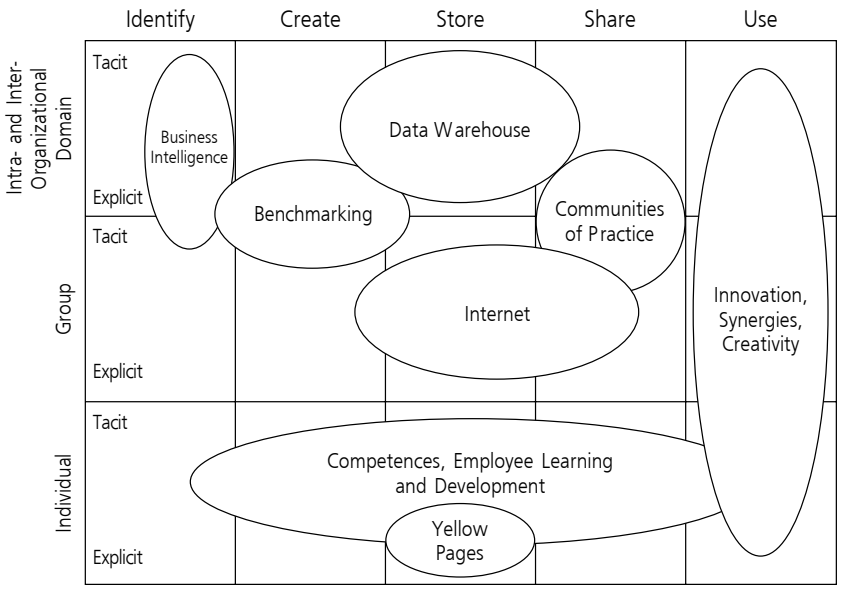
Source: Stephen Covey. 1989. *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People: Restoring the Character Ethic*. Simon and Schuster.
Note: Dwight Eisenhower is the originator of the matrix.

Figure 2: Knowledge Management Investment Features



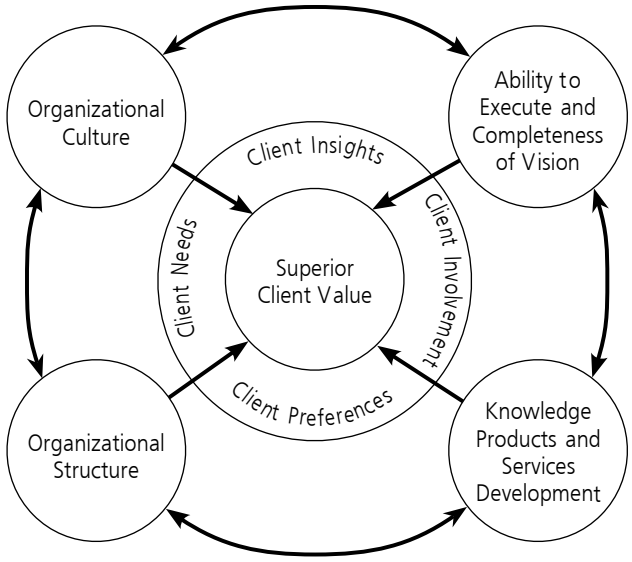
Source: Adapted from Amrit Tiwana. 2000. *The Knowledge Management Toolkit: Orchestrating IT, Strategy, and Knowledge Platforms*. Prentice Hall.

Figure 3: Mapping Knowledge Management Investments



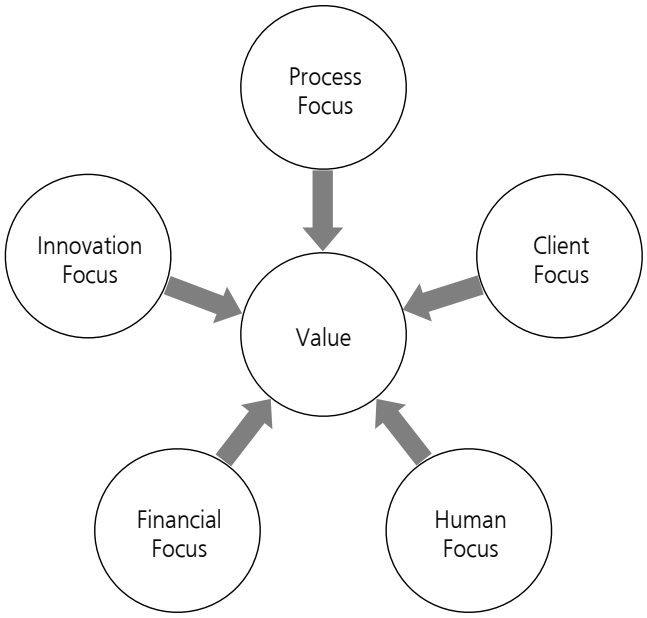
Source: Adapted from Charles Despres and Danièle Chauvel. 2000. How to Map Knowledge Management. In *Mastering Information Management*, edited by Donald Marchand and Thomas Davenport. Prentice Hall.

Figure 4: Innovative Knowledge Product and Service Development



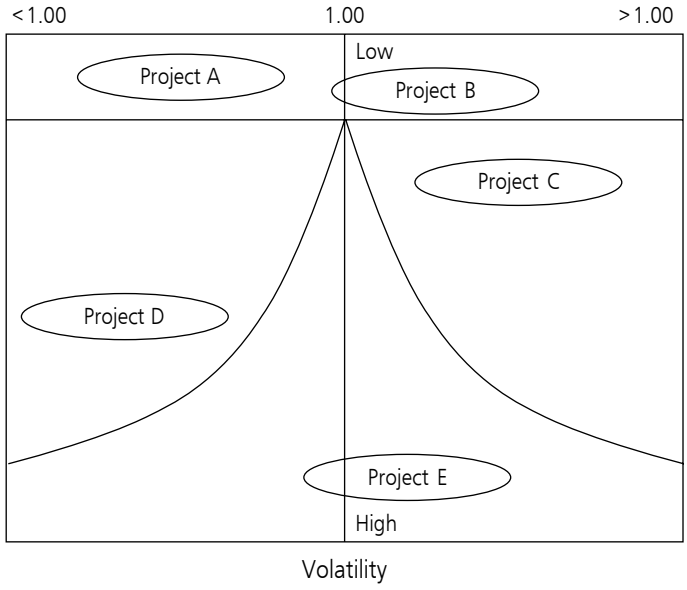
Source: Adapted from Simon Knox. 2002. The Boardroom Agenda: Developing the Innovative Organization. *Corporate Governance: International Journal of Business in Society*. Vol. 2, No. 1: 27–36. Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Figure 5: Value Creation in Knowledge Products and Services



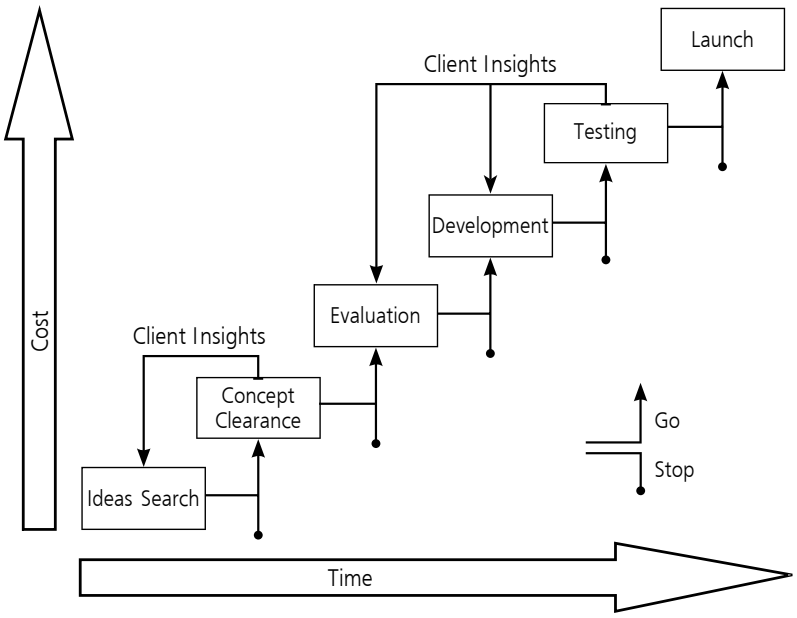
Source: Paul Iske and Willem Boersma. 2005. Connected Brains—Question and Answer Systems for Knowledge Sharing: Concepts, Implementation, and Return on Investment. *Journal of Knowledge Management*. Vol. 9, No.1: 126–145. Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Figure 6: Value-to-Cost Ratio



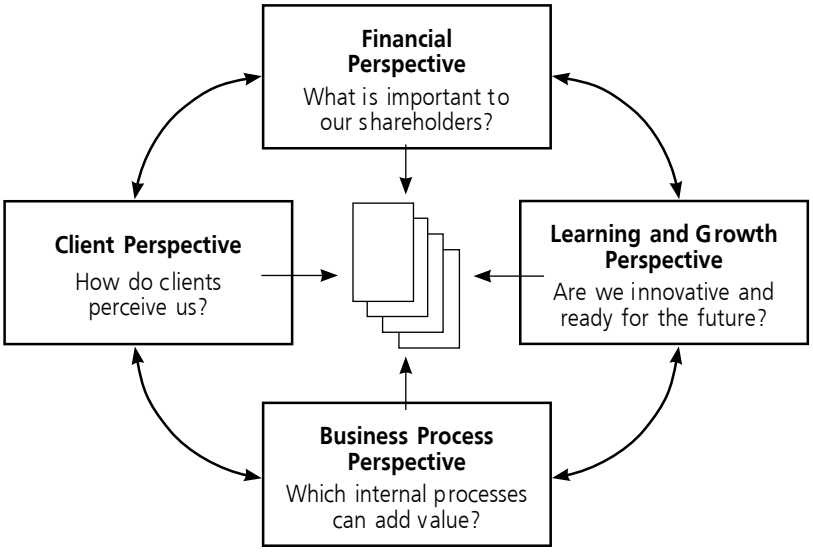
Source: Adapted from Amrit Tiwana. 2000. *The Knowledge Management Toolkit: Orchestrating IT, Strategy, and Knowledge Platforms*. Prentice Hall.

Figure 7: The Knowledge Product and Service Development Process



Source: Adapted from Simon Knox. 2002. The Boardroom Agenda: Developing the Innovative Organization. *Corporate Governance: International Journal of Business in Society*. Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 27–36. Emerald Group Publishing Limited

Figure 8: Balanced Scorecard



Source: Robert Kaplan and David Norton. 1992. The Balanced Scorecard: Measures that Drive Performance. *Harvard Business Review*. January–February: 71–80.

Further Reading

ADB. 2007. *Learning Lessons in ADB*. Manila. Available: www.adb.org/documents/reports/learning-lessons-adb/strategic-framework-2007-2009.asp

——. 2008. *Auditing the Lessons Architecture*. Manila. Available: www.adb.org/documents/studies/auditing-lessons-architecture/IN371-07.asp

For further information

Contact Olivier Serrat, Head of the Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank (oserrat@adb.org).

Knowledge Solutions

The Reframing Matrix

by Olivier Serrat

Everyone sees things differently—knowledge often lies in the eye of the beholder. The reframing matrix enables different perspectives to be generated and used in management processes. It expands the number of options for solving a problem.

Rationale

Perspective is a mental view, an ingrained way of perceiving the world. Different people have different experiences and see in different ways: understanding how they do expands the range of solutions that one might devise to address a question or problem.

Definition

The reframing matrix is a simple technique that helps examine problems from distinct viewpoints. In other words, individuals or groups place themselves in the mindsets of different people and imagine what solutions the latter might come up with. The reframing matrix was devised by Michael Morgan.

Process

The reframing matrix lays a question (or problem) in the middle of a four-box grid. It is then examined from four typical business perspectives

- **Program Perspective:** Are there issues with the program (or product or service) we are delivering?
- **Planning Perspective:** Is the business (or communications plan) appropriate?
- **Potential Perspective:** Is the program replicable? Can it be scale up?
- **People Perspective:** What do the people involved think?

The figure below offers one example of the so-called Four Ps Approach, with illustrative questions aimed at a new program that is not raising funds effectively.

Figure: The New Program Does Not Raise Funds Effectively

Program Perspective Is the program attractive? Has the program been proved elsewhere? Is the program technically sound?	**Planning Perspective** Are we approaching the right donors? Do we have the right strategy? Does the implementation plan make sense?
The new program does not raise funds effectively.	
Potential Perspective Is the program replicable? Can the program be scaled up?	**People Perspective** What do beneficiaries think of the program? What does staff think of the program? Why are donors funding other programs?

Source: Adapted from Ben Ramalingam. 2006. *Tools for Knowledge and Learning: A Guide for Development and Humanitarian Organizations*. Overseas Development Institute. Available: www.odi.org.uk/Rapid/Publications/Documents/KM_toolkit_web.pdf.

Then again, the four-box grid can be used to consider a question (or problem) from the perspectives of different groups of stakeholders, e.g., staff, clients, suppliers, and partners, or specialists, e.g., engineers, lawyers, economists, or information technology specialists. The table below shows how one might figure out the potential perspectives of internal and external stakeholders in the context of a development agency.

Table: Stakeholder Perspectives

Headquarters	• Director General • Director • Program/project officer • Counsel • Cofinancing officer • Control officer • Procurement specialist • Evaluation specialist	How would each stakeholder perceive the question (or problem) What would each stakeholder see as benefits and drawbacks? What might each stakeholder see as potential benefits and drawbacks? What solutions might each stakeholder offer? How relevant is each stakeholder to the situation at hand?
Field office	• Project manager • International consultant • National counterpart	
Beneficiaries	• Farmers/fishers • Women • Children and youth • Ethnic minorities • Local authorities	
Partners	• Executing agency • Implementation support agencies • Civil society • Financing agency	

Source: Adapted from Ben Ramalingam. 2006. *Tools for Knowledge and Learning: A Guide for Development and Humanitarian Organizations*. Overseas Development Institute. Available: www.odi.org.uk/Rapid/Publications/Documents/KM_toolkit_web.pdf

Further Reading

Michael Morgan. 1993. *Creating Workforce Innovation: Turning Individual Creativity into Organizational Innovation*. Allen & Unwin.

For further information

Contact Olivier Serrat, Head of the Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank (oserrat@adb.org).

The SCAMPER Technique

by Olivier Serrat

Ideas are not often plucked out of thin air. The SCAMPER brainstorming technique uses a set of directed questions to resolve a problem (or meet an opportunity). It can also turn a tired idea into something new and different.

Rationale

A problem is a situation, condition, or issue that remains unresolved and makes it difficult to accomplish a desired objective. It is recognized as such when an individual, group, or organization becomes aware of a significant difference between what is desired and what actually is. Trying to find a solution to a problem is known as problem solving.

Problem solving is the process by which a situation is analyzed, a workable solution is determined, and corrective action is taken. The common milestones of problem solving are to

- Define (or clarify) the problem.
- Analyze causes.
- Generate ideas (identify alternatives).
- Weigh up ideas (assess alternatives).
- Make a decision (select an alternative).
- Determine next steps to implement the solution.
- Evaluate whether the problem was solved or not.

The SCAMPER Technique

Every problem invites a solution and, needless to say, problem-solving techniques are numerous.[1] The SCAMPER technique, for one, uses a set of directed, idea-spurring questions to suggest some addition to, or modification of, something that already exists.[2] It has also received much attention as a learning tool that fosters awareness, drive, fluency,

[1] They include Affinity Diagrams (organizing ideas into common themes); the Ansoff Matrix (understanding the different risks of different options); Appreciation (extracting maximum information from facts); Appreciative Inquiry (solving problems by looking at what is going right); the Boston Matrix (focusing effort to give the greatest returns); Brainstorming (generating a large number of ideas to solve a problem); Cause-and-Effect Diagrams (identifying the possible causes of problems); Core Competence Analysis (get ahead, stay ahead); Critical Success Factors (identifying the things that really matter for success); the Five Whys Technique (quickly getting to the root of a problem); Flowcharts (understanding how a process works); the Greiner Curve (surviving the crises that come with growth); Lateral Thinking (changing concepts and perception); the Marketing Mix and the 4 Ps (understanding how to position a market offering); the McKinsey 7Ss (making sure that all the parts of an organization work in harmony); PEST (Political, Economic, Sociocultural, and Technological) Analysis (understanding the big picture); Porter's Five Forces (understanding where power lies); the Reframing Matrix (examining problems from distinct viewpoints); Risk Analysis; Systems Diagrams (understanding the way factors affect one another); Root Cause Analysis (identifying the root causes of problems or events); SWOT Analysis (analyzing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats); and USP (Unique Selling Propositions) Analysis (crafting competitive edge).

[2] The principles of the SCAMPER technique were first formally suggested by Alex Osborn and later arranged by Bob Eberle as a mnemonic in 1991 to increase interest in the perceptive, imaginative, and creative abilities of children.

flexibility, and originality. The stimulus comes from being asked to answer queries that one would not normally pose. The changes that SCAMPER stands for are

- S—Substitute (e.g., components, materials, people)
- C—Combine (e.g., mix, combine with other assemblies or services, integrate)
- A—Adapt (e.g., alter, change function, use part of another element)
- M—Magnify/Modify (e.g., increase or reduce in scale, change shape, modify attributes)
- P—Put to other uses
- E—Eliminate (e.g., remove elements, simplify, reduce to core functionality)
- R—Rearrange/Reverse (e.g., turn inside out or upside down)

Help Guide to the SCAMPER Technique[3]

Substitute	Think about substituting part of the product or process for something else.
	Typical questions: What else instead? Who else instead? What other materials, ingredients, processes, power, sounds, approaches, or forces might I substitute? Which other place?
Combine	Think about combining two or more parts of the product or process to make something new or to enhance synergy.
	Typical questions: What mix, assortment, alloy, or ensemble might I blend? What ideas, purposes, units, or appeals might I combine?
Adapt	Think about which parts of the product or process could be adapted or how you might change the nature of the product or process.
	Typical questions: Does the past offer a parallel? What else is like this? What other idea does this suggest? What might I adapt for use as a solution? What might I copy? Who might I emulate?
Magnify, Modify	Think about changing part or all of the product or process, or distorting it in an unusual way.
	Typical questions: What other meaning, color, motion, sound, smell, form, or shape might I adopt? What might I add?
Put to Other Uses	Think of how you might put the product or process to another use or how you might reuse something from somewhere else.
	Typical questions: What new ways are there to use this? Might this be used in other places? Which other people might I reach? To what other uses might this be put if it is modified?
Eliminate	Think of what might happen if you eliminated parts of the product or process and consider what you might do in that situation.
	Typical questions: What might I understate? What might I eliminate? What might I streamline? What might I make smaller, lower, shorter, or lighter?
Rearrange, Reverse	Think of what you might do if parts of the product or process worked in reverse or were sequenced differently.
	Typical questions: What might be rearranged? What other pattern, layout, or sequence might I adopt? Can components be interchanged? Should I change pace or schedule? Can positives and negatives be swapped? Could roles be reversed?

[3] Litemind's blog on *Creative Problem Solving with SCAMPER* (available: http://litemind.com/scamper/) suggests more than 60 questions that can be asked, along with almost 200 words and expressions one can create associations with.

Caveat

The SCAMPER technique is used to produce original ideas. The creative process thrives on preparation, concentration, incubation, illumination, and verification. In organizations, its fruitful application depends on the existence of an enabling environment. Of course, personal blocks[4] to creativity exist but these can often be overcome. Supervisors who foster creativity listen, are willing to absorb the risks borne by their subordinates, are comfortable with half-developed ideas, do not dwell on past mistakes, expect subordinates to succeed, capitalize on the strengths of subordinates, enjoy their jobs, and make quick decisions. They must then help sell ideas to senior management. This involves assessing the "sellability" of ideas[5] and developing persuasive arguments.[6]

Further Reading

ADB. 2008a. *The Reframing Matrix. Manila*. Available: www.adb.org/documents/information/knowledge-solutions/the-reframing-matrix.pdf

_____. 2008b. *Appreciative Inquiry*. Manila. Available: www.adb.org/documents/information/knowledge-solutions/appreciative-inquiry.pdf

_____. 2009. *The Five Whys Technique*. Manila. Available: www.adb.org/documents/information/knowledge-solutions/the-five-whys-technique.pdf

Litemind. 2009. *Creative Problem Solving with SCAMPER*. Available: http://litemind.com/scamper/

For further information

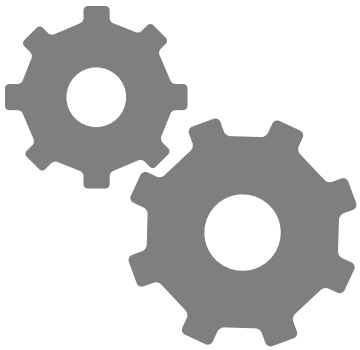
Contact Olivier Serrat, Head of the Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank (oserrat@adb.org).

[4] I do not want to look foolish. I do not want to fail. I am not creative. This is not my area (e.g., skill, style, job, etc.). I am not paid to have fun!

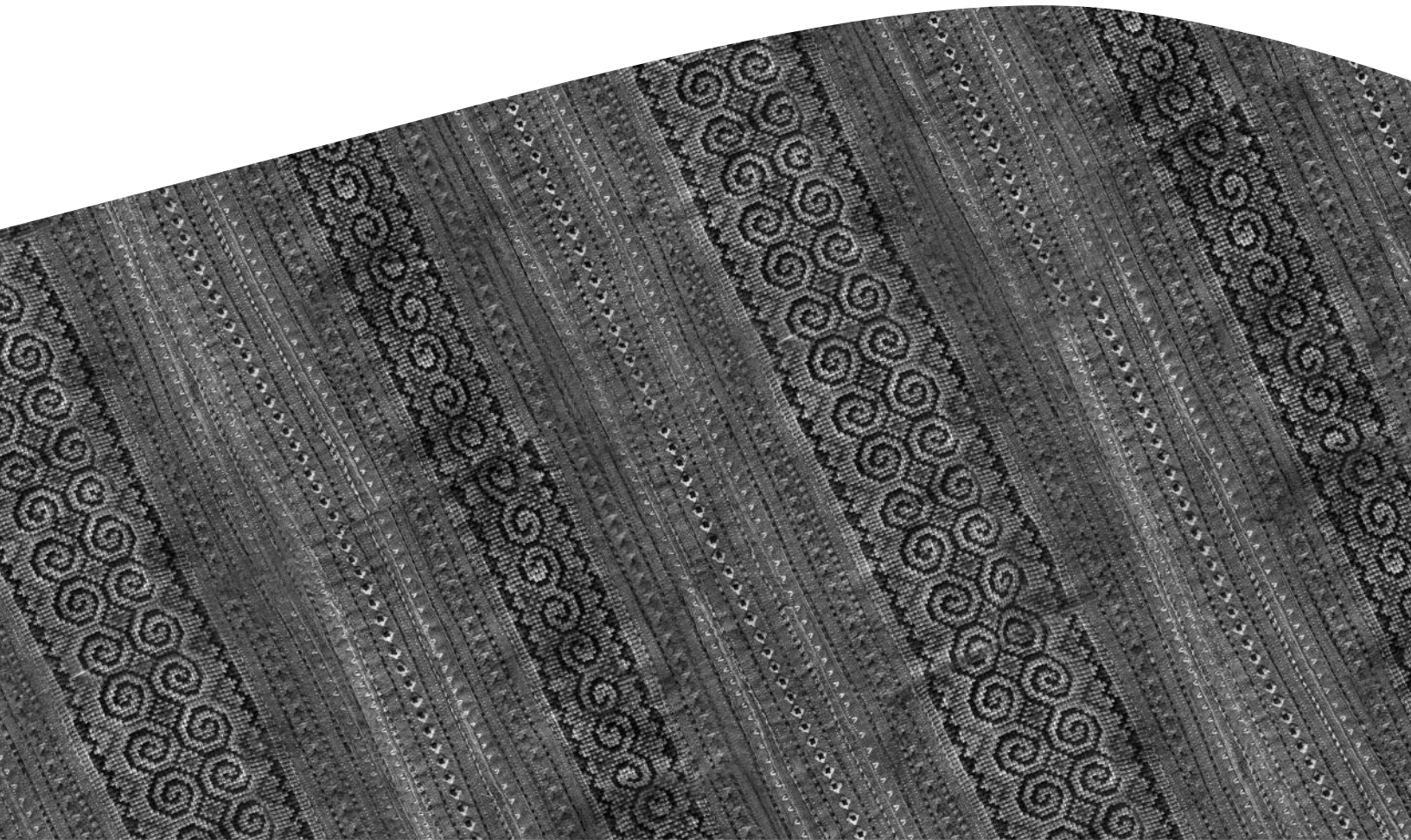
[5] Will the idea work? Will people accept it? Is it timely?

