INSTITUTIONAL AND ORGANISATIONAL SELF - ASSESSMENT

PROCEEDINGS OF THE REGIONAL WORKSHOP

ORGANISED BY

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH CENTRE (IDRC)

IN COLLABORATION WITH

UGANDA NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (UNCST)

29-31 MARCH, 1999
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE CENTRE
KAMPALA, UGANDA

INTRODUCTION

The Institutional Self-assessment workshop was held in Kampala from 29-31 March, 1999. The workshop was organised by the Evaluation Unit of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in collaboration with the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) one of IDRC's strong partners in Eastern Africa.

The workshop was intended to acquaint senior managers and technical personnel in research and development institutions in the region with the IDRC-Universalia framework of Institutional Assessment. And to discuss and practice skills and tools on how to conduct such an assessment using issues, experience, or questions from their own and/or other institutions with a view of strengthening the performance of the research centres and developing sustainable capacity for institutional self-assessment in the region.

The main focus was on organisational performance assessment process components, planning and management. Sharing experiences and developing a common understanding of organisational performance in research centres and assessing the appropriateness of self-assessment in improving an organisation and contributing to strategic management.

The workshop brought together institutional managers and technical personnel in research and development institutions from Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. They represented national and regional academic institutions, government institutions and non governmental organisations.The list of participants is attached to this report as annex 1.

BACKGROUND

Leading researchers and development theorists have learned that development is a people process and nations need to build their people's capacity to take charge of their development. Further that building indigenous capacity and empowering people to take charge of their own development is crucial to development. Nation building includes, among other things, the development of institutions and organisations that operationalise the needs and aspirations of the people. Many development researchers and practitioners now believe that improving the performance of key institutions is a vital ingredient for national development

There is a challenge on improving the performance of institutions and organisations that are critical to development in light of the contradicting performance results of institutions operating in same or similar environments, and the experience indicating that increased institutional support /or funding is not sufficient to sustain improved performance. This points to the need for both the funders and the recipient institutions to develop a common understanding of the meaning, components and the forces that influence institutional and organisational performance in order for them to make informed/strategic decisions regarding institutional strengthening.

Pursuing these and similar ideas, in 1993, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and Universalia Management Group began to explore the issues surrounding ways and means to better understand how to assess institutional and organisational performance. Institutional assessment would not only provide organisational information but also help support organisational learning. Together with Universalia's experience in evaluating national and international NGO's and government organisations, the lack of theory on institutional assessment led them to further research and eventual development of their own model and process that could be used in evaluating these organisations.

It was believed that self-evaluation could empower organisations and aid them using evaluation and learning from it. It also appeared to be a more sustainable approach to development where the funder would, in addition to providing funds, transfer knowledge to build the strategic capabilities of the organisation.

These efforts resulted in the publication of *Institutional Assessment: A Framework for Strengthening Organizational Capacity for IDRC's Research Partners* (Lusthaus, Anderson and Murphy, 1995) and *Évaluation Institutionelle: Cadre pour le renforcement des organisations partenaires du CRDI* (Lusthaus, Anderson and Adrien, 1996). Although the intended audience for the book was research institutions, the model of assessment it describes is generic and has been applied in a range of organizations and institutions. A second edition of the book, which will enlarge the audience, is in the works.

This model for organizational assessment has been tested by Universalia and IDRC with a range of organizations in the developing world, many of whom were interested in self-assessment. This field experience led to the development of their latest publication, *Enhancing Organizational Performance: A Toolbox for Self-Assessment* (IDRC 1999), which was the basis of this training.

With a need to share the outcome of their efforts with their Southern partners, the Evaluation Unit of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) together with the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) organised a three day regional training workshop on Institutional Self-assessment in Kampala. The workshop introduced the IDRC-Universalia model of institutional self-assessment to research and development institutions in Eastern Africa for the first time.

The contents of the training are summarised herein and complement the IDRC-Universalia efforts in strengthening and empowering not only those institutions that participated in the workshop but also those that could /or did not have the opportunity to participate.

