

The Capacity Development Accountability Problem

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#1: There is a significant gap between what is known about good CD practice and what is generally done in the field. This gap is partly responsible for poor overall capacity development performance in the past decade. For example, a 2008 World Bank evaluation of the contribution of training to the capacity of client organizations found a high correlation between training management practice and results. Where training was found not to contribute to sustainable capacity, failure could almost invariably be linked to poor training management practice. Studies in other areas of CD have reached similar conclusions, attributing poor results to failure to conform with basic principles of good CD practice.

Why?

- **TC practitioners are frequently not CD experts.** Much TC is done by subject-matter experts who serve as technical assistants or trainers, despite having very little awareness of principles of good CD.
- CD often necessitates a high level of integration between human, organizational and institutional CD efforts. However, CD is often done through discrete interventions by subcontracted technical assistants or trainers. **Subcontracted specialists are generally not held accountable for how their interventions combine with other efforts to affect overall capacity downstream.**

#2: Widespread shortcomings in practice are partly masked by the fact that CD interventions often suffer from a lack of adequate evaluation. This deficiency has been alluded to in several recent studies of CD practice.

Why?

- CD is an amorphous, largely latent and thus difficult to measure concept. This leads to over-reliance on numeric measures of delivery, such as number of workshop participants or number of participant training days, rather than more in-depth indicators of enhanced capacity.
- Much TC is done in a short-term, piecemeal manner. The costs of evaluating the impact of short-term consultancies or training courses may be disproportionately high relative to the total cost of the intervention.
- TC is often a sub-component of larger programs and is not (or cannot) easily be evaluated separately, thereby limiting the accountability of TC providers.

What can be done? Enhanced accountability necessitates, first and foremost, up front expert review and quality control mechanisms to ensure that CD practice conforms, to the greatest extent possible, with CD theory. While accountability for results matters, it will arguably give us more “bang for the buck” at present to introduce measures to ensure accountability for good practice.

- Expert CD coordinators and/or expert reviewers should be made available in the design and delivery of sector plans and thematic strategies. It is unreasonable to expect that government officials and sector experts, whether local or international can competently design complex CD strategies without expert CD support.
- Relevant international standards for CD support including TC (e.g. ISO on training and on advisory services) should be defined. Such standards can then serve as the basis for evaluation of even smaller TC activities when it may be prohibitively costly or difficult to adequately evaluate impact.
- Mechanisms of accreditation or certification of providers of CD support should be developed in order to both improve practice and empower CD consumers to make more informed choices.