[6] This requires that the proponents relate the idea to a recognized need, appeal to positive values, anticipate objections, get others involved, and advertise their credibility.

Knowledge Solutions



Collaboration Mechanisms



Action Learning

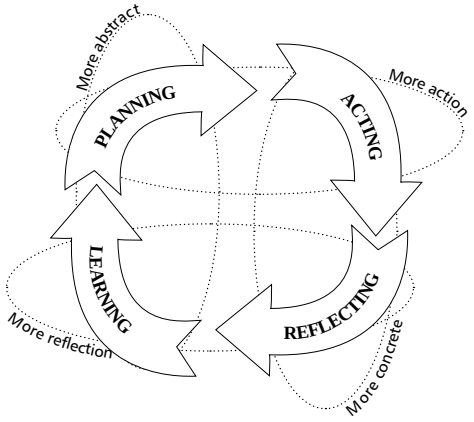
by Olivier Serrat

Action learning is a structured method that enables small groups to work regularly and collectively on complicated problems, take action, and learn as individuals and as a team while doing so.

Rationale

Conventional approaches to learning hinge on the presentation of knowledge and skills. Then again, knowledge is revealed through methods of questioning amid risk, confusion, and opportunity. Reginald Revans, the originator of action learning, recommended that one should keep away from experts with prefabricated answers.[1] Rather, people should become aware of their lack of knowledge and be prepared to explore their ignorance with suitable questions and help from others: finding the right questions rather than the right answers is important, and it is one's perception of a problem, one's evaluation of what is to be gained by solving it, and one's estimation of the resources available to solve it that supply the springs of human action.[2] Figure 1 depicts the cycle of learning.

Figure 1: Learning from Experience



Source: Adapted from David Kolb. 1984. *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*. Prentice Hall.

[1] Revans distinguished cleverness, i.e., knowledge, and wisdom. He described the formula L = P + Q where *L* is learning; *P* is programmed, i.e., taught or read, knowledge; and *Q* is questioning to create insight. Q uses four major questions: where? who? when? what?; and three minor questions: why? how many? how much? From this, he demonstrated that powerful learning comes from people learning with and from others.

[2] High-level questions theorize, reflect, and hypothesize. Low-level questions seek factual answers and tend to converge in that they have correct answers. High-level questions require people to make connections and to engage in application, analysis, interpretation, or evaluation of ideas. Examples include: Are you in agreement with the group's answer? What do you think would happen if …? What is the difference between … and …? How are … and … similar? Why do you believe these differences or similarities occur? Low-level questions require people to recall information that has been presented or to retrieve information from memory.

Definition

Action learning is an educational process by which a person studies his or her own actions and experience to improve performance. Put simply, it is about solving problems and getting things done. In action learning, a small group of 5–8 persons (called action learning set) meets regularly for a day or half a day over at least 6 months and works collectively on a problem faced in ongoing practice.[3] The action learning set helps a "presenter" work on a problem through supportive but challenging questioning. It encourages a deeper understanding of the issues involved, a reflective reassessment of the problem, and an exploration of ways forward. (Action learning requires that actions be agreed at the end of each meeting.) By so doing, it provides a structured way of working that provide the discipline we often need to learn from what we do and improve practice as a result.

Applications

The most common applications of action learning are in professional and managerial learning and development, namely

- A work-based project or program in which set members are involved and for which they have a level of responsibility and are therefore able to realistically influence by their actions.
- An issue that concerns how set members operate in their work context, and one that they wish to improve and that could benefit from the support and challenge of the other members.

Action learning is not useful if the task that a set member is working on is a technical puzzle with a limited number of correct solutions. In such instances, it is better to tackle that the issue through consultation with experts, research, or training.

Benefits

Action learning sets have been used by civil and nongovernment organizations. They

- Increase awareness and enable individuals to identify personal development challenges.
- Develop self-confidence and readiness to take responsibility and initiative.
- Help people relate to and communicate and network with others more effectively.
- Provide structured peer support.
- Enable more disciplined ways of working in powerful teams.
- Enable individuals and teams to learn while working.[4]
- Build leadership competencies.
- Develop systems thinking, creativity, flexibility, and problem-solving skills.
- Foster the emergence of corporate cultures that can handle change and learn.
- Support innovation.

Still, for organizations to really feel the benefits of action learning there must be will to support participation in sets and respect for their outcomes. The disciplines and behaviors that encourage action learning are those of a learning organization. Peter Senge catalogues the attributes of learning organizations as personal mastery, shared vision, mental models, team learning, and systems thinking (the fifth discipline that integrates the other four).

[3] Revans believed that those best able to help in developing the self are those comrades in adversity who also struggle to understand themselves.

[4] Learning can take place at several levels. They include learning about the wider organization of which the set members are a part, learning about group processes, learning about the issue being presented, learning about oneself, the way one works and interacts with issues and people, and learning how to learn.

Key Principles of Action Learning

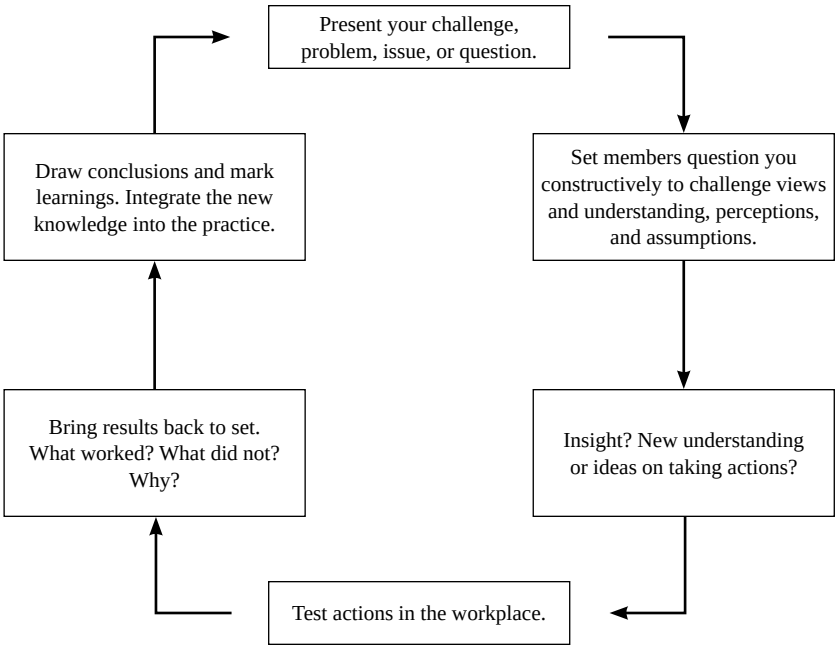
The key principles of action learning are that

- Learning begins with not knowing.
- Individuals and groups who assume responsibility stand the best chance of taking actions that will make a difference.
- Learning involves both programmed knowledge and questioning insight. Learning should be greater than the rate of change.

Process

Action learning brings together small groups of participants with the following intentions. Figure 2 depicts the action learning process as cyclical: it begins at the top of the diagram and moves round systematically, giving each set member the opportunity to present a problem and comment on others.

Figure 2: The Action Learning Process



Source: Adapted from National Primary and Care Trust Development Programme. 2008. *Welcome to Action Learning*. Available: www.natpact.nhs.uk/cms.php?pid=274

A typical set meeting might run like this:[5]

- Before the meeting, each set member thinks about the work-based issues he or she wishes to bring to the set.
- Set members agree to set aside the necessary time for the meeting. It should be held where they will be free from distraction.
- The facilitator might remind set members of the ground rules established during the formation of the set and may recap the key principles of the methodology.

[5] This section draws from BOND Guidance Note No. 5. 2004. *Action Learning Sets*. Available: www.bond.org.uk/data/files/als.pdf.

- The set members check-in and those who had an opportunity to explore their issue in the previous set report to the others on actions taken since the last meeting.
- One of the set members is given airtime for about one hour. This begins with the member taking 5–10 uninterrupted minutes to outline the work-based issue that he or she is bringing to the set members. Then, the other members ask questions of clarification, move into reflective and analytical questions, and towards the end question future action.
- During this process, the facilitator may sometimes "stop" the set to raise awareness on matters of process, for example if set members are giving advice packaged as questions.
- At the end of the airtime, the set member presenting the issue provides feedback on how he or she experienced the process and what learning took place. Set members also offer observations and learnings on both process and content.
- The process of airtime is repeated for as many set members as possible in the time available. (This is normally two members in a half-day or four in a full day meeting).
- The meeting may conclude with the completion of an action review sheet that aims to capture key learnings and action plans from the meeting. The logistics of the next meeting are also agreed.

Facilitation

A significant aspect of action learning is the "unlearning" of all-too-common habits of jumping from problem to solution and offering advice. For this, it is necessary to adhere to a disciplined methodology of good listening and questioning. A skilled and experienced facilitator can help to achieve this. Specifically, a facilitator would help create safe space for honest discussion, remind set members of the methodology, model helpful questioning, ensure that the questioning moves around the action learning cycle at an appropriate pace, draw attention to issues of process, and act as timekeeper.

Tips

Action learning is most effective when the commitment is voluntary. It should also focus on real-life, practice-related problems that are open-ended in nature and do not have a right or wrong answer. Importantly, action learning sets should be clear about the objective; engage the support of management; decide on selection criteria for set members; commit regular time; set dates for meetings and workshops; make sure there is some energy; be honest with themselves and others; respect others and their viewpoint; learn to listen; ask helpful questions;[6] refrain from giving advice; follow the action learning cycle; give individual airtime to others; take responsibility for their actions; and decide early on how the program will be evaluated, who will be involved, and how the results and future actions will be communicated more widely.

Further Reading

World Institute for Action Learning. 2008. Available: www.wial.org

For further information

Contact Olivier Serrat, Head of the Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank (oserrat@adb.org).

[6] Examples include: What other questions does this question raise for us? What is it that we do not understand about this situation? What would someone who had a very different set of beliefs than we do say about this situation? Why did you draw those conclusions? How does x affect y? In your opinion, which is best, x or y? And why? What are the strengths and weakness of …?

Appreciative Inquiry

by Olivier Serrat

Appreciative inquiry is the process of facilitating positive change in organizations. Its basic assumption is uncomplicated: every organization has something that works well. Appreciative inquiry is therefore an exciting generative approach to organizational development. At a higher level, it is also a way of being and seeing.

Rationale

Most organizational change processes are based on problem-solving. We ask "what is the problem?" but in so doing focus energy on what we want less of. We then work to fix things (and keep finding problems). However, organizations change in the direction in which they inquire. Appreciative inquiry is based on the following propositions

- Organizations are not machines.
- Organizations are a social reality—that reality is co-constructed.
- Important organizational processes, e.g., communicating, decision making, and managing conflict, hinge on how the people involved make meaning out of their interactions, not so much on the skillful application of techniques.
- Endeavors to identify or develop the right formula for successful change are often misguided—one cannot treat social reality as if it were objective.

Every organization has something that works right, even if only in small quantities. Hence, it might be easier to foster organizational effectiveness by focusing on what one wants more (not what one wants less of). Getting people to inquire into the best examples of what they want more of creates a momentum toward the creation of more positive organizations. Of necessity, such inquiries should be appreciative, applicable, provocative, and collaborative.[1] To sum up, an organization that tries to discover what is best in itself will find more and more that is good: its discoveries will help build a future where the best becomes more common.

Definition

Appreciative inquiry is a relatively new form of action research that originated in the United States in the mid-1980s and is now being used around the world. It studies the positive attributes of organizations to create new conversations among people as they work together for organizational renewal. It involves in its broadest focus the systematic discovery of what gives life to a human system when it is most alive, most effective, and most capable in environmental, economic, societal, political, and technological terms. It involves, in a central way, the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system's capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential. It is based on two assumptions: first, organizations always move in the direction of the questions their members ask and the things they talk about; second, energy for positive change is created when organiza-

[1] Appreciation means looking for the positive core of an organization and seeking to use that as a foundation for future growth. Applicability means that inquiry is grounded in stories of what has actually taken place in the past and is therefore essentially practical. Provocation means inviting people to take some risks in the way they imagine the future and to redesign their organization to bring that about. Collaboration means involving the whole organization, or a representative cross-section of it, so that all voices can be heard and everyone's contribution valued.

tions engage continually in remembering and analyzing circumstances when they were at their best rather than focusing on problems and how they can be solved. The approach invites organizations to spend time creating a common vision for their desired future and developing the images and language to bring that vision to life.

Process

Appreciative inquiry is usually worked out by using a 4-D Cycle[2]

- **Discovery:** People talk to one another, often via structured interviews, to discover the times when their organization is at its best. These stories are told as richly as possible.
- **Dream:** The dream phase is commonly run as a large group conference with the help of facilitators. People are encouraged to envision the organization as though the peak moments identified in the discovery phase were the norm rather than the exception.
- **Design:** A team is empowered to go away and design ways to create the organization dreamed in the large group conference.
- **Delivery:** The final phase delivers the dream and the new design. It is one of experimentation and improvisation. Teams are formed to follow up on the design elements and to continue the appreciative process. This phase may itself contain more small-scale appreciative inquiries into specific aspects of organizational life.

Figure: The 4D Cycle of Appreciative Inquiry

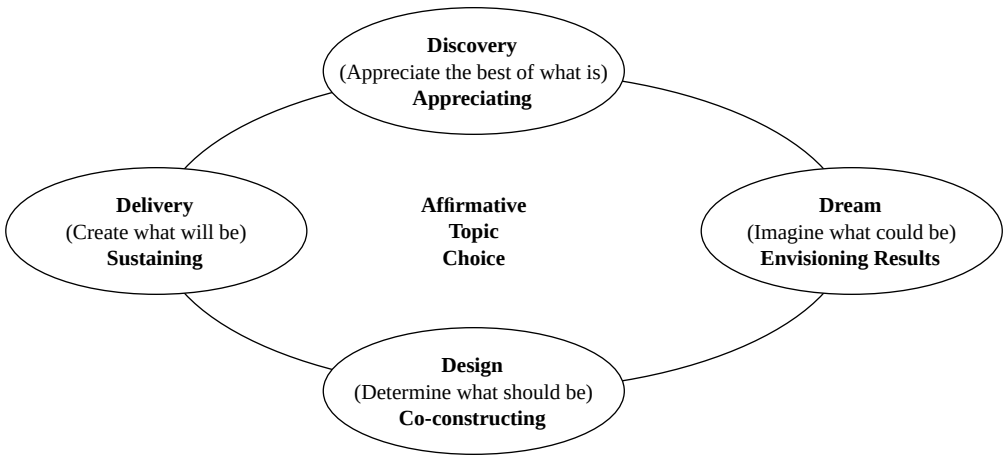


Table: A Generic Appreciative Interview Questionnaire

Think of a peak experience or high point in your work or experience in your organization.
In that experience, think about the things you valued most about yourself, the nature of your work, and your organization itself.
Think about the core factors that give life to your organization, viz., the really positive values it can build upon.
What three wishes would you like to have that would heighten the vitality and health of your organization?

[2] The 4-D Cycle is not the only way of thinking about the process of appreciative inquiry. Some favor the 4-I Model of initiation, inquiry, imagination, and innovation.

Applications

Appreciative inquiry can help

- Build a common vision where one is lacking.
- Challenge preconceived notions of what might be by locating the best of what already exists.
- Discover, understand, and amplify the positive forces that exist in organizations.
- Create openness and rapport between people and groups where a negative work climate has prevailed.
- Forge new approaches to human resource issues that will be accepted by staff and lead to positive change.
- Provide an alternative to conventional team building processes.
- Demonstrate the power and value of teamwork by highlighting ways in which teams give life to organizations.
- Open up opportunities for continuous organizational improvement by illuminating the principles, core values, and exemplary practices that support successful teams.
- Develop communities in various ways.

Further Reading

David Cooperrider, Diana Whitney, and Jacqueline Stavros. 2007. *Appreciative Inquiry Handbook*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

Appreciative Inquiry Commons. 2008. Available: http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/

For further information

Contact Olivier Serrat, Head of the Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank (oserrat@adb.org).

Building Communities of Practice

by Olivier Serrat

Communities of practice are groups of like-minded, interacting people who filter, amplify, invest and provide, convene, build, and learn and facilitate to ensure more effective creation and sharing of knowledge in their domain.

What are They?

According to Etienne Wenger, communities of practice are groups of people who share a passion for something they do and who interact regularly to learn how to do it better. Communities of practice define themselves along three dimensions: what they are about, how they function, and what capabilities they produce. Table 1 summarizes their principal attributes. Each community of practice has a unique domain, community, and practice (and the support it requires).[1] But, in connecting and collecting, communities of practice share the following common characteristics:

- They are peer-to-peer collaborative networks.
- They are driven by the willing participation of their members.
- They are focused on learning and building capacity.
- They are engaged in sharing knowledge, developing expertise, and solving problems.

Table 1: Communities of Practice—What are They?

What are Communities of Practice?	What Do Communities of Practice Do?	How Do Communities of Practice Operate?
• Communities of practice share a domain • They have a desire to share work-related knowledge • They have a passion for learning • They are self-selected and gain value from their membership	• Communities of practice provide a means to exchange data, information, and knowledge freely • They break down communication barriers • They provide an informal, welcoming social environment • They provide a means for relationship-building and networking • They populate and reference their knowledge network workspace	• Communities of practice are in continuous communication • They hold annual and quarterly gatherings • They arrange monthly teleconferences • They have daily or weekly informal interaction • They regularly access their communication platform

[1] The *domain* defines the area of shared inquiry. The *community* comprises the relationships among members and the sense of belonging. The *practice* is the body of knowledge, methods, stories, cases, tools, and documents. The goal of community design is to bring out the community's own internal direction, character, and energy.

What is the Value of Communities of Practice?	Community of Practice Success Factors
• Communities of practice identify, create, store, share, and use knowledge • They decrease the learning curve of new employees • They enable professional development • They reduce rework and prevent reinvention of the wheel • They permit faster problem solving and response time to needs and inquiries • They illuminate good practice • They spawn new ideas for products and services • They enable accelerated learning • They connect learning to action • They make for organizational performance improvement	• **Strategic relevance**—the strategic relevance of the domain, which lets the community find a legitimate place in the organization • **Domain**—directly related to real work • **Membership**—experts are involved • **Activities**—relevant to the members and the domain, with the right rhythm and mix • **Governance**—clear roles and expectations • **Facilitation**—a dedicated, passionate, skillful, and well-respected coordinator • **Culture**—a consistent attitude to sharing and collaboration • **Incentives**—a desire to participate • **Reward and recognition**—the organizational environment is adapted to support participation • **Information technology**—an appropriate medium of communication that adds value and helps deliver work programs • **Time**—members are given time and encouraged to participate • **Longevity**—needed both for communication and to build up trust, rapport, and a true sense of community • **Measurement**—how do we know a community of practice is successful?

Topics, Focal Areas, and Sample Technical Features of a Hypothetical Community of Practice

Table 2 lists the topics for interaction of a hypothetical community of practice in monitoring and evaluation and the areas that it might focus on in each case. On each topic for interaction, the members of a community of practice would ask one another

- What challenges do you face?
- Are the challenges you face the same or different from mine?
- What resources do you have that can be shared?
- What ideas do you have about how to move ahead?
- How can we be mutually supportive?

Table 2: A Community of Practice in Monitoring and Evaluation—Topics and Focal Areas

	Formulating Monitoring and Evaluation Policy	Putting in Place a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework	Planning and Designing an Evaluation	Conducting an Evaluation	Using Evaluation Findings
Relationship Building					
Collaboration Mechanisms					
Knowledge Sharing and Learning					
Knowledge Capture and Storage					

Table 3 is the menu of combinations of some technical features that might support specific goals of that community.

Table 3: A Community of Practice in Monitoring and Evaluation—Sample Technical Features

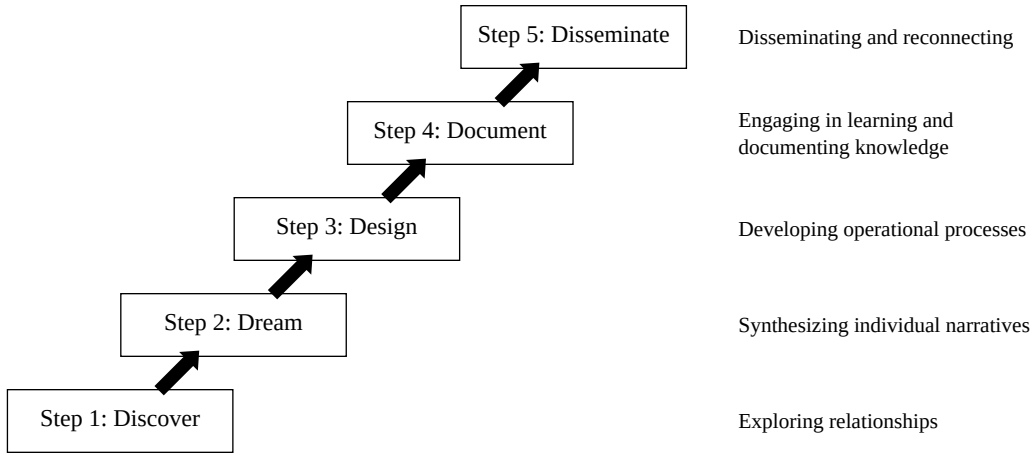
Relationship Building	Collaboration Mechanisms	Knowledge Sharing and Learning	Knowledge Capture and Storage
• Partnerships • Member networking profiles • Member directory with "relationship-focused" data fields • Subgroups defined by administrators or that allow members to self-join • Online meetings • Online discussions	• Action learning sets • Project management • Task management • Document collaboration • File version tracking • Instant messaging • Individual and group calendaring • Web conferencing • Online meetings • Online discussions	• Stories • Peer assists • After-action reviews and retrospects • Structured databases • Idea banks • Visiting speakers • Expert database and search tools • Announcements • Web conferencing • Online meetings • Online discussions • Website links	• Exit interviews • Member profiles • How-to guides • Slideshows • E-learning tools • Visiting speakers • Assessments • Web logs • Web conferencing • Online meetings • Online discussions • Website links

Design and Management

To continuously design and manage a community of practice, members typically follow the 5D model depicted in the figure below.[2] It involves

- **Discovering**—exploring relationships to the community through individual narratives.
- **Dreaming**—synthesizing individual narratives into a community story centered on joint purpose and mutual engagement.
- **Designing**—developing operational processes for the community.
- **Documenting**—engaging in learning and documenting knowledge.
- **Disseminating**—disseminating and reconnecting the community's learning.

