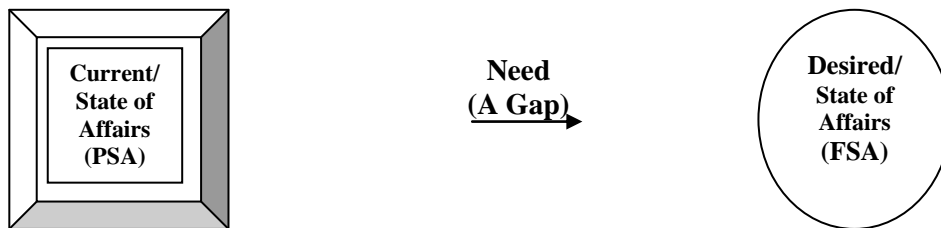


Capacity Assessment & Tools

Capacity Assessments:

All good adult learning interventions start with assessing the interests, strengths and needs of a group of learners. A learning need is the difference between a current situation in mastery of knowledge, skills and attitudes (KSA) and a desired level of mastery in those KSAs. A capacity assessment is the process through which we can identify these two states of affairs: the present condition and the desired future condition. The gap between the two is the scope of the learners' needs and the arena for potential learning interventions (the bridge from now to the future level of mastery). Not all gaps can be addressed with training solutions. To fill the gap other Human Resources Management solutions may be necessary (re-structuring, re-tooling, counselling, etc.)



Capacity Assessment:

Is the process used to identify these two situations, in order to know “the gap” between the two.

The learning intervention is about finding ways to bridge the two situations.

A Capacity Assessment Challenge:

Participants are not always able to describe their current circumstances or a preferred future state in terms of knowledge, skill and attitude levels. The challenge for the facilitator is to pose meaningful questions that help the learner explore what's working and what's not and what is needed (KSA) to improve the situation. This assessment helps give a clear picture of 'what is' versus 'what needs to be'. Learners can give information about their own experience or 'felt' needs. Other sources can offer what they think will help the learner, we can think of this information, as 'ascribed' needs. A learning program will balance the felt and ascribed needs to give a comprehensive picture of the scope of the 'gap'.

Basic Steps in a Capacity Assessment Process:

To conduct a through assessment, the facilitator will incorporate these basic steps into the process:

1. What information is needed?
2. What are the sources of information?
3. How will the information be collected?
4. How will the information be summarised?
5. How will the gathered information be prioritised?

What to do?

- Focus on 'what is' by asking participants to describe their current capacity and circumstances re: levels of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and interests.
- Focus on 'what needs to be' by asking participants to state their expectations and what needs to be improved - identify (e.g. knowledge, skills, and attitudes) and issues or challenges to be addressed.

- Seek responses and information from as many participants and other relevant sources (co-workers, colleagues, etc.) as possible.
- Select most appropriate methods of obtaining information.
- Make sure that the questions are simple, open-ended, clear, constructive, appropriate and not loaded, complex, leading, vague, offensive, threatening, or inappropriate.

Basic Capacity Assessment Methods and Sources to use before a learning program:

- Key Consultations – interviews and discussions with key individuals and groups
- Observations – work samples, field walks, group settings.
- Print Media – International Accords, Regulations, performance standards, laws.
- Surveys and Polls – questionnaires, interviews with large numbers of people
- Reports and Records – minutes from meetings, annual plans, strategic directions
- Tests – paper quizzes, demonstration and feedback

Each of the above methods has its advantages and disadvantages depending on the context. More than one method can be used to complement each other to help strengthen validity of findings.

Basic methods to use during a learning program – at start-up:

Sometimes it is not possible to contact potential participants before a session, therefore it is very useful and valuable to the facilitator and the group to conduct a capacity assessment at the beginning of the session to help identify the level of interest, knowledge, and motivation for a particular theme or subject that will be introduced in the session.

Here are some quick, interactive ways to facilitate a capacity assessment with a group at the beginning of a session:

Interview/Pairs Interview – the facilitator and the group identify topics they would like to know about others in the learning group to enhance the learning environment. Group members are then asked to interview a partner on these topics usually only 10 minutes each and to prepare a 2 minute introduction of their partner to the group. Sample topics might include:

- Family, Work, Volunteer work, Favourite pastimes, Top things that make you smile

Forced Choice Continuum/Human Continuum – This is a fun way to seek information from participants about their interest, motivation or knowledge on a topic. The facilitator constructs a long line on the floor using masking tape.

The extreme ends of this line become the polar opposite positions for questions asked by the facilitator. Participants are asked to stand on the line in the place that best represents their answer at this time. For example if the workshop is about change – the question might be:

- How much change have you experienced in your work over the past year? The participants must choose between A LOT at one end and VERY LITTLE at the other end; they can also stand anywhere in between based on their experience.

Once they arrive at their selected spot on the line (continuum) they discuss their response with another participant on the spot. The facilitator then asks for highlights from their discussions.