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THE IOA FRAMEWORK

In their efforts to develop an evaluation framework that was relevant to organizations, IDRC and Universalia moved from the program as a unit of analysis to the organization itself. By and large, the framework reflected a change in focus from how well the organization did its programming work to how its various systems and resources provided it with what they called *organizational capacity*. As their work evolved, however, they became increasingly concerned with the organization's ability to establish priorities in its own capacity development. This led them to refocus their framework on the organization's *performance* in carrying out its mission.

In the schematic representation of their framework shown below, performance is defined in terms of effectiveness (mission fulfillment), efficiency, ongoing relevance (the extent to which the organization adapts to changing conditions in its environment), and financial viability. The framework implies that certain contextual forces drive performance: the capacities of an organization, forces in its external environment, and the internal motivation of the organization.

Organizational Motivation
! History
! Mission
! Culture
! Incentives/Rewards

Organizational Performance
! Effectiveness
! Efficiency
! Relevance
! Financial Viability

Organizational Capacity
! Strategic leadership
! Structure
! Human resources
! Finance
! Program/ services
! Infrastructure
! Technology
! Inter-organizational linkages

Environment
! Administrative
! Political
! Social/Cultural
! Technological
! Economic
! Stakeholder

Performance

Most organizations view their performance in terms of **"effectiveness"** in achieving their mission, purpose or goals. Most NGOs, for example, would tend to link the larger notion of organizational performance to the results of their particular programs to improve the lives of a target group (e.g. the poor). At the same time, a majority of organizations also see their performance in terms of their **"efficiency"** in deploying resources. This relates to the optimal use of resources to obtain the results desired. Finally, in order for an organization to remain viable over time, it must be both **"financially viable"** and **"relevant"** to its stakeholders and their changing needs. In the IOA model, these four aspects of performance are the key dimensions to organizational performance.

External environment

Organizations exist within certain external contexts or environments that facilitate or impede their performance. Key factors in the policy or regulatory environment, and in the economic, political, socio-cultural, environmental and technological contexts, affect how the organization does its work, or the work it does.

Internal Motivation

Internally, performance is driven by the organization's motivation to perform, which refers to the organizational culture, history, mission, values and incentive systems. These factors affect the quality of work, the nature of how the organization competes, and the degree of involvement of internal stakeholders in decision-making processes.

Capacity

Performance is driven, in part, by organizational capacity, which we now understand as existing in seven basic areas: strategic leadership, human resources, financial resources, infrastructure, programming and process management, and inter-institutional linkages. Each of these seven capacity areas may be described in sub-components, as for example in the organization's strategic leadership capacity which is understood as its structure, governance, leadership, strategic plans and niche management. Human resources, financial resources and infrastructure are seen as resources as well as the management of these resources. Organizations also have capacities that result from the relations, partnerships and alliances they have established with other organizations— referred to as inter-institutional linkages.

THE WORKSHOP PROCESS

Participants expections for the workshop

To determine the extent and need for evaluation in the region, the participants were required to clearly indicate their reasons for participating and their expectations prior to the workshop. Almost all the thirty participants from the fifteen invited institutions expressed a strong need to learn the methodology and skills of assessing the performance of their institutions. A few expressed the desire to compare their own assessment methods and practices with those proposed by IDRC-Universalia in order to examine the possibility of integrating the new methods in their institutional assessments.

Many participants expected to hear and exchange ideas about organisational assessment from other institutions in the region. They also expected to acquire the knowledge and techniques and develop an internal capacity to assess the performance of their institutions.

These reasons and expectations formed the basis for the formulation of the workshop objectives and design of the content and methodology. It was designed to provide the participants with the organisational assessment process, components, planning and management with ample time and opportunity for sharing experiences, developing common understanding of some concepts and assessing the contribution of the model to improving their institutions. The handling of the framework was to be practical, the facilitators were to introduce the idea/concept and demonstrate its applicability by way of a related exercise or assignment to be done individually, in pairs, groups or plenary so as to ensure that hands-on skills in assessing the performance of an organisation are grasped.