Figure: 5D Model for Designing and Managing Sustainable Communities of Practice



[2] See Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger. 1991. *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge University Press.

Building a Community of Practice

The members of a community of practice will need to plan and ask themselves key questions on *strategy*

- What change(s) in the work we do will take place in the next 3–6 months because of the community of practice?
- Why is the community the best way of bringing about this change?
- What is the one thing that I need to do next week to facilitate the community?

Sample *domain-related* questions will include

- What specific topics do we want to address in the community of practice in the next 3–6 months?
- Why are these topics relevant to our organization?
- What kind of influence do we want to have on our organization?
- Who will assume leadership in promoting our domain?

Sample *community-related* questions will include

- Who will be the members of the community of practice in the next 3–6 months?
- How can ownership and management of the community be fostered?
- How often will the community meet?[3] How will the members connect?
- How can the community balance the needs of various members?
- How will members deal with conflict?
- How will new members be introduced into the community?

Sample *practice-related* questions will include

- How should we identify, create, store, share, and use knowledge?
- How should we evaluate the effectiveness of our community of practice in the next 3–6 months?
- How should we ensure ongoing connection between the members?
- How should we deal with conflicts between our own work and community work?

A sample *support-related* question will be

- What support do we need to be successful in achieving changes to our work through the community of practice?

Communication Platforms

An appropriate medium of communication is critical to the success of communities of practice.[4] It should be monitored continuously. The box below suggests what its main attributes might be. Specifically, the communication platform would

- Serve as an ongoing learning venue for practitioners who share similar goals, interests, and concerns.
- Help connect members to the right people and provide a platform for rapid responses to individual inquiries from members.
- Provide news of community activities and events to members.
- Develop, capture, and transfer good practices on specific topics by stimulating active sharing of knowledge.
- Promote partnership arrangements with interested knowledge hubs and other networks.
- Influence development outcomes by promoting greater and better-informed dialogue.
- Promote innovative approaches to address specific challenges.

[3] The initial members could plan an inaugural physical meeting, to be followed by annual meetings. Physical meetings for a virtual platform seem counter-intuitive but the experience of many communities of practice shows that to be a key success factor.

[4] Needless to say, the medium of communication must have connectivity. Members should not experience technical difficulties. Queries should be addressed by a secretariat. The communication platform should also provide a simple user manual and other help tools.

Box: Communication Platforms for Communities of Practice—Architecture

Contents

- Home page: relevant information and news, latest news on the progress of related activities and projects, ongoing activities and online discussions
- About the community: background information, expected outcomes and impact
- News and announcements: news archives, email newsletter archives
- Library (repository of relevant documents and tools)
- Discussions (online discussions on particular topics of interest)
- Members: list of members with background information and email addresses
- Photo gallery
- Links to other websites
- Help (information on how to use the site and how to get assistance)
- Contact us

Tools

- Search facility
- Email this page/notify members of this page
- Download and print this page
- Optional: online chat facility, an events calendar

Look-and-Feel

- Lively and dynamic
- Friendly and accessible
- Professional and credible

Tagline

- A memorable phrase to brand the communication platform and strengthen awareness of it

Optional Orientations

- Rooms for working groups, face-to-face events, or special-interest topics
- Business opportunities and advertisements
- Podcasts/webcasts
- Web logs
- Wikis
- Enhanced member profiles including an individual member's website bookmarks and web log

For further information

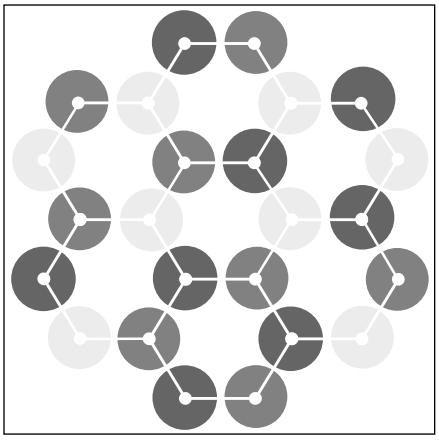
Contact Olivier Serrat, Head of the Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank (oserrat@adb.org).

Working in Teams

by Olivier Serrat

Cooperative work by a team can produce remarkable results. The challenge is to move from the realm of the possible to the realm of practice.

Background



Groups[1] that range from two persons to many are a very big part of social life (indeed, of human experience). They can be significant sites of socialization and learning, places in which beneficial relationships form and grow, and settings where knowledge and wisdom flourish. Because they also offer individuals the opportunity to work together on joint tasks and develop more complex and larger-scale activities (projects), groups can be highly rewarding to their members, organizations, and society at large. On the other hand, the socialization they offer can constrict or even oppress members. Groups can also become environments that exacerbate interpersonal conflict, for example, if one individual dominates or tries to "score points." In addition, the boundaries that are drawn around them can exclude others—sometimes to their detriment—and create intergroup conflict. What is more, belonging to a group often warps the judgment of members: pressure to conform can lead to "groupthink" or poor decision making. Other well-nigh mundane shortcomings include diffusion of responsibility; excessive diversity of views, goals, and loyalties; and the tendency to "solve" (but not analyze) problems. These potential strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats make groups an essential focus for research, exploration, and action, for instance, regarding group development (teamwork) in organizations.

Rationale

In our day, most organizations embrace the notion of teamwork. The justification is that teams are better at solving problems and learn more rapidly and with more effect than individuals.[2] (As a minimum, they are meant to help divide work and thereby increase

[1] Definitions of a group abound but one can identify common attributes. A group is a set of individuals who identify with one another; share beliefs, values, and norms about areas of common practice or interest; define themselves (and are defined by others) as a group; engage in frequent interactions; and come together to work on joint tasks for an agreed common purpose. Importantly, this list suggests that groups are intended and organic—whether they are primary or secondary, or planned or emergent, they are not a random experience. Therefore, there are three crucial characteristics to groups: there are parts, there is relationship between the parts, and there is an organizing principle.

[2] By nature, teams embody wider and deeper knowledge, broader understanding, a greater diversity of problem-solving styles and skills, and firmer commitment.

productivity with speed.) Still, if teams are often deemed a necessary component of organizational success, their use does not guarantee it. To tell the truth, many are apprehensive about teams or even pessimistic about their value. Most prefer to deal with individuals. Others are happier still when working on their own. Therefore, to leverage the potential value that teams can add and ensure that they are effective, members must have more than a limited appreciation of what teamwork is and what it entails: they must be competent in using small-group skills. Since these are not innate and collaboration usually stems from a feeling of being "in the same boat," entering teams or forming them and then behaving in such ways that members can interface, take responsibility, and work together effectively on joint tasks can involve quite sophisticated abilities on the part of practitioners. (The challenge augments in the increasingly common case of virtual teams, certainly with regard to spatial distance and the technology needed to bridge data, information, and personal communication needs.)

What is Teamwork?

From the foregoing, it follows that teamwork is a process whereby a small number of people—commonly 3 to 10—with complementary skills become committed to a common purpose and reach agreement on specific performance targets and indicators, a working approach, and mutual accountability. It follows further that teamwork is not a panacea, a management fad, or a way to cut costs: it is a means to an end. A team does not make "things" happen: it enables them by looking to purpose, thinking as a group, and keeping in touch with the identity and integrity of members.

When to Use Teams

Is a team the best organizational structure for what an organization sets out to accomplish? Not necessarily. Given the potential weaknesses and threats associated with teams, they should only be used in situations where the strengths and the opportunities they offer are critical. That is when

- The problem is relatively complex, uncertain, and holds potential for conflict;
- The problem requires inter-group cooperation and coordination;
- The problem and its solution have important organizational consequences;
- Deadline are tight but not immediate; and
- Widespread acceptance and commitment are critical to successful implementation of a response to a situation, condition, or issue.

The Characteristics of Successful Teams

Successful teams share many characteristics. They tap the diverse knowledge, skills, experience, and interests of members; they generate more creative responses to challenges than individuals; they catalyze fresh ideas for new products and services, better business processes, and profitable strategies; they hone the leadership abilities of members; they carry out their mission with dedication, energy, and efficiency; they engender feelings of satisfaction and pride among members; they channel conflict into productive directions. The enabling environment for such accomplishments rests on positive interdependence, individual accountability, use of emotional intelligence, promotive (face-to-face) interaction, and group processing. [3]

The Keys to Developing a Successful Team

To develop a successful team,

- **Encourage the team leader to follow the manager-as-developer approach.** In high-performance, contemporary organizations, team leaders must move beyond the adequate accomplishments their heroic methods have pulled off. Their prime functions are now to help determine and build common purpose, continuously develop individual skills, and groom shared-responsibility teams. These functions require not only technical competence but also problem-solving abilities and interpersonal skills.

[3] In group processing, members reflect on the team's work and their interactions with each other to clarify and improve efforts to achieve the team's purpose and maintain effective working relationships. This involves describing what member actions were helpful and unhelpful, and making decisions about what actions to continue or change.

- **Clarify the common purpose.** The members of the team must understand what the purpose is and believe that it is sufficiently important for them to sublimate their personal concerns.[4] For this, they need to know what outcome they are expected to deliver and understand how they will work together toward it.
- **Build trust.** Trust is a fragile thing: it takes time to build and it can be destroyed instantly. It is important to keep all team members in the loop. As attention drifts to new initiatives, team leaders may forget to alert members to opportunities or challenges. Belatedly, members may receive data and information that might have influenced their actions and they may begin to question interest in their efforts. Team leaders should also be candid about their problems and limitations. They should be available and approachable, fair and objective, and consistent and dependable. They should listen with respect to the ideas of members. They should also create a climate of openness in which members can reveal and thrash out difficulties without fear of retaliation.
- **Establish mutual accountability.** For a team to qualify as such, all members must feel responsible for both successes and failures.
- **Deliver quick-wins.** Developing a successful team takes time. Its members should put quick-wins under their belts. This can be done by setting achievable targets and spotlighting team progress. Easy accomplishments will drive cohesiveness and confidence.
- **Set up a team-support system.** Organizations that pay lip service to the value of staff working together offer little support. However, it is still possible to set ground rules when the team is formed. They might cover issues such as rotation of members and duties, including leadership; announcements about milestones met; rewards for individual efforts; standards by which the team evaluates its own progress; and even the process by which the team will disband if members think it has lost its usefulness.[5] If the success of the team depends critically on resources from the organization, it is important to ensure those resources will be there.
- **Teach team members new skills.** Team members and the team as a group may need to build their knowledge and skills. This may be in the areas of problem solving, communication, negotiation, conflict resolution, group processing, and learning as a team.[6] The opportunity for training can revitalize a team. If a team is charged with and is made responsible for training members in the best possible way to do a job, its chances of success will be higher.
- **Rotate team assignments.** Teams are formed as needed. Work, however, may become monotonous over time. Depending on the complexity of assignments, it is possible to rotate functions and jobs, including leadership, sometimes even through drawing. Besides keeping interest and morale high, this approach ensures that members are cross-trained; it acts also as an informal certification system. On occasion, changing the composition of a group (if that is possible) may also be necessary.
- **Reward team members.** One of the hardest things for organizations to recognize is that if they install teams, they need to reward based on teams. The team's performance management system should reward interdependence and mutual accountability. Ways to evaluate and reward contributions to collective, not individual, goals can include cash and noncash awards.

---

4 Notwithstanding, in a fast-changing environment a team can find itself working on a mission relevant to an obsolete strategy. To avoid this, the team should review its purpose regularly in light of changing organizational priorities.

5 Regular review of team processes and procedures is necessary, too.

6 Learning as a team is often overlooked. Training in this area can focus on what makes a learning team; creating and maintaining a learning environment in teams; understanding professional mindsets and valuing diversity; harnessing emotional intelligence; understanding learning preferences and how to use them; and avoiding "groupthink" through the use of "devil's advocates."

The Stages of Team Development

Teams are always work in progress. Bradford and Cohen have described team (group) development in terms of five stages leading from simple membership to shared responsibility.[7] The stages they distinguish also provide a relational model against which to judge progress toward a shared-responsibility team.[8] At that stage, individual uniqueness and collective effort are both valued. The team addresses the issues that are vital to the joint task. Members keep each other informed without wasting time. They trust one another to act, but all fight hard and fair over issue-based disagreements. A team can soar that is truly dedicated to its common purpose, able to move freely between individual and collective effort, willing to confront and support members, committed both to performance and learning, and increasingly eager to take on management functions.

Common Operating Characteristics of the Stages of Task-Group Development

Behavioral or Skill Area	Membership	Subgrouping	Confrontation	Differentiation	Shared Responsibility
Atmosphere and Relationships	Cautious, feelings suppressed, low conflict, few outbursts	Increasing closeness within subgroups, cross-group criticism, false unanimity	Hostility between subgroups	Confident, satisfied, open, honest, differences	Supportive, open, expressive, varied; disagreement resolved promptly
Goal Understanding and Acceptance	Low, fuzzy	Increasing clarity, misperceptions	Up for grabs, fought over	Agreed on by most	Commitment to overarching goal
Listening and Information Sharing	Intense, but high distortion and low disclosure	Similarities within subgroups not as great as perceived	Poor	Reasonably good	Excellent, rapid, direct
Decision Making	Dominated by active members	Fragmented, deadlocks, to the boss by default	Dominated by most powerful, loudest	Based on individual expertise, often by the boss in consultation with subordinates	By consensus, collective when all resources needed, individual when one is expert (not necessarily the boss)
Reaction to Leadership	Tested by members, tentative	Resisted, often covertly	Power struggles, jockeying for position	General support, individual differences in influence	Highly supportive but free to disagree on issues
Attention to Way the Group is Working	Ignored	Noticed but avoided, discussed outside meetings in small groups	Used as weapon against opponents	Alternates between uncritical or overcompulsive discussion	Discussed as needed to aid work accomplishment; anyone can initiate

Source: David Bradford and Allan Cohen. 1997. *Managing for Excellence: The Guide to Developing High Performance in Contemporary Organizations*. New York: John Wiley and Sons.

[7] The (relatively simple) stages of team development identified by Bruce Tuckman in the 1960s (and refined in the 1970s) are (i) forming, (ii) storming, (iii) norming, (iv) performing, and (v) adjourning.

[8] Although not every group (team) progresses in exactly this sequence (and many do not get past subgrouping or confrontation), each stage is common enough and the issues fundamental enough that the model serves as a useful approximation of reality.

Further Reading

ADB. 2008a. *Building Communities of Practice*. Manila. Available: www.adb.org/documents/information/knowledge-solutions/building-communities-practice.pdf

_____. 2008b. *Creating and Running Partnerships*. Manila. Available: www.adb.org/documents/information/knowledge-solutions/creating-running-partnerships.pdf

_____. 2008c. *Action Learning*. Manila. Available: www.adb.org/documents/information/knowledge-solutions/action-learning.pdf

_____. 2009. *Social Network Analysis*. Manila. Available: www.adb.org/documents/information/knowledge-solutions/social-network-analysis.pdf

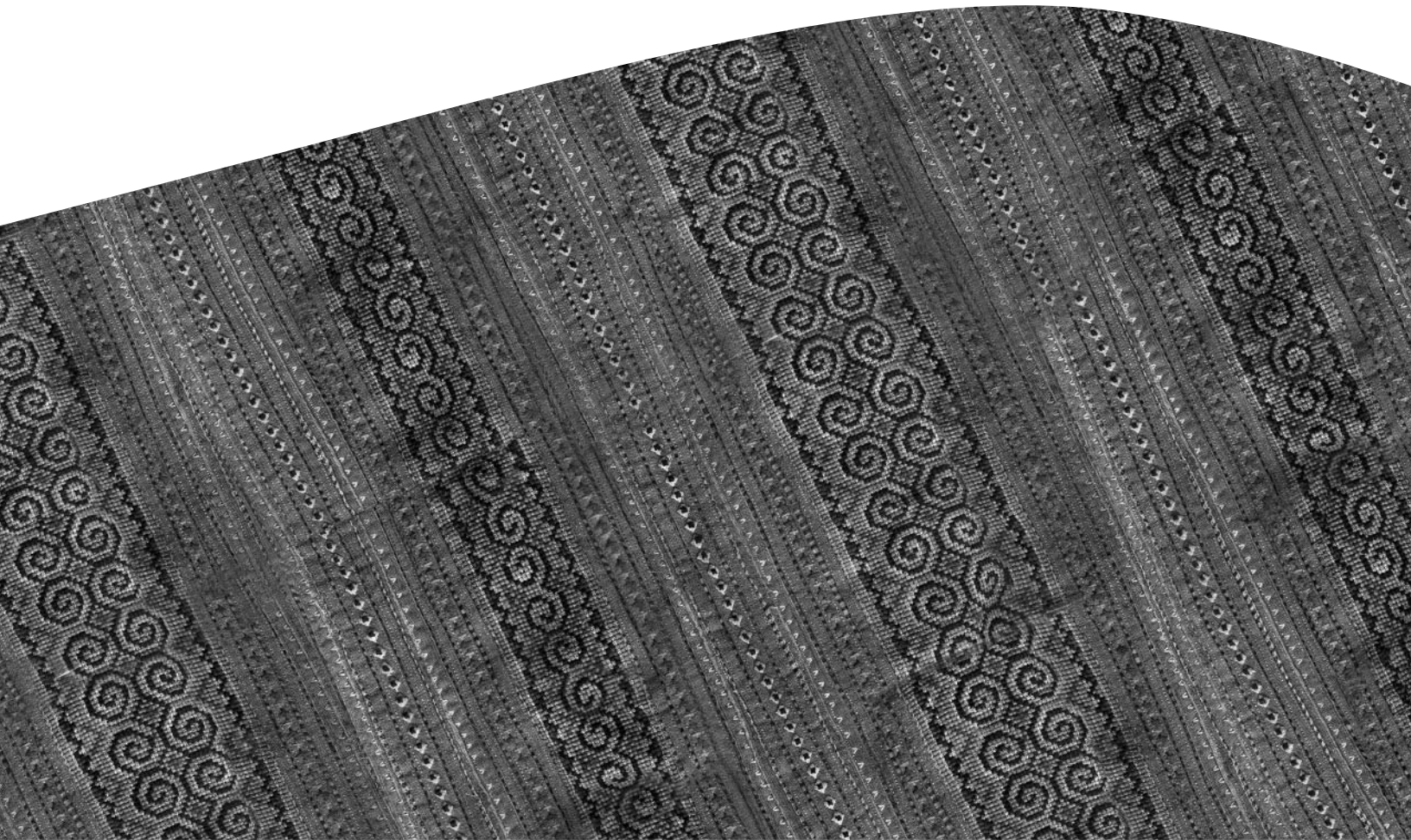
David Bradford and Allan Cohen. 1997. *Managing for Excellence: The Guide to Developing High Performance in Contemporary Organizations*. New York: John Wiley and Sons.

For further information

Contact Olivier Serrat, Head of the Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank (oserrat@adb.org).

Knowledge Solutions

Knowledge Sharing and Learning



Building Networks of Practice

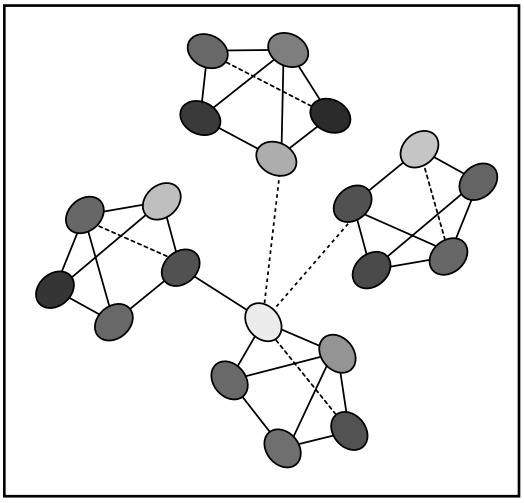
by Olivier Serrat

Organizational boundaries have been stretched, morphed, and redesigned to a degree unimaginable 10 years ago. Networks of practice have come of age. The learning organization pays attention to their forms and functions, evolves principles of engagement, circumscribes and promotes success factors, and monitors and evaluates performance with knowledge performance metrics.

Background

Extensive media coverage of applications such as FaceBook, MySpace, and LinkedIn suggests that networks are a new phenomenon. They are not; the first network was born the day people decided to create organizational structures to serve common interests—that is, at the dawn of mankind. However, the last 10–20 years have witnessed rapid intensification and evolution of networking activities, driven of course by information and communication technologies as well as globalization. These make it possible for individuals to exchange data, information, and knowledge; work collaboratively; and share their views much more quickly and widely than ever before. Thus, less and less of an organization's knowledge resides within its formal boundaries or communities of practice.

Figure: Nodes and Ties in Networks of Practice



Rationale

Knowledge cannot be separated from the networks that create, use, and transform it. In parallel, networks now play significant roles in how individuals, groups, organizations, and related systems operate. They will be even more important tomorrow. Since we can no longer assume that closely knit groups are the building blocks of human activity—or treat these as discrete units of analysis—we need to recognize and interface with less-bounded organizations, from nonlocal communities to links among websites. We should make certain that knowledge harvested in the external environment is integrated with what exists within, especially in dynamic fields where innovation stems from inter-organizational knowledge sharing and learning. Therefore, the structure and composition of nodes and ties,[1] and how these affect norms and determine usefulness, must become key concerns. This makes the study of networks of practice a prime interest for both researchers and practitioners.

[1] Nodes are individuals, groups, or organizations within networks. Ties are the relationships between them.

Networks of Practice

John Seely Brown and Paul Duguid originated the concept of networks of practice. The notion is related to the work on communities of practice of Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, and refers to the overall set of informal, emergent networks that facilitate information exchange toward practice-related goals. These networks range from communities of practice where learning occurs to electronic networks of practice (often referred to as virtual or electronic communities).[2] They differ from work groups created through formal organizational mandate with regard to control mechanisms,[3] composition and participation,[4] and expectations about participation.[5] The underlying implication is that, to be competitive, organizations should promote participation in both traditional communities of practice and networks of practice and stimulate interactions between the two.

Building Networks of Practice for Collaborative Advantage[6]

Networks are ordinarily founded on the hypothesis that we can accomplish more by working together than by working alone. Successful networking delivers collaborative advantage, *viz.*, something that could not have been achieved without the collaboration. In other words, if the underlying premise is that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts, a significant benefit of participating in a knowledge network is that each part also becomes stronger. The rewards can include (i) a better sense of belonging, ownership, and understanding; (ii) improved outcomes that would not otherwise be attained; and (iii) higher performance and productivity. To draw such benefits, the learning organization pays attention to the forms and functions of networks, evolves principles of engagement, circumscribes and promotes success factors, and monitors and evaluates operations with knowledge performance metrics.

- **The Forms of Networks.** Understanding what knowledge products and services a network offers does not necessarily shed light on how or why it does it. These questions have more to do with its structure. Box 1 delineates the principal features of a network's internal and external environment.
- **The Functions of Networks.** Networks bring together individual and organizational entities that remain geographically separated and institutionally distinct. Driven by technological innovation and globalization, the last 10 years have seen a profound transformation in the wide-ranging functions they play. Yet, surprisingly little attention has been paid to what these are, and to the strategic development and management implications from that. Box 2 intimates that networks can fulfill six, nonexclusive functions.[7] (The six can be further segregated into supra-functions, namely, agency or support.)[8]

---

2 Clearly, the distinction between formality and informality can be tenuous. Some organizations have cultivated communities of practice to integrate them into their strategies (which might test the loyalties of members). If communities of practice are a localized and specialized subset of networks of practice, typically consisting of like-minded individuals who coordinate, communicate, and reciprocate in a shared domain in face-to-face situations and to a high degree on implicit knowledge, they can be considered to lie at one end of a continuum of network forms. At the other lie electronic networks of practice, the members of which may never know one another or meet face-to-face and display relatively little reciprocity (they generally communicate through electronic mailing lists, bulletin boards, newsletters, or blogs).

