



CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT BRIEF

SIMPLE STEPS TO MORE EFFECTIVE LEARNING ACTIVITIES

SUMMARY

Countries invest a substantial part of their capacity development budget in learning and training. What steps should be taken to ensure that these investments lead to effective results?

The Learning Management Cycle (LMC) developed by FAO clarifies the steps for creating effective learning activities.

This brief highlights the main elements of the LMC process and provides links to guidance materials and tools.

WHAT MAKES A LEARNING ACTIVITY EFFECTIVE?

Learning activities aim at improving individuals' knowledge, skills and behavior. However, learning alone is rarely enough to improve sector and country capacities.

To effectively contribute to capacity development, learning activities must be integrated into broader interventions targeting organizations in which individuals work - for instance, by improving processes, incentives and mandates.

SEVEN STEPS IN THE LEARNING MANAGEMENT CYCLE

FAO has developed a structured process – the Learning Management Cycle (LMC) – to assist people designing, planning and delivering learning activities.

Learning Management Cycle Steps:

1. **Assess the context: Is it really a learning issue?** Not all capacity problems are related to individuals' lack of knowledge, skills or competencies. Indeed it is crucial to understand the larger context and the organizations involved. A preliminary assessment will reveal if complementary CD activities (such as creating a more enabling environment) need to be carried out for learning activities to be effective.
2. **Identify the target audience.** Effective learning activities target people who will use their new skills immediately. If participants are appointed or nominated on the basis of other factors, for example grade or title, the expected change in behavior and practice may not happen. National stakeholders, with input from FAO if necessary, should work together to identify the right target audience.



Box 1. Tips for selecting participants

- Prepare a 'participant profile' with required skills, education, experience and job functions. Include it in course invitations and announcements.
- Involve team leaders, managers, or key community groups when selecting participants.
- Use admissions questionnaires to identify potentially unsuitable candidates: ask them to describe their work and the challenges they believe the course will help them address.
- Consider asking potential participants to carry out an explicit task or activity before or after the training.

3. **Assess learning needs.** Tailoring learning activities to the actual learning needs of individuals is more likely to result in the newly acquired knowledge being used in the workplace. Depending on time and budget, ways to assess learning needs include stakeholder interviews, questionnaires and structured needs assessment workshops. In all cases, it is important to seek direct inputs from prospective participants rather than relying on desk reviews or reports.
4. **Design the content and select delivery modes.** What do we want the target audience to be able to remember, understand or do differently? Defining learning objectives that are specific,

measurable, achievable, relevant and timely (SMART) help clarify expectations and guide learners through the learning process. Learning objectives will determine the best delivery mode and learning format. Blended learning formats that combine classroom, online learning and on-the-job support are often a recommended choice.

5. **Deliver the learning solution.** Facilitated learning processes harvest the valuable knowledge and expertise already held by participants and lead to more ownership of learning outcomes.



Box 2. Tips for effective learning needs assessments

A good learning needs assessment looks at:

- **Organizational goals** and the role of individuals within the organization so as to identify complementary activities required for more effective and sustainable results;
- **Participants' profiles** and existing knowledge and skills that can help achieve organizational goals or bring about the desired changes;
- **Current job tasks** and knowledge and skill gaps to identify learning content that addresses those gaps;
- Opportunities and challenges for learners wishing to **apply** the new learning and requirements for **follow up** support.

6. **Provide follow-up support.** Follow-up support helps ensure that the momentum created by the learning event translates into lasting changes in practice and behaviour. Technical support, mentoring, learner networks, refresher courses and other tools help learners use, adapt and implement what they have learned.
7. **Evaluate the learning initiative.** Evaluations help monitor participants' satisfaction, whether they are using their new knowledge and skills, and organizational impact. This final step will help make future investments in learning more

More guidance on the Learning Management Cycle and practical tools for each step can be found in the publication "FAO Good learning practices for effective capacity development" (Learning Module 3)