

# RETHINKING CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

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## ABSTRACT

*This article presents a summarized theoretical framework for capacity development, and the implications of applying this framework to development programs and projects. It is hoped the discussions in this article will promote debate among developing countries and development partners on revisions to current approaches to capacity development, and a move to designs that offer greater hope of sustained impact. The author suggests there are three key and essential phases in the CD process, each of which needs to be subjected to careful technical analysis: Performance Analysis – identifying what are the specific performance gaps which the organization wishes to address; Capacity Diagnostic Analysis – identifying the factors which are contributing to the performance gaps of the organization; Strategy development – based on the diagnostic analysis, developing strategies to address the factors which are constraining capacity.*

## INTRODUCTION

Capacity development (CD) is probably the most widely targeted development issue after governance. While good governance is of more recent focus, CD has been the target of choice in development aid for more than three decades by both developing countries and development partners. This emphasis is appropriate given the central role of ‘capacity’ in developing countries in managing and sustaining progress on social, economic and environmental indicators.

Fundamentally, development is about the ‘*capacity*’ of institutions and organizations. This capacity typically refers to the ability of the polity and the public sector to deliver the outputs and outcomes necessary for sustained progress.<sup>2</sup> This capacity relates to the management and regulation of policy, the establishment and enforcement of legal frameworks to safeguard policy implementation, the provision of essential public services, the catalyzing of private investment. However, capacity is also increasingly understood to reflect the ability of the private and civil society sectors to take accountability for their own social and economic progress and the protection of their environment, and to be able to work together with government to these ends.

In spite of all the attention and investment given to CD in recent years, the impact of most CD interventions financed by aid remains questionable. Far too much development money is spent on CD for very modest results. The post-evaluation reports of development partners testify to this. Further, despite the persistent failure of the typically simplistic CD approaches promoted by most development partners, there seems to be little learning from the lessons of these failures; development partner

organizations appear to be reluctant to accept that the process of CD is far more complex than they currently allow.

This article is about both the theory and practice of capacity development. It suggests that not enough attention is given to the theory of CD, and to potential learning from its practice. CD is a technology and an art in its own right. Too often it is simplistically mistaken for ‘mentoring’, ‘training’, ‘skills development’ or ‘organization restructuring’. Too often it is driven by a project orientation and by other-field technical experts, ignoring the fact that CD is a technical field in its own right.

This article presents a summarized theoretical framework for CD, and the implications of applying this framework to development programs and projects. It is hoped the discussions in this article will promote debate among developing countries and development partners on revisions to current approaches to CD, and a move to designs which offer greater hope of sustained impact.

## DEFINITIONS

The focus on ‘good governance’ has enhanced the emphasis on ‘capacity development’. While these two concepts are closely interrelated, they should be clearly distinguished. The definition of good governance has evolved, and with its evolution its link with CD has strengthened. In the 1970s and 80s, the so called “Washington consensus” was persuaded that good governance meant good policies and the sure route to growth and development. Further, ‘good’ policies essentially meant market-oriented ones which emphasized privatization, deregulation and trade liberalization.<sup>3</sup>

The role of CD in good policy frameworks was considered minimal. Competent external consultants were considered adequate by both developing countries and partners, for developing required policies. Consequent to the Russian debacle of price reform and privatization, the realization dawned that policies by themselves were inadequate. They needed to be accompanied by strong, transparent and accountable institutions which serve as the implementation tools to bring good policies to fruition. Thus, development doctrine now talks about the ‘second-generation’ reforms which envisage well governed institutions and the “reinvigorating of the state’s capability”.<sup>4</sup> Good governance is now increasingly viewed as ‘effectively functioning public institutions’.<sup>5</sup>

In development literature, the term *institution* refers to the formal and informal rules and enforcement mechanisms that influence the behavior of organizations and individuals in a particular sphere of society. They include constitutions, laws, regulations and contracts as well as trust, informal rules and social norms<sup>6</sup>. When we speak of institution development in developing countries, we generally refer to the strengthening of the law and justice system, or the management and enforcement of contracts, the efficiency of the public service.

However, institutions of governance do not work unless the individual *organizations* that make up institutions work effectively. Thus, the institutional framework of law and justice can only work if the police force is well managed and disciplined, the courts

system is efficient, and the oversight bodies like the ombudsman are well resourced and work effectively. Hence, the first line of capacity development must focus on the organizations that essentially make up an institution.