3 In formal work groups such as project teams, control mechanisms customarily involve organizational hierarchies, mandated rules, contractual obligations, and both cash and noncash awards.

4 The composition of networks of practice may range from a few individuals to very large, open electronic communities numbering thousands of participants. In the latter case, no formal restrictions are placed on membership. In contrast, the members of work groups are formally designated and assigned.

5 In work groups, participation is determined jointly. Members are expected to commit to a common purpose and reach agreement on specific performance targets and indicators, a working approach, and mutual accountability. In communities of practice, participation is also determined jointly but individuals seek knowledge from identified experts. In electronic networks of practice, participation is determined individually; knowledge seekers have no control over who responds to their queries. In turn, knowledge contributors have no assurances that the knowledge seekers will understand the answers they gave or reciprocate the favor.

6 This section draws heavily on resources of the Overseas Development Institute and other organizations. Their insights are acknowledged with thanks in each instance.

7 Networks can carry out one or more of these functions simultaneously—and many activities would fall under more than one category—but one must also recognize that there are important trade-offs between them. Each function requires specific capacities and skills, resources, and systems: overlooking trade-offs can drive networks away from their original roles.

8 An agency bears responsibility for pursuing a particular change in policy or practice. A supporting role is one in which the agency itself remains with the members: the organization exists to support them. In reality, of course, networks endeavor to conduct both functions to some degree

Box 1: The Forms of Networks

Functions. What roles and functions does the network carry out, i.e., filtering, amplifying, investing and providing, convening, community building, and/or learning and facilitating?

Governance. What are the behaviors and processes in place within the network that govern its short and long-term functioning?

Localization and scope. Where are the network and its members located both physically and thematically?

Membership. Who are the network's members and how are they related to each other?

Capacity and skill. Does the network, including its members, have the capacity and skills necessary to carry out its functions?

Resources. Does the network have access to the inputs necessary to its functioning?

Communications. Does the network have appropriate communication strategies to carry out its functions, thus amplifying messages outwardly or sharing messages and information within the institution?

External environment. What are the external influences affecting the network?

Strategic and adaptive capacity. Is the network capable of managing changes and shocks in its internal and external environment? Can it manage those changes on its own or does it depend on others, e.g., partners, networks, donors?

Source: Adapted from Ben Ramalingam, Enrique Mendizabal, and Ed Schenkenberg van Mierop. 2008. *Strengthening Humanitarian Networks: Applying the Network Functions Approach*. ODI Background Note. Overseas Development Institute. Available: www.odi.org.uk/publications/background-notes/2008/humanitarian-network-functions-approach.pdf

Box 2: The Functions of Networks

Filtering. Organizing and managing information that is worth paying attention to.

Amplifying. Taking new, little-known, or little-understood ideas, giving them weight, and making them more widely understood.

Investing and providing. Offering a means to give members the resources they need to carry out their main activities.

Convening. Bringing together different, distinct people or groups of people.

Community building. Promoting and sustaining the values and standards of individuals or organizations.

Learning and facilitating. Helping members carry out their activities more efficiently and effectively.

Source: Adapted from Ben Ramalingam, Enrique Mendizabal, and Ed Schenkenberg van Mierop. 2008. *Strengthening Humanitarian Networks: Applying the Network Functions Approach*. ODI Background Note. Overseas Development Institute. Available: www.odi.org.uk/publications/background-notes/2008/humanitarian-network-functions-approach.pdf

- **Steps to Applying the Network Functions Approach.** The six functions of networks can be examined in a structured, step-by-step process to confirm, rethink, or reshape the work of an existing network. Box 3 lists six steps to help those facilitating, acting within, or supporting networks reflect on their activities and frame them in a more structured and strategic fashion. The steps can clarify thinking, hone strategies, sharpen activities, and ultimately improve performance, thus delivering greater value. (The approach can also be used to guide the design of a new network.)

Box 3: Steps to Applying the Network Functions Approach

1. Analyze the relevance of the network's vision and mission.
2. Map existing and planned activities against the six functions of networks.
3. Identify the current and planned balance of effort across the six functions.
4. For each function, identify how the network's role is balanced between "agency" and "support."
5. Rate efficiency and effectiveness.
6. Reflect on the vision and mission.

Source: Developed from Ben Ramalingam, Enrique Mendizabal, and Ed Schenkenberg van Mierop. 2008. *Strengthening Humanitarian Networks: Applying the Network Functions Approach*. ODI Background Note. Overseas Development Institute. Available: www.odi.org.uk/publications/background-notes/2008/humanitarian-network-functions-approach.pdf

- **Principles of Engagement.** Networks are not magic bullets. They can do what they were designed to do, but to adopt new functions they need long-term investments. Box 4 suggests principles that decision makers should consider to build them further. Box 5 identifies some keys to success.

Box 4: Supporting Networks: 10 Principles

1. Networks are complex. There are no templates for success and one should expect setbacks.
2. Work with networks to agree on their functional balance and support that balance.
3. Interventions to develop a network cannot be conceptualized as projects driven by a "logical framework"—other approaches such as outcome mapping can provide a better alternative.
4. Support networks to function as networks with and through their members rather than to deliver specific services that could be delivered by their members or other types of organizations.
5. Do not treat networks as traditional nongovernment or civil society organizations, and do not allow funds to undermine community-building functions.
6. When networks carry out a funding role, ensure they have the necessary skills and that other functions are not affected.
7. Network support time frames should consider the different stages of network development.
8. Appropriate support for the network and its members is needed to develop the right competencies and skills to collaborate.
9. A culture of knowledge and learning is a cornerstone of network development.
10. Sustainability should be judged against the need of the members of the network.

Source: Adapted from Enrique Mendizabal. 2008. *Supporting Networks: Ten Principles*. ODI Opinion. Overseas Development Institute. Available: www.odi.org.uk/publications/opinions/105-enrique-mendizabal-supporting-networks.pdf

- **Tools for Monitoring and Evaluation.** Just like any other system, networks stand to benefit from feedback. Put simply, they need to be evaluated from two perspectives: the effectiveness of the network (doing the right thing) and the efficiency of the network (doing things right). Techniques that lend themselves to monitoring and evaluation of networks include SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats); results-based management; logical framework analysis; outcome mapping; and appreciative inquiry. Since networks are about relationships, it is also pertinent to leverage evaluation methods from the human resources field. Table 1 presents a simple network assessment tool based on the four common design principles of structure, context, support infrastructure, and delivery. Table 2 lists several criteria by means of which knowledge-sharing programs and activities might be assessed. Table 3 suggests metrics with which to measure the use of the collaboration platforms that electronic and other networks often rely on. Boxes 6–7 illustrate a sample process for network assessment and a sample interview protocol.

Box 5: What Networks Need to Do: Some Keys to Success

Clear governance agreements. Networks need clear governance agreements to set objectives, identify functions, define membership structures, make decisions, and resolve conflicts.

Strength in numbers. The larger the numbers involved the greater the political weight that will be given to networks.

Representativeness. Representativeness is one key source of legitimacy and thereby influence.

Quality of evidence. The quality of knowledge products and services affects both the credibility and legitimacy of arguments.

Packaging of evidence. Good packaging of knowledge products is central to effective communication.

Persistence. Influence often requires sustained pressure over a long period.

Membership of key individuals. The membership of influential figures in the policy arena will strengthen networks.

Making use of informal links. Informal links are critical to achieving many network objectives.

Complementing official structures. By their nature, networks add most value when they complement, rather than duplicate, official structures.

Good use of information and communication technology and other networking opportunities. Information and communications technologies are opening up great potential for knowledge networking.

Source: Adapted from Julius Court and Enrique Mendizabal. 2005. Networks and Policy Influence in International Development. *Euforic E-newsletter*. Available: www.euforic.org/docs/200505241513335135.pdf

Table 1: Network Assessment Tool

	Agree	Unsure	Disagree
The network has a clear purpose and direction.			
The network has a realistic timetable for delivery.			
The network members understand and are committed to improvement.			
The network is widely inclusive both in the range of disciplines involved and their seniority.			
Network members demonstrate trust, respect, and mutual support.			
Network members are supported by their host organizations.			
Members access and use technology appropriately to support their networking activities.			
There are clear channels of communication among team members.			
Network members share their learning with others.			
Network members ask each other for support and receive it.			
The network delivers success and demonstrates it.			

Source: Adapted from Department of Health of the United Kingdom. 2009. ***Designing Networks for Collaborative Advantage***. Available: www.csip.org.uk/silo/files/networks-for--collaborative-advantage.pdf

Table 2: Evaluation Framework for Knowledge-Sharing Programs and Activities—Criteria, Indicators, and Evidence

Criteria	Indicators (illustrative)	Evidence (illustrative)
Relevance	• Programs and activities anchored in corporate and country priorities • Programs and activities built on ADB comparative advantage • Institutional support aligned with knowledge-sharing strategy	• Knowledge-sharing strategic objectives including client and audience, well defined and linked to corporate, country, sector, and thematic strategies, and core business processes
Quality and Timeliness of Knowledge Products and Services	• Aggregated knowledge is tailored and timed to client needs, clearly presented, technically sound, and state-of-the-art	• Staff, client, and expert reviews and surveys • ADB content management processes
Accessibility and Reach of Tacit and Codified Knowledge	• Intended users/clients have ready access to up-to-date knowledge and expertise needed to do their jobs	• Dissemination tracking, usability testing, usage monitoring of published and online knowledge and information and knowledge services • Staff, client participation in knowledge sharing events • Staff, client feedback surveys, focus groups, reviews
Utility	• Knowledge products and knowledge-sharing activities incorporated into core business processes • Shared knowledge adapted and applied by clients in policies, programs, and institutional developments • Lessons learned and good practices captured and feedback to ADB and client	• Knowledge strategy articulated in country partnership strategies and operations • Knowledge products and activities built into staff and client (team) learning activities • Staff and client feedback surveys • Program and activity self-assessments • Self- and independent assessments of knowledge-sharing process in country assistance programs, and lending and nonlending services
Likely Impact	• ADB and client knowledge bases and capacities enhanced • Targeted improvements in ADB portfolio performance • Interim and longer-term development objectives achieved	• Ongoing knowledge assessments • Self- and independent assessments of program and activity outcomes relative to stated objectives
Cost Effectiveness	• Programs and activities carried out without more resources than necessary to achieve objectives	• Tracking and benchmarking of the costs of programs or activities

Source: Adapted from 2003. The World Bank. *Sharing Knowledge: Innovations and Remaining Challenges*. Washington, DC. Available: http://lnweb90.worldbank.org/oed/oeddoclib.nsf/DocUNIDViewForJavaSearch/F3A114765B80EB1585256DBB006AFB1E/$file/knowledge_evaluation.pdf

Table 3: Knowledge Performance Metrics by Knowledge Management Tool

Knowledge Management Initiative	System Measure	Output Measure	Outcome Measure
Best Practice Directory	• Number of downloads • Dwell time • Usability survey • Number of users • Total number of contributions • Contribution rate over time	• Usefulness survey • Anecdotes • User ratings of contribution value	• Time, money, or personnel time saved by implementing best practice • Number of groups certified in the use of the best practice • Rate of change in operating costs
Lessons Learned Database	• Number of downloads • Dwell time • Usability survey • Number of users • Total number of contributions • Contribution rate over time	• Time to solve problems • Usefulness survey • Anecdotes • User ratings of contribution value	• Time, money, or personnel time saved by applying lessons learned from others • Rate of change in operating costs
Communities of Practice or Special Interest Groups	• Number of contributions • Frequency of update • Number of members • Ratio of the number of members to the number of contributors (conversion rate)	• Number of apprentices mentored by colleagues • Number of problems solved	• Savings or improvement in organizational quality and efficiency • Captured organizational memory • Attrition rate of community members versus nonmember cohort
Expert or Expertise Directory	• Number of site accesses • Frequency of use • Number of contributions • Contribution/update rate over time • Navigation path analysis • Number of help desk calls	• Time to solve problems • Number of problems solved • Time to find expert	• Savings or improvement in organizational quality and efficiency • Time, money, or personnel time saved by leveraging expert knowledge or expertise database
Portal	• Searching precision and recall • Dwell time • Latency • Usability survey	• Common awareness within teams • Time spent gathering information • Time spent analyzing information	• Time, money, or personnel time saved as a result of portal use • Reduced training time or learning curve as a result of single access to multiple information sources • Customer satisfaction (based on the value of self-service or improved ability for employees to respond to customer needs)

Knowledge Management Initiative	System Measure	Output Measure	Outcome Measure
Lead Tracking System	• Number of contributions • Frequency of update • Number of users • Frequency of use • Navigation path analysis	• Number of successful leads • Number of new customers and value from these customers • Value of new work from existing customers • Proposal response times • Proposal win rates • Percentage of business developers who report finding value in the use of the system	• Revenue and overhead costs • Customer demographics • Cost and time to produce proposals • Alignment of programs with strategic plans
Collaborative Systems	• Latency during collaborative process • Number of users • Number of patents/ trademarks produced • Number of articles published plus number of conference presentations per employee	• Number of programs or projects collaborated on • Time lost because of program delays • Number of new products developed • Value of sales from products created in the last 3–5 years (a measure of innovation) • Average learning curve per employee • Proposal response times • Proposal win rates	• Reduced cost of product development, acquisition, or maintenance • Reduction in the number of program delays • Faster response to proposals • Reduced learning curve for new employees
Yellow Pages	• Number of users • Frequency of use • Latency • Searching precision and recall	• Time to find people • Time to solve problems	• Time, money, or personnel time saved as a result of the use of Yellow Pages • Savings or improvement in organizational quality and efficiency
e-Learning Systems	• Latency • Number of users • Number of courses taken per user	• Training costs	• Savings or improvement in organizational quality and efficiency • Improved employee satisfaction • Reduced cost of training • Reduced learning curve for new employees

Source: 2001. US Department of the Navy. *Metrics Guide for Knowledge Management Initiatives*. Available: www.susanhanley.com/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/metricsguide.pdf

Box 6: Sample Process for Network Assessment

Member consultation. Preliminary information on the reason for the assessment (is it self directed or conducted by an external consultant; is it being done at the request of members; or coordinators; or donors?); discussion with members on what the goals and objectives of the assessment should be; request for relevant documentation.

Documentation review. The method in which the network creates proposals and reports to its donors. How minutes of network meetings and conference calls are conducted. How contracts with members, describing activities to be undertaken as part of receiving funding for participating in the network. This includes workshop reports, memorandums of understanding, and governance agreements.

Interview protocol with individual members. A sample interview protocol is appended. Questions are framed to elicit from members signs of changes in research capacity; relationships with decision makers, with other network members; and other changes resulting from their participation in the network.

Interview protocol with people/organizations identified as those the network is seeking to influence. A sample interview protocol is appended. Questions are framed to elicit indications of whether the network's knowledge products and services were relevant to the needs of those people/organizations; how they engaged with the network.

Network meeting plenary session discussion: locating energy for change. An Appreciative Inquiry approach orients the assessment process towards positive experiences: what is working, what has provided excitement, enrichment, information to one's action—the premise being that when one focuses on the sources of energy within a group of individuals, the problems become less challenging, or less important. At a network meeting, in plenary, members are asked to share their thoughts and stories: (i) Describe the best experience you had with the network: when did you feel most excited about the network; when did you feel you accomplished something valuable as a result of being part of the network? (ii) What did you value the most about the network?

Draft review of assessment and recommendations. This should be circulated to all members for comment, verification of findings.

Assessment report work plan for response to recommendations. The report should not be the end of the assessment. Part of the assessment process should include the development of the work plan for the next phase of the network.

Source: Adapted from International Institute for Sustainable Development. 2004. *Knowledge Networks: Guidelines for Assessment*. Canada. Available: www.iisd.org/pdf/2004/networks_guidelines_for_assessment.pdf

Box 7: Sample Interview Protocol with Network Members

A. Network Effectiveness

What did you hope to accomplish through the network? *Prompts:*
- To increase understanding: Identification of a priority issue for your country/region; contribution to research on a priority issue?
- To have influence: on national (or international) policy agenda?
- To build relationships: create a broader coalition of interest and support for priority issue?
- Others

What did you hope to gain by participating in the network? *Prompts:*
- To gain access to other experts, to information?
- To increase influence and reputation of your own organization nationally, internationally?
- Others

What did you want to contribute to the network? *Prompts:*
- Your knowledge and expertise?
- Access to your own communications vehicles?
- Others

Who did you most want to influence through participating in the network? *Prompts:*
- Local decision makers in different sectors?
- Your own organization?
- Other network members?
- Others outside the network?

What do you think has changed as an outcome of your participation in the network? *Prompts:*
- In your own research?
- In your interactions with local decision makers?
- In your relationships with other network members?
- In levels of awareness and understanding nationally and internationally of the issues the network is addressing?
- Others

B. Network Efficiency

What is working well in the network and should be continued? What did not work well and should be improved or discontinued? *Prompts:*
- Interaction with members (internal communications)?
- Use of the network's website (external communications)?

Did you have good support from your own institution for your work in the network? How did you integrate your network work into the rest of your institution's work?

Were the systems and procedures of the network satisfactory? *Prompts:*
- Contracts?
- Financial support?
- Correspondence, listserv, meetings?
- Interaction with coordinators?

Source: Adapted from International Institute for Sustainable Development. 2004. *Knowledge Networks: Guidelines for Assessment*. Canada. Available: www.iisd.org/pdf/2004/networks_guidelines_for_assessment.pdf

Box 8: Sample Interview Protocol for Those the Network Seeks to Influence

Is the person familiar with the network or with individual members of the network?
- What is their perception of the network's role or contribution to the issues on which it is working?
- What has the network accomplished or produced that the person thinks stands out? (prompt for workshops, conference presentations, research reports, e-mail lists, websites, etc.)

What were the major processes or agendas that the network was or should have been active in to promote their knowledge and advice?
- What knowledge products and services has the network developed that related specifically to those processes and agendas?
- What value has the network added to the debate?

Was the network's knowledge timely?
- Was the network too far ahead of the agenda?
- Was the information relevant to issues of immediate importance to its constituents?
- Has the decision maker more/better information/intelligence than he or she had before?

Does the network have a good understanding of who its "constituents" are?
- Who are the key people who should receive their information?
- Who are the "connectors" that, in turn, could influence key people?
- Has the network built relationships with the right people?

What communication strategies did the network use?
- How did the person being interviewed find out about the network; how has he or she received key research products; were they e-mailed to him or her; did they receive notification from a listserv or a secondary source; how do they use the network's website, etc.

Were the research products in a format useful to the person?

Was the content credible, reliable?

Is this an issue on which the network is recognized as expert?

Where is the network positioned vis-à-vis other actors in this field?
- Was there a nonnetwork publication or organization that they found particularly useful; how does it compare to the network?
- Has the network identified an appropriate niche for itself?

Source: Adapted from International Institute for Sustainable Development. 2004. *Knowledge Networks: Guidelines for Assessment*. Canada. Available: www.iisd.org/pdf/2004/networks_guidelines_for_assessment.pdf

Summing Up

Networks are an important alternative for individuals, groups, and organizations trying to influence practice. (Indeed, some prophesy that they will become the preeminent collaboration mechanism. Certainly, the new information and communication technologies are well suited to support, develop, and even strengthen them.) However, surprisingly little has been written on their strategic development and management, and even less is known about how capacity can be built. Still, rich seams of investigation relate to their forms and functions, key elements of which relate to the external context in which networks are set out and the interests of their members. Work in these areas provides a natural entry point for thinking about the resources, capacities, and skills that networks can offer or might need to develop. Moreover, since networks exist for a purpose, there surely is interest also in their use of evidence to influence practice, and ways to improve that. Lastly, more research is needed on simple but effective means to evaluate performance.

Further Reading

ADB. 2008a. *Building Communities of Practice*. Manila. Available: www.adb.org/documents/information/knowledge-solutions/building-communities-practice.pdf

_____. 2008b. *Linking Research to Practice*. Manila. Available: www.adb.org/documents/information/knowledge-solutions/linking-research-practice.pdf

_____. 2008c. *Posting Research Online*. Manila. Available: www.adb.org/documents/information/knowledge-solutions/posting-research-online.pdf

_____. 2008d. *Creating and Running Partnerships*. Manila. Available: www.adb.org/documents/information/knowledge-solutions/creating-running-partnerships.pdf

_____. 2009. *Social Network Analysis*. Manila. Available: www.adb.org/documents/information/knowledge-solutions/social-network-analysis.pdf

John Seely Brown and Paul Duguid. 2000. *The Social Life of Information*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

International Institute for Sustainable Development. 2004. *Knowledge Networks: Guidelines for Assessment.* Canada. Available: www.iisd.org/pdf/2004/networks_guidelines_for_assessment.pdf

Julius Court and Enrique Mendizabal. 2005. Networks and Policy Influence in International Development. *Euforic E-newsletter*. Available: www.euforic.org/docs/200505241513335135.pdf

Enrique Mendizabal. 2008. *Supporting Networks: Ten Principles*. ODI Opinion. Overseas Development Institute. Available: www.odi.org.uk/publications/opinions/105-enrique-mendizabal-supporting-networks.pdf

Ben Ramalingam, Enrique Mendizabal, and Ed Schenkenberg van Mierop. 2008. Strengthening Humanitarian Networks: Applying the Network Functions Approach. *ODI Background Note*. Overseas Development Institute. Available: www.odi.org.uk/publications/background-notes/2008/humanitarian-network-functions-approach.pdf

For further information

Contact Olivier Serrat, Head of the Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank (oserrat@adb.org).

Conducting After-Action Reviews and Retrospects

by Olivier Serrat

Organizational learning calls for nonstop assessment of performance—its successes and failures. This makes sure that learning takes place and supports continuous improvement. After-action reviews and retrospects are a tool that facilitates assessments; they enable this by bringing together a team to discuss an activity or project openly and honestly.

Rationale

Exit interviews are a way to capture knowledge from leavers. Peer assists are about teams asking for help for the benefit of their members. They are about "learning before doing." But continuously assessing organizational performance to meet or exceed expectations requires also that one obtain feedback and understand what happened (or did not happen) during an activity or project, or soon after completion. After-action reviews are about "learning while doing:" they identify how to correct shortcomings and sustain accomplishments. Retrospects are about "learning after doing:" they capture the new knowledge acquired after the fact.[1] In both instances, knowledge gleaned from and compiled by those closest to the review can be used to improve results and can be shared with others who are planning, developing, implementing, and evaluating similar efforts.

Definition

After-action reviews are a leadership and knowledge-sharing tool which bring together the team that is closest to the activity or project, when a critical milestone has been reached, to discuss successes and failures in an open and honest fashion. The purpose is to learn from the experience and take the lessons learned into the next phase of the activity or project, or to accomplish related tasks more effectively the next time a similar activity or project is conducted. After-action reviews and retrospects are linked conceptually. The difference lies in the degree of detail and the formality applied to the process of conducting them.

Benefits

When administered in a climate of openness, candid discussion, clarity, and commitment to identifying and recommending solutions, after-action reviews and retrospects yield many benefits. The participants in the review, e.g., managers, leaders, and those planning to pursue a similar activity or project in the future, will understand more clearly what was originally intended, what transpired and why, as well as what might be done better and how. The number of subsequent repeats of mistakes or missteps will decrease. Furthermore, reports from after-action reviews and retrospects that make concrete and actionable recommendations will increase the chances of success of similar activities or projects.

