



APO NEWS

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Measuring impact for further improvement

To improve project planning and implementation, the APO seeks feedback from participants and organizations who have taken part in its projects or received services. In 2007, the Secretariat began evaluating the impact of APO training courses via online survey questionnaires to gauge the extent to which participants utilized the knowledge and skills they had acquired. This was extended to include e-learning courses in 2008.

This year, the APO Secretariat has introduced new evaluation measures as a follow-up to suggestions made at the recent APO Governing Body Meeting (GBM) and Workshop Meeting of Heads of NPOs (WSM) to make evaluation reports more objective and accurate. At the 2009 GBM in Sri Lanka, Secretary-General Shigeo Takenaka stated that the new project evaluation method had a three-fold purpose: “greater objectivity; depth of coverage; and NPO involvement.” Secretariat Research and Planning Program Officer Kamlesh Prakash explained that, “This will be achieved by introducing independent third-party evaluations and visiting member countries for onsite evaluations and interviews with NPOs, project participants, and their supervisors. NPOs will coordinate and be more involved in conducting the evaluations.” Prakash coordinated the evaluation process during June and July in collaboration with NPOs and Asian Center Professor Dr. Serafin D. Talisayon, University of the Philippines, who served as the external expert.



Evaluation expert Dr. Talisayon (L) conducting an on-site assessment at Sardi KN, Indonesia

Both multicountry and national projects completed less than three years previously were evaluated. Geographic coverage of the online surveys extended to all APO member countries. However, the field visits and interviews focused on Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, India, Singapore, and the Philippines. Project impact was assessed using questionnaires, statistical analysis, interviews, field observations, and firsthand accounts from the projects. “While quantitative items in survey questionnaires are useful for statistical analysis and making generalizations, the results are limited to the categories in the questionnaire. Interviews and firsthand accounts yield insights not anticipated when the surveys were designed,” explained Dr. Talisayon.

Forty multicountry projects and five e-learning courses were selected for evaluation; the latter were only subjected to online surveys. Of 750 sent, 277 were returned, a response rate of 37%. Dr. Talisayon noted that this was a relatively high response since returns from e-mail surveys typically range from 5% to 10%. Questions were under four headings: adequacy of course contents; impact of training; feedback on experts; and transfer of knowledge/multiplier effects. “Participants gave the highest average scores for ‘adequacy of course content.’ It is also clear from the average scores of items under ‘impact of training’ that most participants viewed the courses as beneficial in terms of additional skills, motivation, higher productivity, job satisfaction, and professional development,” reported Dr. Talisayon. Participants regarded e-learning as generally effective despite technical problems experienced by some.

Among national projects, four demonstration companies and four consultancy services under TES were evaluated. Dr. Talisayon and Prakash supplemented the questionnaires with visits to the demonstration companies. Dr. Talisayon noted that, “It is evident from the survey response, site visits, and interviews with managers and staff that the projects benefited the recipient companies. Of the six survey respondents from the recipient companies, two reported a ‘very high’ impact on pro-

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Evaluation team at Adarish Printers, Bhopal, India

ductivity and four a 'high' impact. This was supported by operational impacts that are clearly visible to both managers and employees." Regarding the TES projects, he stated, "Recipients were aware of the positive impact but were also cognizant of improvements needed in TES. The majority of improvements suggested were measures to sustain learning and practice beyond the consultancy period."

In the survey questionnaires, interviews, and field visits, impacts were assessed at individual, organizational, industry, and regional/national levels.

The individual level of the impact was assessed in terms of work performance, professional career, and personal life. The report included examples of individuals whose personal lives and attitudes had improved after being involved in APO projects. The report also described cases demonstrating that the impact at organizational and regional/national levels could be generated "when the right people took part in the right training at the right time and then utilized what they had learned in meaningful, positive ways."

The report is being finalized for submission to the WSM. It will contain anecdotal quotations, suggestions made in response to open-ended questions, and the expert's recommendations along with a detailed analysis of the survey questionnaire results. There is a saying that, "If you cannot measure it, you cannot improve it." These impact evaluations will allow the APO to take further steps to improve the quality of projects and activities by confirming where we are. The APO would like to thank all the individuals and NPOs involved in this important process. 