In this article, the term capacity development essentially refers to the *capacity of organizations*, particularly public sector organizations, to deliver as per their mandate. Public sector organizations are established for a purpose, be it policy making and monitoring, regulation or service delivery. Their ability to deliver to their mandates is of primary importance to government. If they are unable to do so, the larger governance capacity of government is compromised. Thus, CD is integral to good governance. Good governance is the goal; CD is a key means to achieving this goal.

## **SOME LESSONS FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF KEY DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS**

### **Asian Development Bank**

Over the past 10 years, the Operations Evaluation Department of the Asian Development Bank (OED-ADB) has conducted a comprehensive range of evaluations on its numerous CD projects in several sectors. Typically, the ADB invests many hundreds of millions of dollars each year, often in grant form, in developing countries for capacity development. OED-ADB's evaluation reports consistently indicate less than adequate success of these CD projects (usually technical assistance projects).

Key deficiencies in the design and implementation of such projects identified by the OED-ADB include the following -

- A more comprehensive CD needs assessment should be conducted for each such intervention.
- CD interventions at the sector level often do not take adequate account of broader institutional factors.
- More careful phasing and sequencing of CD outcomes is required, based on an assessment of organizational capacity to manage the CD process.
- There is an over-emphasis on training and consultant inputs
- Greater focus should be placed on facilitating change management and organizational learning.

An overall lesson learned is that ADB-supported interventions need to be more carefully integrated into national and sector strategies and systems. Another finding is that a coordinated approach with other partners, including the private sector, funding agencies, and NGOs is critical for optimum CD impact.<sup>7</sup>

## The World Bank

The World Bank also accepts it has had a mixed record in public sector reform and related capacity building to date. Analysis by the Operations Evaluation Department of the World Bank (OED-WB) and the World Bank's Quality Assurance Group (QAG), point to several systemic shortcomings of past Bank work in this area. To quote the Bank's own Strategy Paper of November 2000 on Reforming Public Institutions -

- The Bank has sometimes taken a rather narrow and “technocratic” view of what is needed for public sector reform.....
- It has sometimes relied on models of “best practice” that have not been feasible in the particular country setting, given variations in human and institutional capacity.
- Traditional applications of the Bank's lending instruments—Structural Adjustment Loans (SALs), Technical Assistance (TA) loans, and investment loans—have not always allowed the long-term commitment and systemic viewpoint needed to achieve lasting results. Short-term demands (for example, for quick disbursements or “enclaved” project administration) have sometimes compromised longer-term goals of institutional-building, with negative long-term impacts.
- There has traditionally been a shortage of staff skills in certain specialized areas related to governance, institutional reform, and capacity building, in part reflecting the lower demand for these skills in the past given the limited emphasis placed on institution- building goals.<sup>8</sup>

## AusAID

AusAID, the bilateral development agency of Australia, invests the lion's share of its development investments in PNG and the Pacific. A substantial proportion of this investment is devoted to CD. There isn't on public record, any systematic analysis of its CD projects or programs. However, in a recent overall evaluation of its operations in this region, it makes some broad conclusions, all of which are directly pertinent to how development agencies support and promote CD in developing countries:

“No discussion of aid effectiveness would be complete without an examination of the potential deleterious effects of aid. In the Pacific, these revolve around four areas.

First, aid has probably helped to concentrate economic activity in the region's capital cities. To some extent this is unavoidable as a function of communications and travel difficulties. Nonetheless, aid has added to a tendency on the part of the region's leaders to neglect the needs of those living outside the capital.

Second, aid has probably helped to contribute towards the inflated size and cost of the public sector and propped up unsustainable systems. Since aid is largely a government-to-government process, its management and implementation require considerable additional resources in recipient governments.

Third, aid has in some areas contributed towards a weakening of public sector structures. This has occurred as a result of an emphasis on project delivery, which can distort the deployment of public sector resources.