[1] After-action reviews and retrospects are not audits. The latter are often evaluative or conducted for purposes of accountability. The former aim to turn knowledge into action, not to make judgments.

Lastly, the promotion of open and frequent communication and sharing and the institutionalization of regularly-held meetings that examine strengths to sustain and shortcomings to remedy will also improve morale.

Processes

The focus of an after-action review is to answer three broad questions: What did we set out to do? What worked well, and why? What might we do differently next time, and how? However, there are many ways to tackle these questions: the desired simplicity at the heart of after-action reviews and retrospects means that there is potential to experiment and find ways that will work best with the activity or project examined and the team involved in these. Be it for after-action reviews or retrospects, the processes should be kept simple and easy to remember. Box 1 elaborates on the purpose of the principal questions to ask. Box 2 itemizes the process of planning, preparing, conducting, and following up on an after-action review.

Box 1: After-Action Review Questions

Question	Purpose
What was supposed to happen? What actually happened? Why were there differences?	These questions establish a common under-standing of the work item under review. The facilitator should encourage and promote discussion around these questions. In particular, divergences from the plan should be explored.
What worked? What didn't? Why?	These questions generate reflection about the successes and failures during the course of the project, activity, event, or task. The question "Why?" generates understanding of the root causes of these successes and failures.
What would you do differently next time?	This question is intended to help identify specific actionable recommendations. The facilitator asks the team members for crisp and clear, achievable, and future-oriented recommendations.

Source: 2008. Overseas Development Institute. After-Action Reviews and Retrospects.
Available: www.odi.org.uk/rapid/tools/toolkits/km/aar.html

The Overseas Development Institute explains that the questions posed for a retrospect follow the after-action review format but involve asking the following more detailed questions:

- What did you set out to achieve?
- What was your plan to achieve this?
- How did this change as you progressed?
- What went well and why?
- What could have gone better?
- What advice would you give yourself if you were to go back to where you were at the start of the activity or project?
- What were the two or three key lessons you would share with others?
- What's next for you in terms of this project?
- Can you think of a story that summarizes your experience of work on this activity or project?
- What should we have learned from this activity or project a year from now?
- Are there any lessons for you personally?

Box 2: The After-Action Review Process

Planning the After-Action Review
• Identify an event or activity to be reviewed. • Identify the primary point of contact for the review. • Determine when the after-action review will occur. • Decide who will attend the after-action review. • Select when and where the after-action review will take place. Plan for no more than 90 minutes.[1] • Confirm who will support the after-action review, e.g., technical lead, champion, point of contact, minute taker.
Preparing for the After-Action Review
• Select a facilitator. • Confirm the venue and agenda. • Obtain inputs from interested parties. • Announce the after-action review and compile the list of attendees. • Make logistical arrangements and set up the venue.
Conducting the After-Action Review
• Seek maximum participation. • Maintain focus on a positive and informative after-action review. • Ensure honest, candid, and professional dialogue. • Record key points.
Following Up: Using the Results of the After-Action Review
• Determine actionable recommendations that will improve the process. • Identify tasks requiring senior leadership decisions. • Determine a follow up schedule and point of contact for each follow-up action. • Provide assistance and support as required.

[1] An after-action review might last as little as 20 minutes.

Note: This publication details the four steps in the after-action review process. It provides checklists for the planning and conduct of after-action reviews and for their logistical arrangements and setup. It also offers ground rules for facilitators.

Source: 2006. U.S. Agency for International Development. After-Action Review: Technical Guidance. Washington. Available: http://knowledge.usaid.gov/aar.htm.

Others

After-action reviews and retrospects are not critique or complaint sessions. They are intended to maximize experience by allowing everyone to learn from each other. They are not a full-scale evaluation. And, they are not a cure for all problems. After-action reviews are successful when leaders support them, they are done immediately—by the team and for the team, and participants agree to be honest.

For further information

Contact Olivier Serrat, Head of the Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank (oserrat@adb.org).

Conducting Effective Presentations

by Peter Malvicini and Albert Dean Atkinson

Simple planning and a little discipline can turn an ordinary presentation into a lively and engaging event.

Rationale

From interviews and our own observations, the following scenario is common: the speaker at a seminar shares about 30 slides, skipping over many. Time goes on…and on. Some participants lose interest; others become distracted; some even slip out. Finally, the sponsor says, "Time has run out, but maybe we can have one or two questions." Yet it looked as though the speaker had just reached the heart of the matter. What happened?

In most organizations, staff are busy and they vote with their feet. If they are bored or not actively engaged, they will find excuses to leave. Some will never return to presentations conducted by the same speaker. The good news is that guidelines for conducting effective presentations are simple and do not depend on the speaking ability of the person sharing the message.

Not "How should I talk?" but "How do they learn?"

Most speakers ask the wrong questions. Their efforts are dedicated to the substantive preparation of content ("What should I say?") and pay too little attention to the most important questions: "*Who is my audience*?" and "*How will participants learn best*?" Years of research on adult learning tell us that *adults learn best when*

- The learning purpose and boundaries are clear. The invitation, welcome address, and introduction all orient participants to why they are there and what they can expect.
- Participants first establish common ground by sharing experiences or perspectives.
- Ideas can be shared freely in open environments.
- Ideas are heard before they are critiqued.
- Participants question assumptions driving their behavior and consider alternatives.
- The learning is based on the person's own experience.
- Participants engage actively rather than receive information passively.
- The speaker works with a variety of methods (and senses)—different from typical daily routines.
- The presentation is future-oriented and does not focus on problem solving.[1] This creates anticipation as participants consider the implications for changes in practice.
- Topics apply directly to the professional work of participants and they mull over next steps before they leave the room.

[1] Nothing is wrong with *problem solving*, but it often traps energy. A strategic approach only addresses problems if they are barriers to critical action. According to Carl Jung, problems tend to resolve or "fall off the radar" naturally: "All the greatest and most important problems of life are fundamentally insoluble…They can never be solved, but only outgrown. This 'outgrowth' proved on further investigation to require a new level of consciousness. Some higher or wider interest appeared on the patient's horizon, and through this broadening of his or her outlook the insoluble problem lost its urgency. It was not solved logically in its own terms but faded when confronted with a new and stronger life urge."

Full Disclosure

Let participants know what the seminar is about and give details of who will be sharing information. The opportunities include

- a visitor from a partner agency;
- the release of a study, report, or evaluation;
- a case study of a particular project;
- a new technology, tool, or concept; and
- a perspective or inspirational talk from a leader or respected expert.

If the seminar is given primarily by a consultant marketing a tool or expertise, the announcement will need to make that clear.

Share Expectations

Without being condescending, ask the speaker what his or her approach will be and whether you can see the presentation slides in advance. A complex game plan or an unrealistic number of slides is a good warning sign. Share these *Knowledge Solutions* with them as another way to facilitate preparation.

Agree on a Length of Time in Advance

If the event is a 1-hour presentation, time will pass quickly. One approach is to (i) take 20 minutes for a formal presentation; (ii) move to a question-and-answer session and, if time permits; (iii) hold a constructive group discussion. Better still, if possible, integrate brief questions after certain sections of the presentation instead of saving them for last.

20-Minute Attention Span

Even if your speaker is spellbinding, research shows that most people lose interest after 20 minutes. If the presentation spans 1 hour, it should be broken up with questions and answers or open discussions. Better to leave the group wanting more, than wishing you had given less.

Tell your Story

Illustrations and anecdotes are key to making points effectively and relating to participants.

Takeaways

Supplement the presentation with a brief handout (not merely a copy of the slides)—takeaways add value and catalyze follow-through.

Discussion Questions

Ask the speaker to craft a few discussion questions in advance. Questions that draw experience work best. Analytical questions are second best. Questions about how ideas might be applied are more difficult. For example: (i) What is *your* experience in this area? (ii) Why do you think it worked that way? (iii) What can be done differently in the future?

Organizing a Presentation

In the introduction to the movie, *The Prestige*, the magician explains that there are three parts to every illusion. The first part is the *pledge* where the audience is told what they will see in order to capture attention. The second is the *turn* at which point the trick is performed. Third, the magician restores what he made disappear. It is a moment of awe and appreciation. "Ta-da!" Though not magic, research in communication and adult learning shows that even a brief presentation should follow a similar sequence. For this we can use *hook-look-took*:

- **Hook.** The very start of any presentation should answer the participants' unstated question, "What's in it for me?" This effectively draws people in, helping them quickly relate the topic to their experience (past, present, or future). Relevance is established. An effective hook can be a question or a brief story. The speaker

should not wait until the end of the presentation to confirm the relevance of the message. Even before the presentation begins, the speaker should display the title of the presentation as participants seat themselves. This allows participants to prepare for the topic. Better yet, a pre-presentation might automatically loop introductory slides to give the audience background information.

- **Look.** This is the heart of the presentation, where the concepts and experiences are explained, illustrated, and examined. A presentation is different from a workshop—the presenter must be selective and synthetic. In many cases, introducing a topic and piquing participant interest are all one can reasonably expect in the time frame. A few well-placed illustrations or stories can pull a presentation nicely together.
- **Took.** Most speakers would like participants to apply or use what they learn in their professional work. Should participants do anything with the knowledge gained from the seminar? If the answer is yes, *they are unlikely to do anything they do not discuss at the seminar*. Application is not automatic—even the best seminars are quickly forgotten. If there is a specific opportunity to follow up or to take a next step, try to "close the deal" at the seminar.

Slide Maxims

- *Follow the Rule of 7 (or 777)*. It recommends a maximum of 7 lines of text on any slide, a maximum of 7 words on any one line, and a maximum of 7 slides in a 20-minute talk.
- *Do not read your slides.* Most participants read just as well. Paraphrasing the content works, as does illustrating it.
- *Choose your fonts carefully.* Font selection can help or hurt a presentation. Sans serif fonts (such as Arial) are best used for titles, while serif fonts (such as Times New Roman) make the text of the main body easier to read.[2]
- *Use subtle transition effects*. When changing slides, avoid dizzying effects such as elaborate fade-ins.
- *Do not skip slides*. Edit the presentation in advance based on the time given. "Recycled" talks need to be adapted to the particular group.
- *Use graphics prudently.* A picture is worth a thousand words. Full slide photographs or clearly illustrated diagrams can be inserted every three to five slides to provide visual learners with a medium that appeals to their senses. Similarly, short audio clips reinforce concepts for audio learners, while short video clips meet the needs of both audio and visual learners.
- *Evaluate the use of slides.* It sounds like heresy but not every presentation benefits from slides. In some cases, a handout with informal sharing of experience or "stories" is more effective. Try it for a change.

On the Day of the Presentation

The speaker should arrive at the venue at least 15 minutes in advance to check the sound system, projector, computer connection, and internet connection. If using a remote control for slide advancement or laser pointer, he or she should become comfortable with how they work. Nothing is more frustrating to participants than watching a presenter attempt to get the slides to show up on a projector and fumble with a remote control or laser pointer while speaking.

Preparation

A little preparation, when it comes to conducting presentations, is much better than none. But not all the ideas in these *Knowledge Solutions* should be applied at once. Presenters should try a few, and see what happens.

For further information

Contact Peter Malvicini, strategic consultant (pgm1@cornell.edu), or Albert Dean Atkinson, Head of Information Resources and Services, Asian Development Bank (adatkinson@adb.org).

[2] You can read them up to 20% faster, as serifs help the eye tie letters together.

Conducting Peer Assists

by Olivier Serrat

Peer assists are events that bring individuals together to share their experiences, insights, and knowledge on an identified challenge or problem. They also promote collective learning and develop networks among those invited.

Rationale

The experience that an organization has gained is its most important asset. Exit interviews are a way of capturing knowledge from leavers, but can only be relied upon once. Peer assists capture knowledge before employees leave, and in such ways that can repeatedly apply and strengthen good practice as well as consistency across an organization.

Definition

The formal use of peer assists as a management tool was pioneered by British Petroleum to help staff learn from the experiences of others before they embark on an activity or project. Put simply, a peer assist is the process whereby a team working on an activity or project calls a meeting or workshop to seek knowledge and insights from a good mix of people in other teams. From the onset, the distinction between a peer assist and a peer review should be made explicit: without it, participants will fall into the familiar patterns of peer reviews and little knowledge will be transferred. Table 1 explains the principal differences between the two.

Table 1: How does a peer assist differ from a peer review?

	Peer Review	Peer Assist
Goal	To judge the work of others	To transfer knowledge to others
Purpose	The purpose of a peer review is evaluative.	The purpose of a peer assist is collaborative.
Task	The core task of a peer review is to critique the activity or project.	The core task of a peer assist is to learn with and through the team that calls the assist.
Participants	Peer reviewers are selected by others.	The team that calls the peer assist selects the assisters, i.e., those whom they think could be of help to them.
Nature	Peer reviews can be a “dog-and-pony” show aimed at receiving a good evaluation.	A peer assist is a problem-solving, working session.
Roles	Some people are always peer reviewers. Others are always receivers.	The role of participants to a peer assist is reciprocal. Members of the team calling the assist may themselves assist others.
Reporting	The peer review report is sent to management.	The peer assist report is sent only to the team requesting the peer assist.

Source: Adapted from Common Knowledge Associates. 2007. Peer Assists: Guidelines for Practice. Available: www.commonknowledge.org/homepage.asp?id=19

Benefits

Peer assists are part of the process of "learning before doing." They are about gathering knowledge from knowledge brokers before embarking on an activity or project, or when facing a difficulty in the course of related events. The benefits of peer assists are quickly realized: learning is focused directly on a specific issue and can therefore be applied immediately. A peer assist allows the team involved to gain input and insights from people outside the team, and to identify possible new lines of enquiry or approach—in short, reusing existing knowledge and experience rather than having to reinvent the wheel. Peer assists also have wider benefits: they promote sharing of learning between teams, and help develop strong networks among people. They are relatively simple and inexpensive to organize: they do not require special resources or new, unfamiliar processes. It is worth using a peer assist when a team is facing a challenge, where the knowledge of others will really help, and when the potential benefits outweigh the costs of travel.

Process

There is no single way to hold a peer assist. Box 1 outlines the method that has worked for British Petroleum. Box 2 gives an example of a peer assist at British Petroleum in the form of a story. Table 2 shows what a meeting agenda for a peer assist might look like.

Box 1: Peer Assists at British Petroleum

Clarify the Purpose of the Peer Assist. Peer assists work well when their purpose is clear and you communicate that purpose to participants. Define the specific problem you are seeking help with, and be sure that your aim in calling a peer assist is to learn something (rather than seeking endorsement for a decision you have already made).

Has the Problem Already Been Solved? Do some research to find out who else has already solved or tackled a similar problem. Also, share your peer assist plans with others, as there may be other teams who are currently tackling a similar problem who could also benefit from participating in the peer assist.

Enlist the Help of a Facilitator. You will need a facilitator from outside the team to make sure participants to the meeting reach the desired outcome. The facilitator also may or may not record the event: be sure to agree on that before the meeting.

Pay Attention to Timing. Ensure that you plan a date for the peer assist that is early enough in your project to make use of the input you receive and to do something different on the basis of what you have learned. A frequent mistake is to hold the meeting too close to the decision date to make a real impact. Consider that you might get a different response to the one you expect: will you have time to do anything about it? The length of a peer assist depends on the complexity of the problem and tends to be somewhere between half a day and two days.

Select the Participants. Once you are clear on your purpose, select participants who have the diversity of knowledge, skills and experiences needed for the peer assist. Four to five people are a good number.[1] Look "across" the organization rather than "up" it—hierarchies can hamper the free exchange of knowledge whereas peers tend to be much more open with each other and can challenge without feeling threatened. Avoid the temptation to select "the usual suspects." If the same experts are selected for peer assists again and again, you may be limiting the number of fresh ideas and perspectives available to you. Similarly, seek to select people who will challenge your ways of thinking and working and perhaps offer a different angle, rather than looking for people who will validate your current Reports drawn up on the lines I propose may first seem rough as compared with the flat surface of "officialese" jargon. But the saving in time will be great, while the discipline of setting out the real points concisely will prove an aid to clearer thinking.

[1] Having more than five participants makes it difficult to have an in-depth discussion.

Be Clear about Deliverables. Be clear about what you hope to achieve during the peer assist and then plan the time to achieve that. The deliverables should comprise options and insights rather than providing an answer. It is up to the person or team who called the peer assist to then make the relevant decisions, based on what is learned. Provide the participants with any briefing materials in advance so that they have adequate time to prepare.

Allow Time for Socializing. Allow time in your agenda for the teams to get to know one another; this might be a dinner the night before or time for coffee at the start of the day. It is important to build rapport so that the group can work openly together.

Describe the Purpose and Set the Ground Rules. At the start of the meeting, ensure that everyone is clear about the purpose of the peer assist and their roles within it. The role of the host team is to listen in order to understand and learn. The role of the visiting team is to share knowledge and experience to help resolve the challenge without adding to the workload. Agree that where there are areas of contention, you will focus on the activity or project rather than on the individual people involved.

Share Information and Context. Divide the meeting time roughly into four equal parts. During the first quarter, the host team will present the context, history, and their future plans regarding the problem or challenge in question. Keep this part short and sharp—you only want to say enough to get the visiting team started in the right direction. Remember that the purpose of the peer assist is to learn rather than tell. When communicating the problem or challenge about which you are seeking input, be prepared for it to be redefined as part of the peer assist process. It may be that the problem you have identified is in fact the symptom of a further problem and the peer assist will help you identify the root cause.

Encourage the Participants to Ask Questions and Give Feedback. In the second quarter, the participants consider what they have heard, and then begin by discussing what they have heard that has surprised them, and what they expected to hear but haven't. The host team should take a back seat at this stage and simply listen; in some cases they may even opt to leave the room. The participants then consider what else they need to know to address the problem and where might they find that knowledge. It may be that they want to make some telephone calls and talk to some other people, or request some data or reports. Remember, they are not seeking to solve the problem but to offer some options and insights based on their own knowledge and experience.

Analyze What You Have Heard. The third quarter of the meeting is for the visiting team to then analyze and reflect on what they have learned and to examine options. Again, the home team remains largely in the back seat; it might be appropriate to involve one or two of them, provided that they continue to listen and learn rather than closing off options or seeking to draw conclusions too early.

Present Feedback and Agree on Actions. In the fourth and final quarter of the meeting, the visiting team presents their feedback to the host team and answers any questions. The presentation will be along the lines of "what we have learned, what options we see, and what has worked elsewhere." As with all feedback, this should start with the positive—what has been done well, and then what options there are to do things differently. When presenting what has worked elsewhere, participants should simply tell the story rather than prescribing "you should…" In closing, the person who called the peer assist should acknowledge the contribution of the visiting team, and also commit to when he or she will get back with an action list of what the team are going to do differently. Finally, invite the visiting team to reflect on what they have learned and what they will take away and apply. Learning is never one-way.

Source: Adapted from National Library for Health. 2008. *Knowledge Management Specialist Library. Peer Assists.* Available: www.library.nhs.uk/knowledgemanagement/

Box 2: Peer Assist at British Petroleum

Helen is a team leader for British Petroleum's Barden Exploration site. She has four people reporting to her, two geo-physicists, a geologist, and a petroleum engineer. The team has spent several months collecting and analyzing a great deal of data about the possible well site off the coast of Norway known as Barden. The team is at a point where they need to make a decision as to how they will proceed. Should they commit to a rig? Should they make firm commitments to their partners in the exploration license? These are important decisions because of the money involved; a rig, for example, can cost up to $200 a minute.

Helen's team has decided it would be useful for her to call upon the knowledge that other people in British Petroleum have learned about this type of prospect. They are going to call a peer assist. That means identifying people from other parts of the world who have experience with the kind of issues facing the Barden team. Helen identifies about 15 possible candidates; people she has worked with before or knows about through the grapevine. She makes the calls. She finds some are too busy on other projects, but she ends up with six people from her original list that she thinks can be very helpful, three from the Norway office, one from Scotland, one from South Africa, and two from London. They have agreed to meet on Wednesday, one month from now, in Stavanger, Norway to spend the day.

On the meeting day, Helen starts by defining what her team wants from the peer assist. She lays out their objectives for the meeting. The peer assist members have received a packet of material to read through in advance. The walls of the conference room where Helen's team and the peer assisters are meeting are covered with pictures of the ocean bed, seismic lines, and charts. More are spread several layers deep on the tables around the room. As Helen finishes her introduction, the peer assist group asks some clarification questions about the objectives, and then Helen introduces Knut who begins to talk through the data and his interpretation of it. Before long everyone is up looking more closely at the wall data. There is a lively discussion about the implications among all the participants.

After a coffee break, Martin, another team member, is introduced and he begins to show the data for seismic velocity. Again within minutes the whole group is back on their feet examining the charts more closely. The discussion flows back and forth with the peer assist members asking each other technical questions about the data and often challenging each other's responses.

After the lunch break, Helen says that they have finished presenting the data they planned. The peer assist group again returns to questions about the original objectives for clarification in light of what they have just heard. One of peer assisters notes that: "I'm uncomfortable with the discussion because there are some strategic decisions to be made before we can give our opinion on whether to drill the well." The group decides they need to develop criteria for drilling the Barden well. Collaboratively the two groups develop these criteria, gaining additional insight as they talk through each point.

About three o'clock Helen says she would like to excuse herself and her team to give the assist team a chance to talk through the response they want to make. Once the Barden team leaves the room, the peer assist group designates one member to keep track of their ideas on the flip charts and they consider who should make the report when the team returns. As the group gets down to work on their recommendations there is an animated exchange. For nearly every assertion that is made, someone wants to know why that is needed or why it should be given preference over other points. The member from Scotland suggests a new technique they have just developed west of the Shetlands that could provide useful additional data on a prospect like Barden. He offers to send the specifications for that process and to spend some time helping the Barden team go through it the first time. The discussion is technical but it is very open and lively. It is obvious that the members are interested in this situation and want to be of help.

About five o'clock the Barden team returns to hear the ideas of the assist team. The spokesperson thanks the Barden team for giving them a chance to work on such an interesting problem and notes they have all learned from the exchange. The verbal report is given with the promise of a more formal written report

later.As the report proceeds the Barden team asks a few clarification questions, but mostly they listen to the thoughtful response this team is providing. When the report is finished, Helen says that the report is very clear and notes that it has given her team a great deal to think about as they move toward the decisions they must make. She acknowledges that the Barden team was nervous about whether it was too early in their investigation to call for a peer assist, but she is now convinced that the timing was right. The team can take the recommendations into account before they are fully committed to a course of action. The day ends with a dinner at a local restaurant. The dinner is relaxed and people have time to talk through how the peer assist went. The dinner is a way for the Barden team to express their gratitude to those who came to lend their knowledge.

Table 2: Meeting Agenda for Peer Assists[1]

Item	Time Allowed
1. The participants introduce themselves. The activity or project leader presents the context, history, and ideas regarding the activity or project at hand. He or she states the objective of the peer assist and enables possible redefinition of the session.	
2. The participants consider the problem or challenge the activity or project team faces. They present or discuss what has been covered and whatever information was not included in the pre-documents.[2]	
3. The peer assisters consider what the activity or project team might need to know to address the problem or challenge it faces.	
4. The peer assisters are given time to reflect on what has been learned and to examine options.[3]	
5. The peer assisters provide non-prescriptive recommendations to the activity or project team.[4] They respond to specific questions.	
6. The activity or project team acknowledges the contributions of participants. It responds to the peer assisters, noting what it found particularly useful. It may commit to a timeline for delivery of an action list, emphasizing the different things that it will do as a result of the peer assist.[5] Follow-up interviews may be considered.	