Common Institutional Problems

The institutional profiles the participants provided on the first day of the workshop revealed the heterogeneity of the participating institutions in terms of history, sizes and mandates. The common issues affecting the performance of these institutions emerged as **financial and human resource inadequacies, delays in decision making and disruption of research operations**. The causes were identified as **dependence on small and erratic government grants which lead to small and unreliable operational budgets, low staff motivation, limited training opportunities and many ad hoc activities in research centres.**

Participants' Learning Objectives

With the above and other problems facing their organisations, the participants' general learning objectives were to **understand the role and importance of self-assessment** and **develop an ability to identify the key elements for institutional self-assessment, get skills to execute it** and **discover the weaknesses and strengths of their institutions** , learn to **make optimal decisions with scarce resources** borrowing from their own and experiences of similar organisations .

Specific learning objectives were expressed by two institutions. One was implementing several donor funded projects and needed to **learn methods of moving away from dependence on donor evaluations**. Another wanted to **learn how self-assessment would help it in its transition** from part-time to full-time staff structure.

Although self-assessment appeared to be a new concept to most participants, there was strong reason among the facilitators to believe that some of these institutions could be or actually carry out activities that could in themselves be assessments, have a direct relation to and/or could form the basis for institutional self-assessment.

The results of the self-assessment card game confirmed this view. All the institutions indicated producing **annual reports, strategic plans and mission statements**. Very **few solicit for feedback** especially from the funders. Only two institutions identified

handling unsolicited feedback, the rest acknowledged receiving but **ignoring** it for being too **sensitive, questioning performance** of the leadership and most times being reported directly to the **board of directors** without going through the organisational leadership. From this exercise, the participants discovered that the IDRC-Universalia framework was **not an entirely new concept but rather a more systematic and comprehensive approach to institutional assessment.**

Performance and Performance Indicators

The participants' understanding of performance is manifested in the indicators they identified to measure the performance of their institutions.

Effectiveness
- The degree of impact on policies i.e. how the changes in policies are due to the institutions' research findings.
- The number of researches accepted for publication in international journals

Efficiency
- The number of research proposals written, in progress, operationalised and the number of proposals per researcher.
- The ratio of planned to accomplished activities
- Institutional development in terms of human resources and research capacity
    - i) The numbers of researchers enrolled for post graduate studies
    - ii) Infrastructure and equipment

Financial Viability
- Number of consultances and commissioned researches
- Number of donors per research activity.

Relevance
- Ability to bring in new activities in the organisation
- Extent of involvement of multiple partners i.e. number of stakeholders per activity.
- The number of new technologies developed.
- The number of consultancies carried out in the centre.

Effectiveness turned out to be an issue of common concern to all the institutions. They were interested in measuring how effective they are in moving towards the attainment of their missions and realisation of their goals and objectives.

The government institutions, faced with budgetary cuts, were interested in measuring their efficiency in the utilisation of the meagre resources available. And their financial viability i.e. their ability to identify and mobilize sustained alternative funding. The non-governmental organisations were interested in measuring their financial viability and relevance to their stakeholders.

Strategies to create organisational readiness.

Institutional and organisational self-assessment is successfully implemented when the executing/instituting organisation has some initial degree of readiness in terms of, among other things, leadership, resources, vision and strategy, and people. This implies having committed management, receptive and willing staff, an ability to implement the results and a compelling factor (e.g. an impending external evaluation). To ensure that their institutions are adequately prepared and ready for self-assessment, the participants identified and suggested the following strategies.

- Enhancing commitment from management through communication about the importance of the exercise through out the process.

- Creating leadership vision through leadership training and sensitization, change of organisational leadership or encouraging wider participation.