Group Expectations Activity – using 2-3 brief questions, the facilitator first asks participants to think of their own responses to the questions; then in small groups, they share their interests and listen to others and then summarize the key points coming out of their discussion. These key points are recorded on flipchart to share with the larger group. Sample questions might include:

- What is your experience with the topic? What do you already know?
- What do you want to learn regarding the topic?

- What situations will benefit from your increased skill or knowledge in this topic?

Fill in the Blanks or Sentence Completion – The facilitator prepares a series of 3-4 incomplete statements or questions to get participants thinking about their interests and motivations for being in the session. Participants share their answers in a ‘go-round’ in the group if the group is small (or pairs or small groups can be used for the first discussions and summaries given in the large group).

Four Corners – Similar in procedure to the Forced Choice activity above, the participants are asked questions that have 4 possible responses and they have to choose one of the four that is most like them at this time. Once the facilitator asks the question and gives the 4 possible answers with directions pointed out as to which corner of the room to go to for each answer, participants then move to the answer ‘most like me at this time’.

- Examples of a question might be in relation to conflict styles – which of these four animals describes how you react in times of conflict – like a turtle, a shark, a teddy bear, or an owl? (this is a culturally relevant one so the facilitator must choose animals that are known to the participants and illicit a strong image of different conflict responses).

Participants go to the corner that best describes them, they discuss why they made this choice, what are some advantages and disadvantages of this choice and what do they have to offer others because of their choice and what support do they require from others. After 10 minutes of discussion in their corners, the facilitator then hears from the group in each corner and allows additional questions from the group before moving on and hearing from all 4 corners.

All the above examples of capacity assessment activities are used to heighten the awareness in a group about the capacity participants bring to a topic which can be a rich resource for the facilitator and group to call upon. There are also many other capacity assessment tools to consider, two lengthier ones are shared in the next pages – the Questionnaire and Nominal Group Technique (NGT).

Focus Groups

Coloured Cards for Choices

Basic Needs Assessment Tool: The Questionnaire

Purpose:

- To identify the interests, issues and concerns of the target participant group.
- To formulate/sharpen a purpose statement for the workshop, meeting, etc.
- To obtain data for developing design and workshop agenda.

When it is useful:

- Whenever participants' contribution, involvement and input is required.

Who can use it?

- Anyone planning/organizing a meeting, workshop, etc.

Benefits:

- Provides a heightened awareness of issues of concern to the participants.
- Provides the facilitator with the opportunity to plan the event in a way that responds to needs and therefore increases the probability of greater satisfaction.
- Increases the chances for the application of outputs (learning, decisions, etc.) by participants.
- When results are shared, provides participants with insight into the variety of interests and issues among them.

How to use it:

- Write a "Draft Purpose for the Event" at the top of the Needs Assessment questionnaire.
- The questions can be sent to all prospective participants by e-mail or in hard copy or can be administered through interviews.
- No name need appear on the responses.
- Responses can be collated and are used in planning for choosing discussion themes, topics learning/training sessions, etc.

Sample questions for a Needs Assessment

- Describe your present situation related to focus X.
- State three values/ principles, which you see as instrumental to the effectiveness of our work.
- What issues would you like to see addressed in the workshop?
- What would you hope to learn more about as a result of this workshop?
- What would you like to be able to do better as a result of this workshop?
- What would you expect to see as an outcome of the workshop?
- Other comments or suggestions.

A Structured Needs Assessment Tool: Nominal Group Technique (NGT)

The NGT is a structured group exercise. In its earliest forms, NGT was a problem-definition/solving exercise in which little verbal communication occurred among participants; hence, the process was called 'nominal', as it is a group in name only. Presently, it has many versions and variations. The following version can be used for Needs Assessment:

The Group:

- A nominal group can be from 6-12 individuals. An optimal group size is 8-10 people.
- The group can be homogeneous or heterogeneous.
- The facilitator should consider implications posed by the group's composition (e.g. senior versus middle management and other forms of 'power distance').

The Process:

1. The facilitator prepares the critical question to be addressed. It should be open (solicits different individual opinions) yet focused (directed at one issue or one set of issues). It should be clear and require no or little clarification.
The facilitator presents the question on a flip chart or prepared work sheets.
2. Group members individually respond to the question silently and in writing.
3. The facilitator takes one response at a time from each participant and posts on the flip chart until all ideas are collected.
4. The facilitator provides an opportunity to clarify the meaning of items. Clarity and not consensus is being sought. Everyone is encouraged to contribute and no one is allowed to feel ownership of any item.
5. The list is refined. All items are sorted. If someone wishes to 'hold-on' to an item let it stand as separate.
6. The listed items are prioritized. This is done silently and individually. Participants are asked to choose the 3 items that best address the original question. People may get up and rate each item on the chart; or they may do this in their seats and hand them to the facilitator.
The 'votes' are then tabulated so that the items with the most votes show the greatest interest in the group.
The top 5-10 items (depending on context) are selected for learning points in the group.