[1] Complex problems or challenges may require time for the peer assisters and the activity or project team to socialize outside of meeting times. The establishment of good rapports is fundamental to the learning process.
[2] Participants should be given material in advance so that they may prepare for the peer assist.
[3] This may require that the activity or project team leave the premises.
[4] Participants share knowledge to help resolve the problem or challenge without adding to the workload.
[5] This is not the time for decisions. The team will make these on a separate, team-held occasion.

Source: Adapted from Common Knowledge Associates. 2007. Peer Assists: Guidelines for Practice. Available: www.commonknowledge.org/homepage.asp?id=19

Others

An important consideration is that of evidence-based practice. When conducting peer assists, staff will need to ensure that lessons learned are based on a combination of both on-the-job experience and evidence. They might wish to carry out an after-action review following the peer assist to look at whether the process went according to plan, what was different and why, and what can one learn from that for the next time. While the peer assist process is designed to provide input for a specific purpose or project, they should consider who else might benefit from the lessons learned.

For further information

Contact Olivier Serrat, Head of the Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank (oserrat@adb.org).

Knowledge Solutions

Conducting Successful Retreats

by Peter Malvicini and Olivier Serrat

A retreat is a meeting designed and organized to facilitate the ability of a group to step back from day-to-day activities for a period of concentrated discussion, dialogue, and strategic thinking about their organization's future or specific issues. Organizations will reap full benefits if they follow basic rules.

Rationale

People look forward to retreats (or workshops) with excitement or dread. At best, it is a time for renewal, team building, and focusing work. At worst, it is a dull two days of lectures or extended meetings. A good retreat works in three dimensions—the practical, the ideal, and the political—ignore any one and you are headed for trouble.

Applications

There are as many reasons for conducting a retreat as there are issues and challenges facing an organization. Among the most common uses of retreats are

- Helping set or change strategic direction.
- Fostering a collective vision.
- Creating a common framework and point of reference.
- Developing annual goals, objectives, and budgets.
- Discussing specific issues or challenges facing the organization.
- Dealing with sources of conflict and confusion.
- Generating creative solutions for entrenched problems.
- Improving working relationships and increasing trust.
- Encouraging honest and enlightened conversations.
- Letting people be heard on issues that are important to them.
- Orienting new staff.

Tips for Effective Retreats

Here are a dozen tips to make retreats more effective

- **Start at the End.** Know what you want from your retreat, "your intended outcomes," and how you will follow up the event. Work with a planning group in your unit and be clear about these outcomes from the beginning. Be careful not to define predetermined results: instead choose a focus to guide your work: "a plan to implement x," "a new strategy for y," "actions to strengthen workflows and business processes," etc.
- **Get Away.** Allow some physical or psychological distance from the office and see what happens. If you are on-site, distractions can undermine work and preserve the formality one is trying to break down.[1] Crossing the street is better than going no-

[1] The reasons for this are straightforward: retreats require long periods of intense, uninterrupted discussion; participants are less likely to be interrupted by phone calls and other staff if they are away from the office; participants can better focus on the topics under discussion; participants are more like to stay for the entire time; and being "away on retreat" creates a atmosphere that is more conducive to teamwork, creative thinking, and consensus building.

where. If working for a couple of days, try something further afield—the cost is small compared with the gain from the energy and continuity you create. The intensive effort and concentrated time staff can give to an effort normally pays off. The work and fun had in two 10-hour days off-site gains more than two six hour days on-site and much more than weekly committee meetings for a year.

- **Suspend the Rules.** The workplace carries sets of unspoken rules and implied norms of behavior, especially when dealing with people of different position and status within the hierarchy. At least during your retreat, remove these boundaries and create broad ownership of the task as a team. During introductions make this clear. Rein in any dominant senior personnel and let participants see how important it is that all have a voice. And please leave formal business dress behind.
- **Work as a Team.** Retreats are special. So do not organize them like a two-day staff meeting or a symposium. If participants are passive, they will lose interest even in the most captivating speakers. Information sharing is more effective by print through a briefing pack for the event. Short briefings are useful as background for an activity, but spend most of your time in deliberation, prefer-ably in smaller groups, and large group discussion of those ideas.
- **Discuss the "Undiscussable."** All units have concerns not normally put on the table (but everyone is aware of them)—typically these issues are a barrier to productive work. A retreat can be a time to work on these areas positively and productively. Discussions in smaller groups can help staff vent any frustrations and then return to the larger group with practical solutions. Do not miss a chance to do important work and break through a serious bottleneck to effectiveness.
- **Keep it Real.** Do real work. As much as possible, avoid simulations, abstract discussions, and lectures from experts. Real tasks energize participants, combined with challenging matters that concern them most, and a process that lets them question, deliberate, and refine their ideas and actions. "Experts" can be useful as resource persons to serve the task, but many find the combined expertise of their staff to be more than adequate for the job.
- **Do Not Play Games (Just Have Fun).** By design, a retreat is less formal than the workplace. That informality is one way of engaging people and creating a safe environment. Game-playing may send mixed signals, especially when the organization's culture views them as silly. Creative ways of working with small groups or teams and creative ways of presenting ongoing work will allow the humor of participants to break through spontaneously—this can be useful especially when dealing with difficult topics and concerns. This is also an effective way of indirect teambuilding.
- **Mix it Up.** Variety will hold the interest of participants. Try different size discussion groups, different small group processes, and different ways of sharing group outputs. Avoid organizing things the same way you would back at the workplace. People learn and plan differently—create opportunities for all participants.
- **Think Big.** By stepping away from work routine, participants have a chance to rediscover the meaning and motivation for their daily work. Whenever possible, allow all staff to envision the future of the organization—they can build a shared understanding, and this is powerful. Staff then move swiftly from a "bird's eye view" of desired outcomes and goals, translating them into concrete results.
- **Think Small.** Staff and management want concrete results. Discussing the "nuts and bolts" of implementation means the difference between real follow-up and good intentions. There will not be time to consider all details. But, draft basic timetables and share responsibility for follow-up tasks before you leave the retreat.
- **Just Do It.** Deliberation is great. Deliberative action is better. The climax of a good retreat should be decisions for new action. A poorly planned retreat will not leave enough time for this and the lack of follow-up will be obvious.
- **Get Professional Help.** Planning your retreat need not drive you insane. Most organizations can benefit from using a facilitator with expertise in group dynamics, group processes, team building, decision making, and consensus building. He or she will help plan the retreat, develop the agenda, and set realistic goals and expectations. During the retreat the facilitator will manage or facilitate group discussions.[2] The facilitator should have no particular stake or interest in the issues being discussed. His or her sole interest should be in

[2] This will involve tracking three levels of activity—the substance of the work, the process, and the relationships (psychosocial environment).

helping the group have a successful retreat. During the retreat, the facilitator will also function as a recorder for the group by capturing the key points on a flip chart or on computer. After the retreat, the facilitator will generally provide the group with a written report summarizing the discussions, any decisions that were made, and action steps to be taken. If no professional facilitators is available, consider training members of your unit or borrow (or swap) experienced facilitators from other units.

Table: Retreat Planning Checklist

Purpose	Location
• What is the purpose of the retreat? • What criteria will we use to determine that the retreat was successful? • Who supports the idea of holding a retreat? • Who is opposed to the idea? • Who needs to attend the retreat? • Who will participate? • Will all the key participants be able to attend? • How much time will they be willing to spend at the retreat?	• Where will the retreat be held? • Are the rules governing the use of the space acceptable? • Can the room be arranged as we want it? • Are the chairs comfortable? • Is there good control over lighting and air conditioning? • Can we have food, snacks, and refreshments in the room? • Who will provide food, snacks, and refreshments? • Can we hang flip chart paper on the walls? • How will breaks and meals be handled? • Will overnight accommodation be needed?
Equipment	**Facilitator**
• What equipment will be needed? • Who will provide it? • Who will operate it?	• Do we need an outside facilitator? • Who will facilitate? • How much experience does the facilitator have with groups like ours?
Recording and Reporting	
• Do we want to record the meeting? • What kind of a retreat report do we need?	

Reasons Not to Hold a Retreat

Retreats will not help if the organizer has no intention (or ability) to follow through or act on the suggestions of participants or if the intention is to

- Fulfill a covert agenda.
- Make an individual's problem the group's problem.
- Talk at participants instead of with them.
- Improve morale.
- Treat the retreat as a reward.

For further information

Contact Peter Malvicini, Strategic Consultant (pgm1@cornell.edu) or Olivier Serrat, Head of the Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank (oserrat@adb.org).

Identifying and Sharing Good Practices

by Olivier Serrat

Good practice is a process or methodology that has been shown to be effective in one part of the organization and might be effective in another too.

Rationale

Most organizations know that learning from the past increases the chances of success in the future—finding ways to do so can also link staff with the resources they need to complete tasks faster, better, and more cheaply. Frequently, this is done by means of instruction manuals or "how-to" guides—which typically provide information or advice on a particular topic, or with taxonomies—which are a common way to organize content logically. Leading organizations maximize opportunities across all core knowledge activities to identify, create, store, share, and use better.

A good practice is defined as anything that has been tried and shown to work in some way—whether fully or in part but with at least some evidence of effectiveness—and that may have implications for practice at any level elsewhere. Three possible levels of good practice flow from this: promising practices, demonstrated practices, and replicated practices.[1] Since knowledge is both explicit and tacit, good practice programs should comprise two elements: good practices databases that connect people with information, and collaboration or knowledge sharing and learning mechanisms, such as communities of practice or peer assists that connect people with people.

Benefits

The benefits from identifying and sharing good practice are that doing so will

- Identify and replace poor practices
- Raise the performance of poor performers closer to that of the best
- Decrease the learning curve of new employees
- Reduce rework and prevent "reinvention of the wheel"
- Cut costs through better productivity and efficiency
- Improve services
- Minimize organizational knowledge loss (both tacit and explicit)

Needless to say, good practice programs give the highest returns where business processes are already quite developed and where knowledge and experience has already accumulated. They will also be useful where several units perform similar tasks but are dispersed and cannot easily learn from one another through day-to-day contact.

[1] Some prefer to use the term "best practice" but it is debatable whether there is a single "best" approach and approaches are constantly evolving and being updated.

Process

David Skyrme Associates suggest a six-step approach to identifying and sharing good practice:

- **Identify Users' Requirements.** Although this step seems obvious it is not uncommon to start by designing a database. This is a case of putting the cart before the horse. One should start by considering where one can really add value, looking at what areas of the organization need attention. Who will benefit most from better knowledge and understanding of good practices? How will they access and use these?
- **Discover Good Practices.** There are several ways to identify good practices. One is to examine individuals and groups that deliver excellent results and are therefore likely to be using good practices. Having discovered these, one will then need to discern what parts of their overall approach or methodology represent good practice. This is likely to be done best by people knowledge of the relevant practice. But other approaches exist too: they include communities of practice, after-action reviews and retrospects, and exit interviews. Also, much can be learned from the practices of other organizations in the same field, or even from organizations in others.
- **Document Good Practices.** Good practice descriptions are commonly kept in a database in standard format. A typical template might include the following:
  - **Title:** A short descriptive title that can be accompanied by a short abstract.
  - **Profile:** Several short sections outlining processes, function, author, keywords, etc.
  - **Context:** Where is this applicable? What problems does it solve?
  - **Resources:** What resources and skills are needed to carry out the good practice?
  - **Description:** What are the processes and steps involved? Are performance measures associated with the good practice?
  - **Lessons Learned:** What proves difficult? What would the originators of the practice do differently if they were to do it again?
  - **Links to Resources:** Expert contact details, workbooks, video clips, articles, transcripts of review meetings, etc.
  - **Tools and Techniques:** A description of the approach and methodology used in developing the good practice.
- **Validate Good Practices.** A practice is only good if there is a demonstrable link between what is practiced and the end result. Still, in most cases judgment is needed as to what constitutes good practice. A frequent approach is to have a panel of peer reviewers evaluate a potential good practice. It is better to seek input and feedback from clients too.
- **Disseminate and Apply.** Databases of good practices are a useful starting point but most organizations find it necessary to complement these with face-to-face knowledge sharing. This is where true value is added for the process can also generate two-way benefits. Mechanisms include communities of practice, quality circles, visits to individuals and groups displaying high performance, organized learning events, secondments, and exchanges.
- **Develop a Supporting Infrastructure.** To successfully implement a good practice program, you need to ensure you have the required infrastructure in place. This infrastructure is often developed as part of a wider knowledge management strategy. Typically, several generic aspects need attention. The people to facilitate and drive the process through its initial stages, until it becomes embedded in the organization's ways of working, e.g., a good practice team or a network of good practice coordinators. The technical infrastructure for document sharing and databases. The content management infrastructure to ensure that good practices are documented and classified electronically in a way that makes them easy to find.

Caution

Here are a few Do's and Don'ts to identifying and sharing good practice

- Good practices are not a quick-fix solution and setting up the required processes and infrastructure can be resource intensive.
- Good practice evolves constantly.
- Do not underestimate the importance of organizational culture.
- Resist the temptation to focus on explicit knowledge: it is through people that deep knowledge is transferred.
- Do not be too prescriptive about good practices and focus instead on encouraging people to identify and share them voluntarily.
- Tie good practices to business drivers, focus on those that add value, demonstrate benefits, and give evidence.
- Recognize the individuals and groups who submit good practices.
- Promote the good practice resource actively.
- Monitor usage of the good practice resource.
- Make contact to the provider of the good practice easy.

Further Reading

David Skyrme Associates. 2008. *Best Practices in Best Practices.*
Available: www.skyrme.com/kshop/kguides.htm

For further information

Contact Olivier Serrat, Head of the Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank (oserrat@adb.org).

Posting Research Online

by Olivier Serrat

Dissemination is an indispensable means of maximizing the impact of research. It is an intrinsic element of all good research practice that promotes the profile of research institutions and strengthens their capacities. The challenge is to ensure the physical availability of research material and to make it intelligible to those who access it.

Knowledge and information often stay where they are generated. For that reason, the performance of research institutions hangs on the ability to disseminate research findings to different audiences.[1] For each research agenda, this calls for a dissemination policy, a dissemination plan, a dissemination strategy, and dissemination tactics.

Over the past 10 years, the world has witnessed the amazingly rapid development of the Internet as a worldwide communications network linking millions of computers. Not surprisingly, the Internet is now the primary means of disseminating research findings, such as through digital libraries containing electronic journals, electronic print archives, and conference proceedings. It is now possible for all researchers to use the Internet to promote research online so that it may be invoked by peers, educators, students, journalists, customers for research expertise, and the general public. Research institutions ignore the Internet at their peril.

Posting Research Online

There are powerful arguments for using the Internet to disseminate research findings:

- **Outlay:** Posting is almost free of charge. The main cost is associated with compiling, designing, and producing material. Once material is online, hundreds, thousands, or even hundreds of thousands of people can access it at no additional cost to the supplier.
- **Speed and Flexibility:** The Internet is very fast compared to most print media. It also enables hypertext-specific and interactive actions, such as linking to full journals or conference papers from publication lists or summaries (if copyright permits it). Posting takes minutes, unlike printing, and helps material to be opportune and fresh. (Furthermore, updating material does not require a new print run.)
- **Synergies:** Posting enhances and sponsors other dissemination methods by allowing people to see the quality of work. Making material available online means that audiences are more likely to buy, subscribe to, or request other products.
- **Audiences:** The Internet exposes work to new audiences. Although not everyone has access to it, more people will be able to find and access materials if they are available online as well as in print.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Internet publication facilitates online impact assessment.[2]

[1] Dissemination is the process of sharing knowledge and information. The challenge is to improve accessibility to audiences. This means making research findings physically accessible in comprehensible ways to as many audiences as possible.

[2] Conversely, it also draws broad-based feedback on the quality of work, which is an intrinsic element of all good research practice.

- **Fund-raising:** The investors that fund research know that the Internet links research to practice. Increasingly, Internet publication is a requirement of research funding. Dissemination raises the profile of an organization and builds its capacity. Investors are more likely to be attracted to research institutions that are demonstrably committed to disseminating research findings to many end users.
- **Others:** The Internet limits the need for gatekeepers, offers greater control over intellectual property, and eliminates the constraints posed by lack of space.

Communicating Online

Successful online communication means actively encouraging end users to read and absorb material. Simple operating principles can be drawn from an understanding of how people use the web:

- **Reading Online:** How do people behave online? End users are impatient. They are typically short of time and may be paying for the connection. They want immediate gratification. They want to see the value of a page instantly. They are also active, not passive. They have the power to move from page to page and they want to exercise it. Research shows too that reading from a computer screen is tiring and takes about 25% longer than reading from paper. Therefore, end users are less willing to invest time and they make on-the-spot judgments about the value of the knowledge and information presented. Further, about 80% of end users do not actually read but scan for knowledge and information. They will not scroll down a page if they are not convinced upfront that it contains useful data. And they do not like self-serving publicity. The implication for Internet publication is simple: the challenge for disseminating the full content of research findings online is to convince end users to print the documents in which they are found.
- **Disseminating Successfully Online:** Building on this understanding of how people use the web, the operating principles are that websites must be scannable (because end users do not read),[3] concise (because end users do not scroll),[4] and objective (because end users do not like self-serving publicity).[5]

Posting Research in a Web-Friendly Way

Paradoxically, however, researchers are probably most averse to posting research online. The Internet is a relatively new method of disseminating research findings that can upset long-standing conventions within research institutions. Despite persuasive, common-sense arguments to the contrary, some researchers are still not convinced of its usefulness. Others fret that their work will be pirated or that they will lose their status. To make matters worse, research writing is inherently not web-friendly.[6] All the more cause, then, to make a special effort:

- **Assisting End Users to Find Research:** Researchers can help end users find research findings without difficulty if they display prominent links to the materials in the website; advertise examples of latest research with short, informative descriptions; make the work discernible to search engines with compelling page and section headings, page descriptions, and meta tags; and advise audiences, notably by electronic mail but also through other various marketing techniques, that research findings are available on the website.

---

[3] This means using headings, breaking text into short sections, marking key knowledge and information-carrying words in bold, limiting each paragraph to one idea and stating what that is in the first sentence, using bullets and numbered lists, and splitting long text into multiple pages according to subject.

[4] This entails keeping to the subject; giving background information with hyperlinks to other pages; eschewing repetition, adjectives, and metaphors; using simple sentence structures; and writing in the active, not the passive.

[5] This requires composing for the audience, reining in superlatives and vague statements, presenting nothing as fact without providing evidence, avoiding exaggerations or self-congratulations, curbing promotional talk, and giving facts and letting end users decide what is relevant.

[6] The full-text version of research findings appears on a computer screen as a mass of text. Research papers are also commonly written in what is known as the pyramid style: starting with a foundation and gradually building to a conclusion. And the need to convey depth of knowledge and information is such that research writing can be wordy. And so research papers are not scannable or concise, nor do they satisfy the desire that most web users have for immediate gratification. In contrast, the Internet has its own writing style, which serves to convey knowledge and information directly. It is akin to the journalistic style, which inverts the pyramid: starting with a conclusion, laying out essential information, and developing the background.

- **Organizing Links to Documents:** Researchers must think outside the box. What is the perspective of outsiders who know little about a research institution? A helpful logic is to categorize materials by type, e.g., working paper, discussion paper, et cetera; year of publication; and research theme. This logic must then be made obvious to end users by providing a menu at the top of the page enabling direct access to the section of interest. It is also helpful to make explicit that a document is downloadable or not. A customized search engine should be built if numerous documents are hosted on the website.
- **Selecting a Digital Format:** Documents featured on the website must be in a format that will enable end users to both open and print them. Documents should not be split or zipped.

Building on Commitment

Successful websites are not constructed in a corporate vacuum. They have a reason for being and a mission statement. They light the way and make navigation easy. They have ever-changing, targeted, and credible content. They load very quickly. They are consistent in look, feel, and design. They are interactive. They are marketed. They are measured. They understand search engines. They are built for growth and look to the future.

For further information

Contact Olivier Serrat, Head of the Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank (oserrat@adb.org).

Storytelling

by Olivier Serrat

Storytelling is the use of stories or narratives as a communication tool to value, share, and capitalize on the knowledge of individuals.

Definition

Storytelling is the vivid description of ideas, beliefs, personal experiences, and life-lessons through stories or narratives that evoke powerful emotions and insights.

Advantages

Storytelling has advantages over the communication techniques commonly used in organizations, be they electronic mail, reports, or formal speeches. First, it enables articulation of emotional aspects as well as factual content, allowing expression of tacit knowledge (that is always difficult to convey). Second, by providing the broader context in which knowledge arises, it increases the potential for meaningful knowledge-sharing. Third, by grounding facts in a narrative structure, it augments the likelihood that learning will take place and be passed on. Purposeful storytelling can deliver results that conventional, abstract modes of communications such as those mentioned earlier cannot. Anyone can use it and become better at using it to reach many rapidly.

Communicating Naturally

The age-old practice of storytelling is one of the most effective tools that people can use. Storytellers communicate naturally: analysis might excite the mind but it does not offer an easy route to the heart, which is where one must go to motivate people. Working with stories is one of the best ways to

- Make abstract concepts meaningful.
- Help connect people and ideas.
- Inspire imagination and motivate action.
- Give breathing space and allow different perspectives to emerge.
- Create sense, coherence, and meaning.
- Develop valuable descriptions of the situations in which knowledge is applied and solutions are found.
- Examine organizational values and culture.
- Communicate complex messages simply.
- Operate effectively in networks.
- Inspire change.

Table 1: The Difference Between a Report and a Story

Version A	Version B
In our evaluation of a project in Bangladesh, we noted a wide variance in the competence of individual villages to develop sustainable and effective solutions to problems encountered, for example in replacing broken parts or developing low-cost products such as new latrines. The lessons to be learned from this evaluation are that we should: • work against over-dependence on development partners, • note and encourage entrepreneurial approaches to problems, • identify existing and repeatable good practices, • build and strengthen communication between villages to assist cross-fertilization of ideas at the grassroots level.	Bangladesh is a really impressive place… in a positive sense. I was in a village last year working in water and sanitation. We were trying to promote the use of improved latrines, but could not produce concrete slabs and rings locally for a low cost. Somebody told me to visit the latrines of a lady in the village, so I went along and said, "Can I see your latrines?" She had made a latrine out of a clay pot with the bottom cut off. Then, with a potter from the area, she developed a small local production of bottomless pots, and they became the latrines. Ingenious. A few weeks later I was in another village and saw a hand pump; it was broken, just a small piece missing. So I said to the villagers, "Why don't you repair your pump?" And they said, "Oh, we just wait for another donor to bring a new pump." So I said, "Why don't you visit the lady in the village over there? She finds ways of getting things done for herself."

Source: Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. 2005. *Story Guide: Building Bridges Using Narrative Techniques*. Berne. Available: www.deza.admin.ch/ressources/resource_en_155620.pdf

Table 2: A Storytelling Catalog

If your objective is to	You will need a story that	In telling it, you will need to	Your story will inspire such responses as
Spark action	Describes how a successful change was implemented in the past, but allows listeners to imagine how it might work in their situation	Avoid excessive detail that will take the audience's mind off its own challenge	"Just imagine..." "What if..."
Communicate who you are	Provides audience-engaging drama and reveals some strength or vulnerability from your past	Include meaningful details, but also make sure the audience has the time and inclination to hear your story	"I didn't know that about him!" "Now I see what she's driving at."
Transmit values	Feels familiar to the audience and will prompt discussion about the issues raised by the value being promoted	Use believable (though perhaps hypothetical) characters and situations, and never forget that the story must be consistent with your own actions	"That's so right!" "Why don't we do that all the time?"
Foster collaboration	Movingly recounts a situation that listeners have also experienced and that prompts them to share their own stories about the topic	Ensure that a set agenda does not squelch this swapping of stories—and that you have an action plan ready to tap the energy unleashed by this narrative chain reaction	"That reminds me of the time that I..." "Hey, I've got a story like that."
Tame the grapevine	Highlights, often through the use of gentle humor, some aspect of a rumor that reveals it to be untrue or unlikely	Avoid the temptation to be mean-spirited, and be sure that the rumor is indeed false	"No kidding!" "I'd never thought about it like that before!"
Share knowledge	Focuses on mistakes made and shows in some detail how they were corrected, with an explanation of why the solution worked	Solicit alternative—and possibly better—solutions	"There but for the grace of God ..." "Wow! We'd better watch that from now on."
Lead people into the future	Evokes the future you want to create without providing excessive detail that will only turn out to be wrong	Be sure of your storytelling skills (otherwise, use a story in which the past can serve as a springboard to the future)	"When do we start?" "Let's do it!"