- Forming steering committees to spearhead the assessment and mobilize resources in order to overcome the pressure from external evaluation. The institutions may want to assess themselves before being assessed by an external group and therefore the self-assessment could be used as a clean-up exercise in preparation for a donor instituted external assessment.

- Inducing the commitment of stakeholders or staff by communicating with the concerned group about the necessity and potential benefits from the assessment. Where staff is part-time, the use of modern communication mechanisms is required to ease the process of data collection.

- Training the existing staff in skills and methodology to carry out the self assessment. For a start, the participants of this workshop should become trainers or champions of the exercise. Where necessary evaluation experts and consultants should be hired to facilitate the process.

- Increasing participation and ensuring that all the necessary persons are on broad to minimize the possibility of mis-management and internal conflict. Organisational restructuring may be necessary where there is conflict roles.

- In instances where there are no budgetary allocations to self-assessment activities. The institutions may seek external funding from donors or carry it out gradually and continuously over time and eventually institutionalise the self-assessment activities by integrating them in the normal organisational programs and activities.

Organisational Environment

On the second day of the workshop, the participants went through an analysis of the external environment in which their organisations operate. This comprises of the political, administrative, social/cultural, technological, economic and the stakeholder environment.

The external environment can determine the extent of performance i.e. whether an organisation can perform or not. For instance, the political environment can hinder or determine the scope of performance of a given project; the donors can determine the research agenda even when it is irrelevant to the context (mandate) of the organisation; and government can determine the direction of organisational effort e.g. modernisation.

Organisations exist in different environments and serve different sets of stakeholders. The common stakeholders identified were the parent and line ministries, organisational employees, collaborating institutions, donors, government, suppliers, researchers and research students and the general public.

A careful study of the stakeholders in particular and the environment in general reveals a mixture of negative, positive and neutral forces that shape the performance of an organisation. Caution should be exercised when categorising the external forces as negative. It is important to identify the implicit motive of the critics of the organisation, they could be individuals or entire organisations interested in destroying or improving the institution.

The relationship between the performance issues and the environment is demonstrated by a case of an institution that specialised in conducting and disseminating results of a particular kind of research. It was no longer effective in disseminating its research results owing to global shifts in research interest away from its kind of research coupled with the growing economic pressures. It found it increasingly difficult to market its research results, they fetched low and declining prices in the existing market of relevant contemporary research . The donors similarly shifted interest from that kind of research and consequently reduced their funding. The little research grants the institution received were further reduced by taxes. This greatly impacted on its research output.

In order to remain relevant and financially viable, the institution was faced with a paradoxical situation of either remaining loyal to its current stakeholders and having to learn to operate within the limits of its resources or changing its research agenda (mission) to attract more funding.

The performance issues seemed so inextricably intertwined and mutually reinforcing that it was difficult for the institution to diagnose and prescribe measures to adequately address its performance problems.

Organisational Motivation

Organisational motivation could briefly be understood as a driving force in an organisation that makes it do what it does the way it does it. It represents the beliefs, values and norms that guide organisational existence.

Organisational motivation is comprised of its history (milestones, successes, crises), mission (goals, characteristics, values and philosophy that give the organisation direction and purpose), culture (values, beliefs, customs, and traditions that distinguish the organisation from others), incentives (monetary and non-monetary rewards), symbols (stories, festivities, socialising and initiations).

The participants accepted that motivation does not normally immediately feature as a major cause of poor performance. Even when it does, only incentives in the form of monetary rewards are taken to be the most important motivating factor affecting the performance of their organisations.

It is necessary to recognise the importance of motivation and appreciate the contribution of the other forms of motivation in shaping/improving the performance of the organisation.

The Mighty Motivation Contest that came after this discussion was aimed at testing the ability of the participants to convince their Management Committees on the importance of motivation in particular and self-assessment in general.

In groups, the participants made presentations on why motivation was worth investigating as part of a self-assessment, the likely resistance and how to overcome it.

The general hypothetical reasons given for investigating motivation were that despite the endowment of their institutions with adequate capacities and conducive external environments, they still faced performance problems arising from poor motivation.

This lack of motivation is reflected in the poor attitude towards organisational processes, products and activities. The laxity characterised by absenteeism/lateness and low output. High attrition rates leading to loss of the best people and resulting in poor performance, loose continuity and generally weak institutions.

They observed that investigating and addressing motivation issues will improve/change the organisations by:
- Attracting the best manpower and customers.
- Enhancing productivity per worker through staff punctuality and commitment to work.

- Improving the quality of work
- Reducing negligence of equipment and office property.
- Increasing effectiveness in the delivery of their products and services.
- Creating a positive image of their institutions.
- Attracting more stakeholders and more income .

Resistance likely to be encountered included devoting extra financial and human resources to the assessment, lack of openness due to fear of revealing sensitive information, and management inefficiencies, digging into personal issues, victimisation on grounds of religion, tribe, gender, politics and age, their consequent effect on employment and the lack of implementation of the assessment results.

This resistance could be overcome through ensuring confidentiality of responses by delinking information source from data; sensitizing all levels of staff, ensuring confidentiality and impartiality of the assessing team, and ensuring larger participation.

Much resistance is expected to come from persons who benefit from the status of the organisation. This could be addressed through linking assessment to the better future for both the institution and individuals.

In one of the presentations, the participants witnessed a situation of an institution redeemed by an exceptionally inspiring and motivating leader who sacrificed his personal resources to motivate, train staff and initiate a self-assessment. He also used his knowledge, contacts and influence to solicit for both internal and external funding. In this way, he recapitalised and improved the performance of the institution.

Organisational Capacity

The IDRC-Universalia framework understands organisational capacity to exist in its strategic leadership, human resources, financial management, infrastructure, program management, process management and institutional linkages. All these seven areas of capacity are interrelated, easier to identify and address, and form the foundation for organisational performance.

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Problems affecting institutional capacities.

The participants identified the following capcity problems in their institutions

Human resources.

- High staff turn over
- Difficult to maintain trained personnel
- Inadequate trained and highly qualified personnel
- Lean structure and stretched staff
- Lack of staff planning and development
- Lack of staff commitment and dedication to work

Leadership/Management

- Institutional leadership instability
- No guarantee for continued good leadership
- Low organisational capacity to develop and manage programs and process
- Lack of feed back and evaluation

Logistics /Infrastructure

- Inadequate infrastructural capacity i.e. research equipment and facilities
- Lack of training facilities i.e. research laboratories and development centres
- Obsolescence of equipment due to non maintenance and replacement
- Inadequate transport and communication facilities.

Inter-institutional linkages

- Weak inter-institutional linkages within the country/region.
- Absence of interdisciplinary professional interaction

Policy

- Lack of indigenous capacity for solid short- and long-term policy formulation and analysis
- Insufficient research cycle (time)

Finance

- Inadequate funding

Each of the capacity issues mentioned above relates to a particular aspect of performance, for instance, the lack of feedback on achievements is a result of the weak inter-institutional linkages, the weak capacity to manage programs and process and the limited capacity to communicate. All these affect the institutions' effectiveness in achieving their objectives. One way to overcome them is by establishing strategic discussion fora and electronic communication systems.

The inadequate funding has an implication on the infrastructure and human resources and directly affects the effectiveness and financial viability of an organisation when it persists. The solutions could be developing marketable products and services, instituting fundraising projects and many other income generating activities.

LESSONS FROM THE WORKSHOP

Performance goes beyond capacities

The participants acknowledged that many of their organisations tend to link their performance issues to their capacities especially financial resources and give little or no attention to other aspects that shape the performance of the organisation like organisational environment and motivation

They also learnt to distinguish between performance and causes of performance i.e. the distinction between performance issues such as effectiveness, efficiency, relevance and financial viability and the contributing factors such as capacity, motivation and environment.