Source: Steven Denning. 2004. Telling Tales. *Harvard Business Review*. May: 122–129. Available: www.deza.admin.ch/ressources/resource_en_155620.pdf

Table 3: Storytelling Template for Use in Workshops

The Title of the Story: **The Name of the Original Teller:** **The Name of the Listener or Understander:**
Landscape: The scene in time (year) and space (country)
Dwelling Place: The precise location where the action occurred
Characters: The cast list, descriptive attributes, and roles in story
Challenge: The problem or task that triggered the action
Action: The sequence of events before, during, and after the turning point
The Turning Point: The moment when the change happened
Resolution: The ending, including the moral, lesson learned, or message
Key Visual Hooks: Mnemonics to help partners re-tell the story

Source: Adapted from Sparknow Consulting. Available: www.sparknow.net.

Applications

Storytelling is used to identify and exchange learning episodes, explore values and inspire people toward the possibility of change, enrich quantitative information with qualitative evidence, make out connections and create common purpose, and improve the effectiveness of strategic decisions. Potential applications of stories include

- Oral histories
- Team or community-building exercises
- Workshop warm-ups
- Back-to-office reports
- Activity or project reviews
- Monitoring and evaluation systems
- Recreation

Elements of a Good Story

Good stories are generally interesting, unusual, provocative, serious, controversial, surprising, intriguing, or inspiring. They

- Respond to demand.
- Exploit a specific opportunity.
- Include personal and human elements of experience.
- Present the point of view of someone who has been directly involved.
- Use a variety of narrative patterns for different aims.
- Achieve a balance between words from persons and statements from organizations.
- Recount a successful intervention.
- Describe an unsuccessful intervention.
- Provide a solution to both immediate and broader problems.
- Play to what is already in people's minds.
- Target people with the authority to make decisions and change things.

Caveats

Storytelling is not suitable for every situation and there may be instances when they are not the right choice. That is when the audience does not want one, when analysis would be better, when the story is not ready, or when a story would be deceptive. In some working contexts, storytelling will require patience and management backing for a long time.

Further Reading

Steve Denning's website. Available: www.stevedenning.com
Ingie Hovland, I. 2005. Successful Communication: A Toolkit for Researchers and Civil Society Organizations. ODI Working Paper 227. London: ODI. Available: www.odi.org.uk/RAPID/Publications/Documents/Comms_tools_web.pdf.

For further information

Contact Olivier Serrat, Head of the Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank (oserrat@adb.org).

Using Plain English

by Olivier Serrat

Many people write too much, bureaucratically, and obscurely. Using plain English will save time in writing, make writing far easier, and improve understanding.

Purpose

Reports are a visible part of work. They remain and are used long after it is done. Work is advanced by readable[1] reports that give the target audience a good chance of understanding the document at first reading, and in the sense that the writers meant them to be.

What is Plain English?

Plain English—or plain language—is a message written for the reader in a style that is clear and concise. It is quicker to write, faster to read, and puts messages across more often, more easily, and in friendlier ways. Using plain English, writers should

- Select simple words.
- Make lists.
- Keep sentences short.
- Refrain from giving unnecessary details.
- Cut down on jargon and use defined terms sparingly.
- Discard superfluous words.
- Reduce nominalizations.[2]
- Avoid weak verbs.
- Use the active voice with strong verbs.
- Be specific rather than general.
- Write personally, as if you were talking to the reader.

Knowing the Audience

Knowing the target audience is the most important step in assuring that a document is understandable. One can create a profile of individual target audiences based on the following questions:

- What are the demographics of the audience, e.g., age, education, and work experience?
- How familiar is the audience with technical terminology?
- What concepts can one safely assume the audience understands?
- How will the audience read the document for the first time? Will they read it straight through or will they skip to sections of particular interest? What data and information will they look for, and is it easy to find?
- How will the audience use the document?

[1] Merriam-Webster's defines "readable" as pleasing, interesting, or offering no great difficulty to the reader.

[2] A nominalization is a noun derived from a verb. It usually ends in -tion. To make writing more vigorous and less abstract, writers should find the noun and try to make it the main verb of the sentence. For example, "We made an application" becomes "We applied."

Knowing the Information to Disclose

The following steps can be taken to ascertain that a document written in plain English is readable:

- Read and outline the current document.
  - Read the table of contents to see if there is an obvious logical flow to the argument.
  - Read the entire document without taking notes to gain a general understanding of the information presented.
  - Read the entire document a second time, taking notes on what information is covered and what questions the target audience might have. The notes will show if the information flows through the document in logical order.
  - As you read, consider the following: Will the audience understand the language? Does the document emphasize information of importance to the audience? Is any important information missing? Does the document include information that is not required and will not help the audience make informed decisions?
- Eliminate redundant information.
  - Question the need for repeating any information. Reading similar material more than once bores—perhaps even troubles—readers.
  - Readers skip over paragraphs they think they have read before.
- Discuss the executive summary.
  - An executive summary is an inviting entryway to a document. It should orient the reader, highlighting the most important points that are presented in detail in the document.
  - Many executive summaries seem as long as the document itself and all-too-often consist of paragraphs copied from the main text.

Applying the Rule of 15

A rule of thumb for preparing plain English reports is to use the "rule of 15":

- Not more than 15% of sentences should be longer than 15 words.
- Not more than 15% of sentences should be written in the passive voice.
- Not more than 15% of words should be longer than three syllables.

Editing the Document

When it is time to edit the document, it is best to work in the following order:

- Edit for overall structure.
- Edit for sequencing and logical flow within subsections.
- Edit for plain English.
- Edit for style conventions.
- Edit for typographical errors and punctuation.

Checking Microsoft Word's Readability Statistics

Microsoft Word allows users to check how difficult text is to read.[3] Aim for

- Flesch Reading Ease score >50 (higher scores are easier to read).
- Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level score <12 (lower scores are easier to read).

[3] On the **Tools** menu, click **Options**, and then click the **Spelling & Grammar** tab. Select the **Check grammar** with **spelling** check box. Select the **Show readability statistics** check box, and then click **OK**. On the **Standard** toolbar, click **Spelling and Grammar**.

Using Readability Formulas and Style Checkers

Readability formulas establish how difficult a document is to read. Several websites offer free readability services online. They include

- **Gunning Fog Index**. Available: http://simbon.madpage.com/fog/
- **Online Utility**. Available: www.online-utility.org/english/readability_test_and_improve.jsp
- **Juicy Studio**. Availability: http://juicystudio.com/services/readability.php

Box: "Brevity"—Memo to the War Cabinet, from Winston Churchill, 9 August 1940

To do our work, we all have to read a mass of papers. Nearly all of them are far too long. This wastes time, while energy has to be spent in looking for the essential points.

I ask my colleagues and their staff to see to it that their reports are shorter. The aim should be reports which set out the main points in a series of short, crisp paragraphs.

If a report relies on detailed analysis of some complicated factors, or on statistics, these should be set out in an appendix.

Often the occasion is best met by submitting not a full-dress report, but an aide-memoire consisting of headings only, which can be expanded orally if needed.

Let us have an end of such phrases as these:

"It is also of importance to bear in mind the following considerations," or "consideration should be given to the possibility of carrying into effect." Most of these woolly phrases are mere padding, which can be left out altogether, or replaced by a single word. Let us not shrink from using the short expressive phrase, even if it is conversational.

Reports drawn up on the lines I propose may first seem rough as compared with the flat surface of "officialese" jargon. But the saving in time will be great, while the discipline of setting out the real points concisely will prove an aid to clearer thinking.

Further Reading

ADB. 2002. Handbook of Style and Usage. Manila. Available: www.adb.org/documents/handbooks/style_usage/hsu.pdf

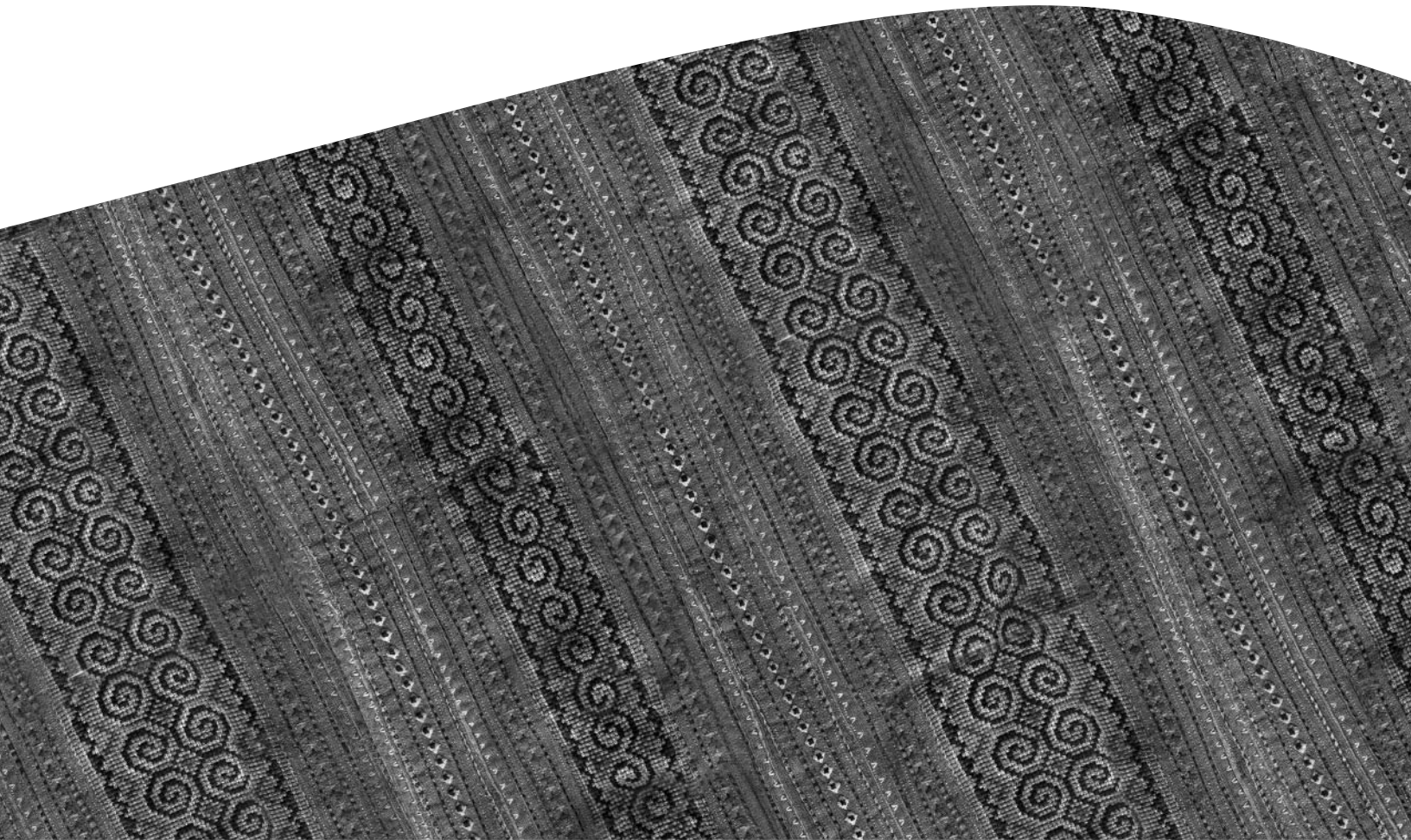
ADB. 2002. Handbook on Correspondence and Writing. Manila

For further information

Contact Olivier Serrat, Head of the Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank (oserrat@adb.org).

Knowledge Solutions

Knowledge Capture and Storage



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.

Assessing the Effectiveness of Assistance in Capacity Development

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

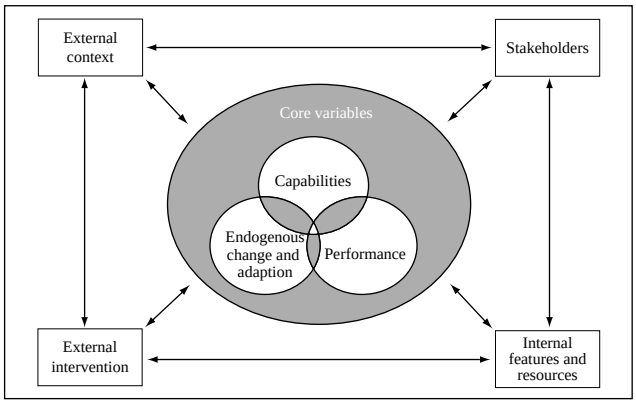
success drivers in categories (i) and (iii) are design and quality-at-entry factors as well as implementation factors within ADB's control, they can be achieved through improvement in ADB's design and implementation practices for capacity development interventions. Since the success drivers in categories (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 questionnaire[1] 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) 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.

Simplified Analytic Framework for Monitoring and Evaluation of Capacity and Capacity Development



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.

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 • 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]	Yes	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
	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 satisfactory	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 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
	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 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 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.		
	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.

Also view the technical assistance completion report on *Capacity Building of the Inland Fisheries Research and Development Institute II*. Available: www.adb.org/documents/tacrs/cam/36634-cam-tacr.pdf

——. 2008a. *Getting Institutions Right*. Manila. Available: www.adb.org/documents/evaluation/learning-curves/ses/lc-getting-institutions-right.pdf

——. 2008b. *Conducting Exit Interviews*. Manila. Available: www.adb.org/documents/information/knowledge-solutions/conducting-exit-interviews.pdf

——. 2009. *Monthly Progress Notes*. Manila. Available: www.adb.org/Documents/Information/Knowledge-Solutions/Monthly-Progress-Notes.pdf

For further information

Contact Olivier Serrat, Head of the Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank (oserrat@adb.org).

Conducting Exit Interviews

by Olivier Serrat

Exit interviews provide feedback on why employees leave, what they liked about their job, and where the organization needs improvement. They are most effective when data is compiled and tracked over time. The concept has been revisited as a tool to capture knowledge from leavers. Exit interviews can be a win-win situation: the organization retains a portion of the leaver's knowledge and shares it; the departing employee articulates unique contributions and leaves a mark.

Rationale

Together with staff engagement surveys, exit interviews are one of the most widely used methods of gathering employee feedback. The less tacit and explicit knowledge an organization captures from staff on a regular basis, the more it needs to capture when they exit. Exit interviews are a unique chance to survey and analyze the opinions of departing employees, who are generally more forthcoming and objective on such occasions. From an employer's perspective, the purpose is to learn from the employee's departure on the basis that feedback is a helpful driver of organizational performance improvement.

More recently, the practice of exit interviews has been revisited as a knowledge management tool to capture and store knowledge from departing employees and minimize loss through staff turnover. This is especially relevant in roles where the employee embodies significant human capital that may be passed to appropriate employees remaining in the organization. Most departing employees are pleased to share knowledge, help a successor, or brief management, in so doing yield information that may be used to enhance all aspects of an organization's working environment including culture, management, business processes, and intra- as well as inter-organizational relationships. Notwithstanding, participation in exit interviews and responses to exit interview questionnaires must be voluntary.

Benefits

At negligible cost, the benefits of learning-based exit interviews are that they

- Help retain vital knowledge in the organization.
- Shorten the learning curve of new employees or successors to the departing employee.
- Catalyze identification of specific mistakes and improvement opportunities.
- Enhance the understanding and experience that managers have of managing people and organizations.
- Inform management succession planning.
- Support an organization's human resource practices.
- Provide direct indications on how to improve staff retention.
- Generate useful information for training needs analysis and training planning processes.
- Result in the departing employee having a more positive view of the organization and its culture.

Preparation

Face-to-face interactions are central to exit interviews. The management of the exit interview process must be initiated as early as possible after it is known that the employee is leaving. In preparation, it is important to

- Consider who currently accesses the departing employee's knowledge and what they need to know from the replacement staff. It is useful in this respect to think about documented explicit knowledge (in files, documents, and electronic mails) as well as tacit knowledge (know-how) that need to be explained.
- Develop a plan in a participatory way to ensure that knowledge can be captured and stored during the departing employee's notice period. This requires a review of key tasks, drawing from the original terms of reference of the departing employee. For explicit knowledge, the departing employee should move relevant files into shared folders or a document library. Ideally, they should organize all files and draw up a related set of notes for the successor. For important tacit knowledge, activity-based knowledge mapping could prove useful, providing a framework for conversations about how key activities are undertaken, what inputs and outputs are involved, or what obstacles and bottlenecks might exist. Internal and external networks and other sources of knowledge could also be discussed.

Last Words

The last words of departing employees can provide valuable insights into corporate culture, dysfunctions, and opportunities to do better. It is important to listen carefully during an exit interview, track answers, and look for long-term trends. But it is even more important to act on the information received to correct mistakes or improve further in areas of success.

Figure: Activity-Based Mapping Template

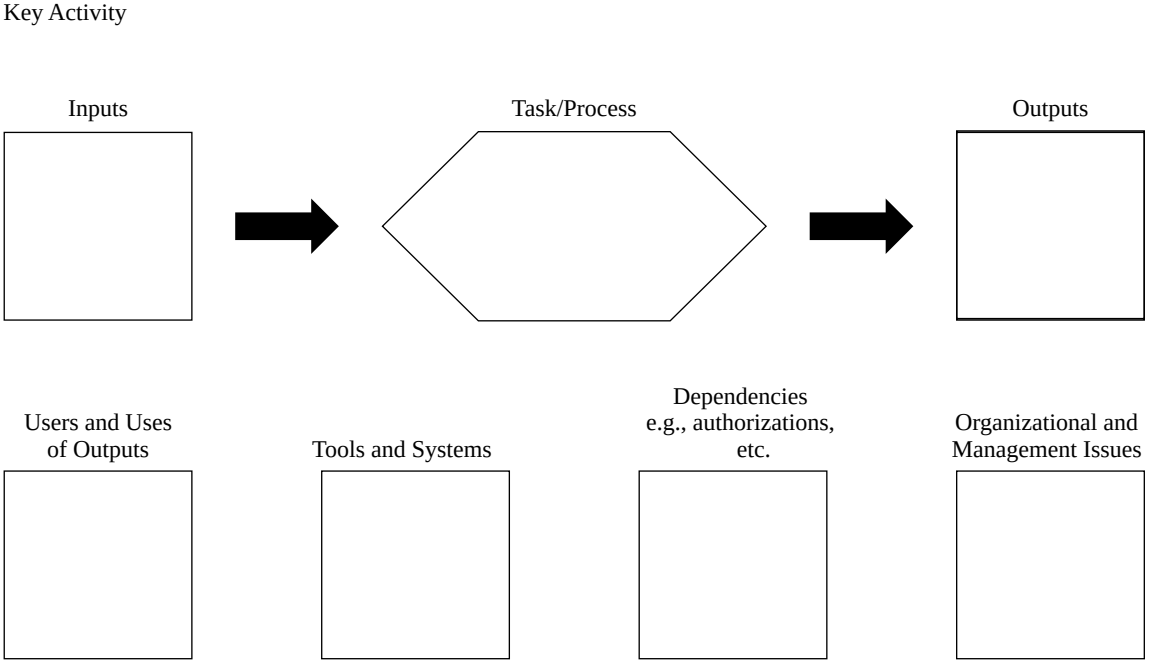


Table: Exit Interview Questionnaire[1]

Details (to be completed by the unit but checked by the departing employee)	
Name:	
Gender:	
Nationality:	
Position:	
Level:	
Type of contract:	
Start and Finish Date:	
What Next	
What are you going to do?	
If employment, who will be your new employer?	
If employment, what sort of job and at what level?	
If employment, what attracted you to your new job?	
If employment, how will your new job differ from your current one?	
About the Unit	
Do you feel the description of your job in the engagement process was accurate?	
Were the purpose and expected results of your position clear throughout your work in the unit?	
Could your qualifications, experience, and skills have been used to better advantage?	
Do you feel you received appropriate support to enable you to do your job?	
Was the training you received in the unit adequate to enable you to accomplish your job?	
Are there further training opportunities you think the unit should be offering?	
What did you see as your promotion and career prospects in the unit?	
How might those prospects have been improved?	
How was your working environment generally?	
Can you list the three most important things that should be done to make the unit more effective in terms of influencing decisions in the organization?	
Others	
Can you suggest ways to improve this questionnaire?	
Signed:	Date:

[1] Please return to the head of the unit (or office, division, or department as appropriate) with copy to designated supervising staff.

Box: Sample Exit Interview Questions

The following questions can be used in face-to-face exit interviews to complement or deepen, on a case-by-case basis, the responses made to the exit interview questionnaire.

General
- What was satisfying during your time in the unit? What was frustrating?
- What could you have done better or more?
- What extra responsibility would you have welcomed?

Induction
- Were you inducted adequately for your role(s)?
- What improvement could be made to the way you were inducted for your role(s)?

Training and Development
- How well do think your training and development needs were assessed and met?
- What training and development did you find helpful and enjoyable?
- What training and development would you have liked or needed that you did not receive and what effect would that have had?

Performance Evaluation
- What can you say about the way your performance was measured and the feedback on your performance results?
- How well do you think the performance and development plan worked for you?
- How would you have changed the expectations (or absence of) that were placed on you? And why?

Communications
- What can you say about communications in the unit? How could these be improved?
- What could you say about communications between the unit and other departments and offices? How could these be improved?

Working Conditions
- How would you describe the culture of the unit?
- What suggestion would you make to improve working conditions?
- What examples of inefficiencies in business processes and procedures in the unit could you point to?
- How could the unit reduce stress levels among employees where stress is an issue?

Management
- What can you say about the way you were managed? On a day-to-day basis? On a month-to-month basis?
- What things did the unit and its management do to make your job more difficult?
- What would you say about how you were motivated and how could that have been improved?
- How could the unit have enabled you to have made better use of your time?

Knowledge Transfer
- What would you consider to be your foremost knowledge assets?
- How might your explicit and tacit knowledge be transferred prior to your departure?
- Would you be happy to take part in a briefing meeting with managers, replacements, successor, and/or colleagues so that we can benefit further from your knowledge prior to your departure?
- What can the unit do to enable you to pass on as much of your knowledge as possible to your replacement or successor prior to your departure?

- How and when would you prefer to pass on your knowledge to your successor?
- Could you introduce (name of successor) to your key contacts before you go?
- How can the unit gather and make better use of the knowledge of employees?

For further information

Contact Olivier Serrat, Head of the Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank (oserrat@adb.org).