The IOA framework

The participants accepted that they had learned the IOA framework and the relationships between its elements. They could explain the relationship between performance and organisational capacity, motivation and the environment

Multiple use of the framework

The framework was found to be holistic. It was designed with an in-built capacity /mechanism and flexibility as to allow for organisational self-assessment and/or assessment of organisations and institutions of various types and sizes in different environments at several units of analysis say organisational, departmental and individual level.

Justification of self-assessment

All the participants reported that they had acquired the skills to justify the self-assessment of their organisations. They learned the why, how and when an institutional assessment should be done and noted the need for increased **accountability,**

competitiveness and **overall performance** and **reduced dependence on external evaluations** as the driving factors for instituting self-evaluations.

Self-assessment enhances organisational performance

They learnt how to use self-assessment in order to enhance performance of their organisations. Some of the participants strongly believed that self-assessment tools will help them to self-scrutinise and identify areas for improvement in their organisations.

Extent of self-assessment

The participants learned that assessment does not always have to be comprehensive. For instance, Management can use the framework for a quick assessment of some specific aspects of the organisation that require urgent attention and later extend it to cover other areas depending on the skills and resources available.

Resistance to self-assessment

It was understood that self-assessment is likely to be met with mixed reactions of support, resistance and indifference and that in order to overcome these problems, **sensitization** of staff, **impartiality** and **transparency** are necessary at all stages of the self-assessment.

Commonality of oganisational issues and problems

Through their formal and informal interactions and sharing experiences in group discussions, the participants discovered that though their organisations were different in many aspects, they faced similar problems and issues. And that the solutions and measures suggested at the workshop were relevant, applicable and beneficial to all the institutions in the region. This realisation will help strengthen inter-institutional links of research and development institutions at national and regional level.

The nature and form of the final product of a self-assessment.

The participants learned that the final product of a self-assessment depends on the audience to which the results are to be communicated. It can take the form of a **single and one time formal report, periodic reports, memos** or **internal/board meetings** to review the results and performance of the organisation.

WORKSHOP EVALUATION

The participants expressed satisfaction with the workshop materials and said that they allowed for quick references , earlier preparation for next activities and keeping on track of issues and topics being discussed. One participant noted that the arrangement both during the discussions and breaks provided her with an opportunity to share with others, learn from and make friends with them.

The use of local examples from their institutions was very interesting to the participants. It made learning easy and helped increase their contribution to the workshop output.

One participant observed that the practical and participatory approach which was combining a mixture of methodology, theory and practice was a very new learning process. It helped them acquire the institutional assessment skills and was a challenge to those who have attended only brainstorming workshops.

The atmosphere was relaxed, cool and conducive for concentration. A participant observed that he was kept so alert that he could not get a chance to take his usual afternoon nap for the three days he was at the workshop.

Some participants however, needed more time to practice with the institutional self-assessment course book. They wondered why the time appeared to have been so short for such important exercise.

RESOLUTIONS AND FUTURE PLANS

All the participants atleast had something they planned to do with the knowledge they had acquired from the workshop. Most of them said they were going to **write reports** to their boards **recommending why and how a self-assessment could be done in their institutions**. Some were going to introduce the idea through dialogue between different staff groups.

One participant was going to propose a staff meeting to discuss the concepts, framework and highlights of what emerged from the workshop and **propose an assessment at an appropriate time**. Another participant was going to write a summary of what happened and in addition **suggest an integrated self-assessment** to replace the **fragmented departmental assessments** currently going on in the organisation.

The host institution intends to institute its **own assessment** and also start a **program to assess the performance of its research and development institutions** that did not get the opportunity to participate in the workshop.

CLOSING REMARKS

The participants thanked the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) for organising such a useful and timely workshop that provided the much needed information especially when most of the organisations in the region are **undergoing major restructuring**. Expressing their **desire for more information** about the subject, they requested for more follow up workshops, conferences, seminars and pledged to keep in constant contact with the workshop facilitators and organisers.

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