Knowledge Solutions

Monthly Progress Notes

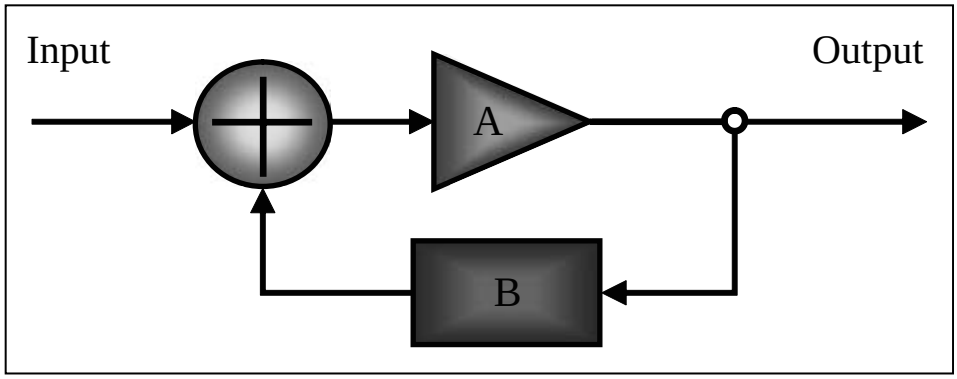
by Olivier Serrat

Feedback is the dynamic process of presenting and disseminating information to improve performance. Feedback mechanisms are increasingly recognized as key elements of learning before, during, and after. Monthly progress notes on project administration, which document accomplishments as well as bottlenecks, 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.[1] Examples of feedback include audits, performance appraisals, monitoring and evaluation, shareholders' meetings, surveys, and 360-degree assessments.

The Feedback Mechanism



Monitoring and Evaluation

The essential first steps of feedback are the processes of monitoring and evaluation. Monitoring[2] provides senior management with information about current and emerging problems and data to assess if objectives are being met and remain valid. Monitoring reports should be based on a set of simple indicators that can be collected and processed in time

[1] Typically, feedback mechanisms on development activities seek to (i) improve future policies, strategies, programs, and projects, including their design, implementation, and results, through feedback of lessons learned; (ii) provide a basis for accountability, including the provision of information to the public; and (iii) facilitate the updating or reformulation of current project design to increase the implementability and sustainability of the project.

[2] The primary questions of monitoring are: (i) Are the right inputs being supplied or delivered at the right time? (ii) Are the planned inputs producing the planned outputs? (iii) Are the outputs leading to the achievement of the desired outcome? (iv) Is the policy environment consistent with the design assumptions? (v) Are the project's or program's objectives still valid?

for senior management to take the necessary actions. Evaluation,[3] in the context of project implementation, is an ongoing activity used to reassess components necessary to meet objectives in the light of experience as implementation proceeds. Evaluation draws on information supplied through monitoring, as well as special studies to reconsider and adjust project components as required through such mechanisms as reformulation. As a tool, evaluation can be applied at different points in the project cycle to elicit information for project identification and, subsequently, project design; for ongoing management (monitoring and reviews); or for future development activities (post-evaluation studies). Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be timely, accessible, simple, ongoing, and systematic. They should also offer a variety of approaches and promote follow-up.

The Challenge

The challenge of feedback is to develop ways for the results of monitoring and evaluation to be disseminated and returned through the system to relevant individuals and groups. Thus, feedback mechanisms require information dissemination strategies and formal mechanisms that ensure integration of findings into the project cycle. Institutionalization of the feedback loop facilitates this process. This involves establishing a variety of formal and less formal means that can be used to ensure that findings are considered during project or program implementation and in the development of new projects or programs. Typically, these include linkages to

- senior management,
- policy development,
- program management,
- agency procedures, and
- training.

Common Constraints

Constraints on feedback mechanisms are many. They include

- poor appreciation of the benefits from feedback, and thus poor cooperation in its conduct;
- insufficient clarity and precision in performance indicators;
- shortages of personnel with skills in performance evaluation and confidence in its effectiveness;
- overemphasis on official or regulatory procedural aspects, which often means that more attention is given to accomplishing a necessary task than to looking beyond immediate requirements to the needs of current and future projects and programs;
- inadequate financial resources;
- the poor quality of information generated;
- the absence of well-established management information systems; and
- lack of a truthful environment in certain political cultures.

Monthly Progress Notes

Monthly progress notes on project administration should be considered an essential feedback mechanism. They document accomplishments as well as the problems or bottlenecks encountered during project or program preparation and implementation, and assess alternate means of replicating or dealing with them, respectively. They are also a means of establishing accountability for various actions at various stages of the project cycle, and assessing the budgetary implications of improving development effectiveness. Yet, the submission of monthly progress notes on activities and accomplishments is too infrequently provided in the scope of projects and programs.

[3] The primary questions of evaluation are: (i) Were the commitments honored from all sides? Did the planned activities actually occur? (ii) What should have been planned (rather than what was actually planned) to reach the project's objectives more effectively and efficiently? (iii) What could have been achieved with the same resources and in the same time if the project or program had been managed more effectively and efficiently?

Template

The text and tables below provide guidance on the preparation by consultants of monthly progress notes in the form of a recommended format and a description of the contents required. Naturally, flexibility in the interpretation and use of the instructions should be exercised as they are intended to introduce approximate conformance in the more obvious components of reporting. The monthly progress notes, completed at the end of each month or partial month, should be submitted by consultants to their direct supervisor(s), e.g., the project implementation office head, department director, and project director, and entered into the central files of executing and implementing agencies. Consultants may wish to copy other personnel as well.

The monthly progress notes should serve the function of monitoring and evaluation and purport to inform others in the interest of coordination. They should be concise statements of work accomplished or shortcomings during the preceding month. They should consist of a few pages of text followed by attachments including (i) details of daily work output in a calendar format, and (ii) a summary of output against terms of reference. Other attachments may be added to clarify aspects of activities.

Needless to say, the body text of the monthly progress note should vary depending on the amount of information that needs to be reported. It may consist of a few paragraphs that summarize the work output or may include separate sections that provide additional information on activities undertaken. In either case the note should contain a section that summarizes the actions taken during the month on the previous month's recommendations. Any other information should be shown as additional attachments.

Text: Monthly Progress Note

[Month] [Year]

To: [Primary recipients—LIST]

From: [Name], [Position]

Copy: [Secondary Recipients—LIST]

Introduction

The opening paragraph should describe the period covered by the note, and indicate whether the consultant was present on the project full or part time. It should also reference any attachments to the progress note that are used to provide additional details on the consultant's work. There are generally two: the first attachment provides a calendar review of activities for the month; the second provides a brief synopsis of activities against the consultant's terms of reference. Other attachments, added as necessary, should be referenced here.

General

This should be a brief summary list of the major categories of work over the past month. Further details on these topics should be provided in later sections.

Actions Taken in Response to the Recommendations of the Previous Monthly Progress Note

Recommendations from the previous Monthly Progress Note should be presented in italics, followed by a summary of actions taken over the past month to address the recommendations.

[Summary of First Recommendation in italics.]

[Summary of actions taken]

[Summary of Second Recommendation, etc.]

[Summary of actions taken against second recommendation, etc.]

[Activity Category 1]

These sections (as many as needed) should address in some detail individual activities as identified in the section labeled "General" above. A description of the activities and their importance can be described in one or more paragraphs here. Examples of categories include "Purchasing," "Work Planning," "Project Coordination," and "Meetings and Reports."

Recommendation: Any recommendations for future redirection of activity can be provided here.

[Activity Category 2—N]

This paragraph addresses in the same fashion the second category. Additional sections should be added as needed (up to "N").

Recommendation: This paragraph provides any relevant recommendations for the second category.

[Overarching Category]

For most consultants there may be one category that overarches all others, and is the primary focus of the consultant's work. If so, activities under this category can be described here and used to sum up and integrate all the consultant's activities for the month.

Recommendation: General, overarching recommendations may be offered here.

Signed:

[The note should be signed, at least in hard copy]

_____

[Name], [Title]

Table 1: Schedule of Daily Activities—[Month, Year]

[Month] [Year]

Sun	*Mon*	*Tue*	*Wed*	*Thu*	*Fri*	*Sat*
A form such as this can be used to show daily activities. It should be filled out each day of the month.	Type in the day's activities, e.g., "Met with PIO Head. Prepared monthly progress note," etc.	1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

Table 2: Terms of Reference and Monthly Summary of Activities—[Month, Year]

Item	Terms of Reference	Monthly Summary of Activities
1.	[List items in terms of reference here.]	[Describe activities undertaken during the month against items in the consultant's terms of reference]
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
10.		

[Note: Variations on the style and layout of this table are acceptable.]

Further Reading

ADB. 1995. *Project Quality: An Agenda for Action*. Manila.

For further information

Contact Olivier Serrat, Head of the Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank (oserrat@adb.org).

Staff Profile Pages

by Olivier Serrat

Staff profile pages are dynamic, adaptive electronic directories that store information about the knowledge, skills, experience, and interests of people. They are a cornerstone of successful knowledge management and learning initiatives.

Rationale

A determinant of organizational performance is the ability to leverage expert knowledge. Much of that is tacit and therefore difficult to capture, codify, and make available through search engines and database technologies. And so, when looking for quick, reliable information we usually turn to people we know. (Chance conversations can help, too.) However, in the global economy, personal networks are no longer sufficiently diverse to identify all the right persons, much as reliance on random connections is a thing of the past. Staff directories are no longer adequate to the task:[1] learning organizations thrive on rich and fluid linkages and need expertise location capabilities to put people in contact with one another.

Definition

Staff profile pages[2] are electronic tools that locate knowledge and expertise in an organization. Their purpose is to enable conversations that facilitate the emergence of rich communities of practice (or interest) in and across sector or thematic groups. In the process, especially if they can be linked with the knowledge resources that an individual has contributed, they create context-rich knowledge assets.

Benefits

Staff profile pages are technologically simple and quite effective in helping organizations know what they know. They allow people to find the tacit knowledge they need by making it easy to find those who hold it, and can also underpin corporate initiatives for collaboration, knowledge sharing and learning, and knowledge capture and storage. Naturally, they are particularly beneficial to large organizations that have offices in different locations.

---

1 Staff directories list names, job titles, departments, and contact details. Typically, they are NOT linked to knowledge resources/connected to sector or thematic communities/searchable, attractive, lively, or championed by managers. What is worse, their more advanced versions are often mistakenly linked to skills assessment and evaluative systems. Consequently, they encourage people to overstate their skills or conversely discourage them from populating the database.

2 The term is taken here to equate with "white pages," experts' directories, expertise directories, skills directories, and capabilities catalogues.

Building Dynamic Pages

Staff profile pages that connect people to generate conversations can only be voluntary and must therefore encourage personal ownership and maintenance. To build dynamic pages

(i) Preserve a balance between the discipline of restrictive formats and the chaos of not having a format. This calls for a delicate mix of formal and informal content[3] and templates that individuals can use to customize, create, and update their entries are popular. Fixed terms or options for some fields may be appropriate. Multiple versions of uploaded biodata should be allowed.

Staff Profile Page Template

Photograph:

Name:

Job Title:

Department and Division:

Contact Details:

Expertise: Fast facts (2 paragraphs) covering

- Areas of knowledge or expertise (selected from a predefined list of themes; staff should record extensive knowledge only)
- Sectors and countries of experience (selected from a predefined list of sectors; staff should record extensive experience only)

Education and Professional Qualifications:

Affiliations:

Biography: Fast facts (2–3 paragraphs) covering

- Work experience (employment history)
- Current job description
- Main areas of interest (memberships in communities of practice, working groups, knowledge networks, etc.)
- Languages spoken (staff should rank their ability, e.g., "good," "fair," "slight")
- Recent Work
- Current studies
- Previous involvements

Publications:

- Books
- Monographs, journal articles
- Magazines, newspapers, and selected less formal publications
- Selected unpublished items
- Selected speeches
- Contributions to compilations/edited volumes/other published work
- Multimedia
- Blogs/blog posts

Biodata: (multiple versions)

[3] Staff profile pages will help people find others but the chances that they will actually act on the information and contact a person will be greater if they feel they "know" them. Familiarity can be promoted by including some personal information, e.g., hobbies, interests, holidays, etc., and avoiding sterile passport-style photographs in people's entries.

(ii) Ensure that the design is inclusive, embedded in people processes, and connects to sector and thematic networks in the organization. By helping forge communities of practice (or interest), it is possible to identify champions and promote use.
(iii) Maximize the attractiveness of the platform with multimedia that relates to the expertise advertised.
(iv) Turn the pages into a smart system. However powerful staff profile pages are in themselves, they still force staff to seek answers. Also, staff have no means to know if someone else is investigating the same subject, thereby missing the opportunity to pool resources and avoid duplication of effort: adaptive staff profile pages that learn as they are used enhance an organization's ability to identify, create, store, share, and use knowledge.
(v) Add further value to the staff profile pages by linking them to the other knowledge management tools that might be available on an intranet or internet, such as good practice notes, and vice versa.

Others

Of course, any electronic directory must be marketed internally to encourage participation and senior staff should sponsor the rollout. Guidelines and training that encourage staff to use the pages and add entries are necessary, too. Lastly, it is also necessary to track use and measure that effectively to continuously promote staff profile pages across the organization.

For further information

Contact Olivier Serrat, Head of the Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank (oserrat@adb.org).

Writing Weblogs

by Norman Lu and Olivier Serrat

A weblog, in its various forms, is a web-based application on which dated entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video are posted. A weblog enables groups of people to discuss electronically areas of interest and to review different opinions and information surrounding a topic.

Background

Electronic communications were one of the first expressions of networked computing.[1] They were developed to enable individuals, groups, organizations, and related systems to collaborate on documents, regardless of their respective physical locations.

However, until recent times, posting content on networks was a task that only technology-savvy persons could perform. It required skills in navigating directories and coding HyperText Markup Language (HTML). But weblogs (blogs)[2] of various types are now relatively easy to set up and maintain and have become a ubiquitous feature of the internet.[3] (In December 2007, the Technorati blog search engine was tracking about 112 million blogs.) As a result, they are redefining collaboration and knowledge capture and storage among digital communities to great effect. Increasingly, they allow the creation of networks of practice (or communities of interest) based on the particular topic discussed.[4]

Definition

Blogs are websites. Typically, they are written, edited, and maintained by individuals acting in their own capacity, as subject matter specialists, or on behalf of organizations. (Some are written by multiple contributors after editor approval.) They share common features with journals: they are published regularly, e.g., daily, weekly, or monthly; they have subscription mechanisms;[5] and they undergo review.[6] Elsewhere, they differ substantially, too: unlike journals, blogs can evolve in a matter of seconds—authors have the means to respond to reader comments and update entries as required; while journals are typically produced by scientific or academic communities, blogs do not have clear-cut parameters; also there are no set criteria for writing blogs as they are considered a vehicle for personal expression. (Increasingly, however, they are also being used to break, shape, and spin news stories.)

Features

Needless to say, the format of a blog should match the purpose for which it is intended. This has implications for the features it should rest on, or advertise. Even so, the common features of blogs are:

---

1 Others are electronic mail, bulletin board systems, message boards, and hypertext.
2 The term "weblog" was coined by Jorn Barger in 1997 to describe the process of logging the web. The short form, "blog," was coined by Peter Merholz in 1999.
3 Many portals offer free tools for bloggers and space to host blogs.
4 Not surprisingly, given their use for social networking, research reveals that blogs become popular through citation and affiliation.
5 Unlike journals, they rely on Really Simple Syndication (RSS) to push new content to subscribers.
6 Unlike journals, which are reviewed by peers or external referees, blogs do not have a formal review process. But they receive critical inputs through the feedback (comments) feature most incorporate (but can still be vetted).

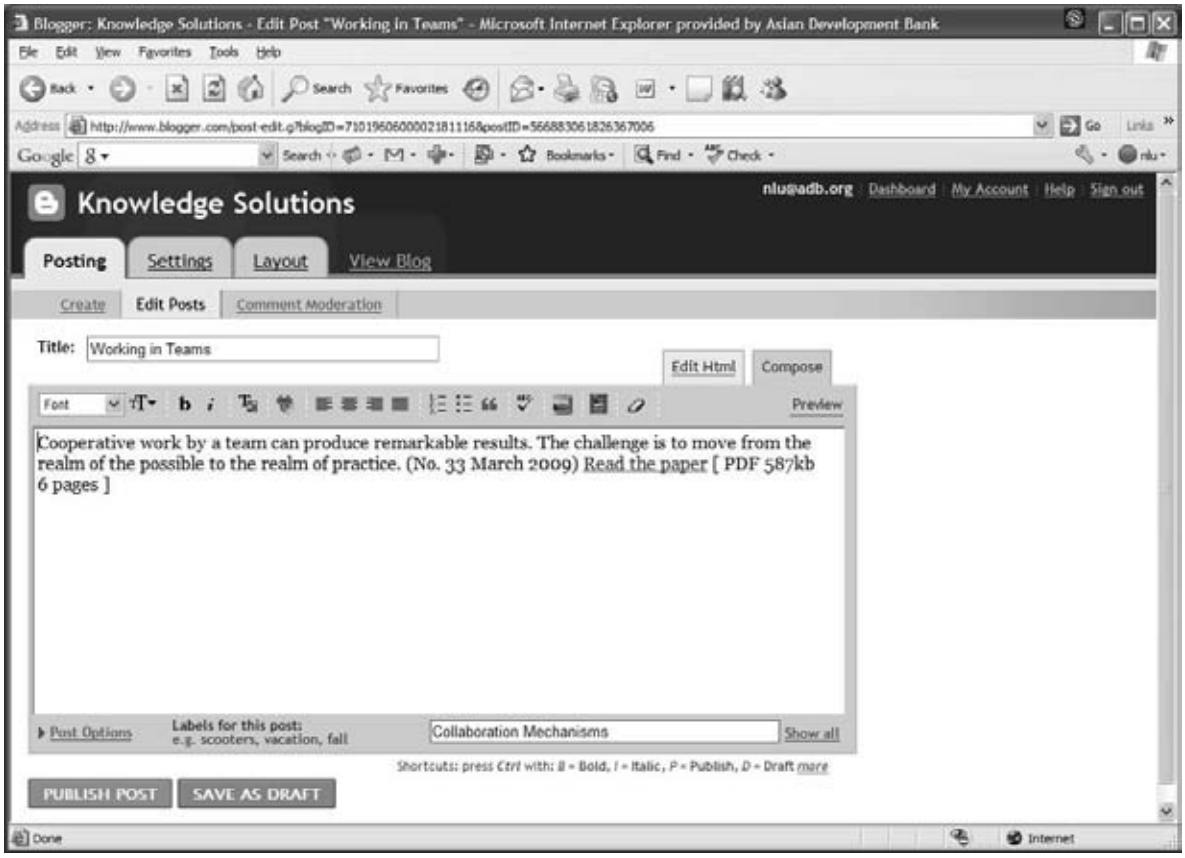
- Text—Most blogs are primarily textual, although some focus on art, sketches, photographs, video clips, music, and podcasts.
- Tags—Posts are classified into subject areas and subtopics.
- Reverse chronological order—New posts are found at the top of the page.
- Comments—Readers can react to a post, and discuss it with the author and other interested parties.
- Links—A typical blog offers links to other blogs, webpages, and other media related to its primary topic.
- Archives—A searchable database of previous posts.
- RSS feed—RSS enables visitors to subscribe to a blog and know what is new without having to visit the site itself.
- Permalinks—It is important that links not be lost. Many sites archive older entries and generate a permalink for individual entries.[7] Permalinks also allow an entire blog to be transferred to a new server without changing the link structure.

Writing a Blog

In the age of "push-button publishing" (a term used to denote the ease with which one can create, write, and maintain a blog), anybody can have a fully functional platform in 30 minutes or less. While there are no hard-and-fast rules, authors should observe a few basic guidelines:

- Write as you talk. Blogging is a conversation. The message should be clear and easy to understand. Use plain English to start a discussion and engage readers. They will respond if they are interested. This is an opportunity for mutual enrichment.

[7] A permalink is a Uniform Resource Locator designed to refer to a specific information item and to remain unchanged permanently (or at least for a long time).



- Stay on topic. The majority of readers are interested in content that centers on a specific theme. If the content of all posts relates to it, authors will create a loyal following.
- Label posts. Each post must be filed under a specific category or subject. This makes it easier for readers to find related posts.
- Use keywords. If the goal of the blog is to increase visibility, the title of the blog should include related keywords. The title should be no longer than half a dozen words.
- RSS. RSS will increase readership and distribution and extend a blog's reach.
- Old news is not news. Blogging each day can be a drain but it is important that the information presented be current, informative, and accurate.
- Adhere to a schedule. Blogs and RSS feeds are created daily. Realizing that blogging requires time and effort, authors should not create unrealistic expectations. Still, search engines spider pages at regular intervals and frequent update of blog content will raise profile.
- Create links. Linking to other blogs also raises profile. (These should relate to similar subject areas.) Search engines use links as a means to validate blogs, which raises their profiles in search results.[8]
- Use media whenever appropriate. Many blogs offer capabilities to add photographs and video clips. However, if several media files relate to a post, consider placing them elsewhere, for example, on media-sharing sites such as Flickr. Blogs that are saddled with large files rapidly become unusable.
- Look up to peers and readers. Bloggers are internet users. Paying respect to their views will enhance the relevance and credibility of posts. Blogs are easy to set up but they can taken down with speed if authors do not treat their audiences well.

[8] Aside from metadata, search engines use the number of referencing links to weigh up a site's relevance to search terms. For instance, if several websites link to a particular blog on aquaculture, search engines will accept that as a validation of the blog's content and assign to it a higher rating in search results for queries on aquaculture.

- Recognize intellectual property. On the internet, citing sources is easier, especially if these are already available online. An embedded reference that provides a hyperlink is usually sufficient for citation purposes.

Further Reading

ADB. 2008a. *Using Plain English*. Manila. Available: www.adb.org/documents/information/knowledge-solutions/using-plain-english.pdf

_____. 2008b. *Building Communities of Practice*. Manila. Available: www.adb.org/documents/information/knowledge-solutions/building-communities-practice.pdf

_____. 2009a. *Social Network Analysis. Manila*. Available: www.adb.org/documents/information/knowledge-solutions/social-network-analysis.pdf

_____. 2009b. *Building Networks of Practice*. Manila. Available: www.adb.org/Documents/Information/Knowledge-Solutions/default.asp

For further information

Contact Norman Lu, Knowledge Management Officer (nlu@adb.org), or Olivier Serrat, Head of the Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank (oserrat@adb.org).

Knowledge Solutions

About the Series

A competency approach befits knowledge management and learning. The tools, methods, and approaches described in *Knowledge Solutions* fit in five comprehensive areas of competence: (i) strategy development, (ii) management techniques, (iii) collaboration mechanisms, (iv) knowledge sharing and learning, and (v) knowledge capture and storage. In general, raising organizational performance is contingent on progress in all of these. However, the Five Competencies Framework also helps determine priorities for immediate action by selecting the area that will yield the greatest benefits if improved.

Asian Development Bank

ADB's vision is an Asia and Pacific region free of poverty. Its mission is to help its developing member countries substantially reduce poverty and improve the quality of life of their people. Despite the region's many successes, it remains home to two thirds of the world's poor: 1.8 billion people who live on less than $2 a day, with 903 million struggling on less than $1.25 a day. ADB is committed to reducing poverty through inclusive economic growth, environmentally sustainable growth, and regional integration. Based in Manila, ADB is owned by 67 members, including 48 from the region. Its main instruments for helping its developing member countries are policy dialogue, loans, equity investments, guarantees, grants, and technical assistance.

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.

Asian Development Bank
6 ADB Avenue, Mandaluyong City
1550 Metro Manila, Philippines
Tel +63 2 632 4444
Fax +63 2 636 2444
knowledge@adb.org
www.adb.org/knowledgesolutions
ISBN 978-971-561-783-3
Publication Stock No. TIM090184

ISBN 978-971-561-783-3
9 789715 617833

Printed in the Philippines