Finally, aid has sometimes added inappropriately to the size of the recurrent budget. Roads need to be maintained, schools staffed and hospitals supplied with drugs, and sometimes the budgetary realities of this are not reflected in aid planning decisions.”<sup>9</sup>

### **CD: A PROJECT OR A PROCESS?**

A central issue emerging from the evaluation findings of development agencies such as the ADB, AusAID and the World Bank is that CD too often seems to be conceptualized by development partners as a ‘project’. The assumption is that CD is not very different to building a road, a school or a power plant. Thus, a project or program modality is typically adopted: establish clear objectives, identify required resources and put in place a professional project management system. The project design is given a timeline for outputs, a date for project completion, and a fairly tightly defined budget. In the case of ADB technical assistance projects, the timeline often ranges from as tight a period as 3 months to 2 years. In AusAID, CD projects usually stretch over 5 years and longer. The consultants brought in to bring to resource such projects are typically recruited for their technical and project management expertise; in fact they are contracted precisely because they operate efficient and effectively run institutions, public sector organizations and related systems in their source (developed) countries. The assumption is they are the most appropriate to design and implement such interventions. If they can do it in their own countries, there is no reason why they should not be able to do it in the client developing country. This is precisely the logic and thinking behind the billion-dollar *Enhanced Cooperation Package* negotiated by Australia with PNG recently wherein senior Australian public servants have been sent in to PNG for extended periods, to ‘fix the system’.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, a technocratic approach is adopted, where log-framed objectives are set, blueprint project designs developed, and an externally managed project implementation system put in place.

Nothing could be more inappropriate than this typical approach. It violates all principles of CD, and ignores the obvious. CD is about catalysing sustained organization change, and assisting the client organization to work more effectively and to better address its mandates. No sustained change will take place, unless the CD process is owned and led by the internal leadership of the organization.

Aid agencies typically view CD as the transfer of skills, systems and processes, or new technology. While these have their role in CD, the process is more about changing the mindsets and motivations of those who use these skills, operate these systems and apply the new technology. Skills, systems and new technology alone do not necessarily get you organization change for more effective performance.

CD is also not about a simple infusion of new resources. It is about helping organizations operate within the constraints of available resources, and helping them use

their constrained resources to achieve better efficiencies and effectiveness. The factors influencing how the organization uses its resources (budgets, staff, assets) are varied and complex and are inextricably linked into the local socio-cultural milieu. To therefore imagine that outsiders can effectively bring about internal change in such situations, and in time periods as short as a year or two, simply illustrates the degree of shallow understanding that sponsoring development organizations have about the dynamics of institutional and organizational change.

A number of positions on CD are therefore being presented here. First, CD is a process which by its very nature, must be led and driven by the internal management of the organization. The role of outsiders is to catalyse this leadership and support it; not to take over. Second, CD cannot be subjected to the detailed design approach of a project. While it is important to be clear on the organization performance deficiencies to be addressed (more on this later), the way to address these will differ organization to organization, and must be worked through in a gradual and phased manner as the understandings and motivations of the leadership are built and consolidated. Thirdly, the factors influencing organization performance in developing countries are complex. There is little possibility of external consultants ever fully understanding these factors and their interlinkages, and how these affect under performance, and certainly not in the typically short timeframes available for detailed project designs

Given these uncertainties, it would appear that CD is truly more an art than a science. Much appears to depend on the skills of the external catalyst with respect to understanding organization dynamics and local cultural influences. It seems paramount to be able to gain the confidence of the internal leadership, to inform and persuade, and to engender motivation for organization change. And, most importantly, a high degree of patience and empathy appear essential to effectively shepherd the typically unpredictable processes of change.

However, while all of the above are true, this article suggests that there are well defined analytical and technical principles which also govern the process of CD. It is suggested that CD is indeed a technical field in its own right. And it is both regrettable and ill advised of development partners to charge consultants who patently have no knowledge of these analytical and technical process, with so strategically significant an intervention as capacity development. This article attempts to summarize these analytical and technical principles and demonstrate that CD, besides being an art, is also a science.

This article suggests that there are three key and essential phases in the CD process, each of which needs to be subjected to careful technical analysis:

1. Performance Analysis – identifying what are the specific performance gaps which the organization wishes to address.
2. Capacity Diagnostic Analysis – identifying the factors which are contributing to the performance gaps of the organization.
3. Strategy development – based on the diagnostic analysis, developing strategies to address the factors which are constraining capacity.

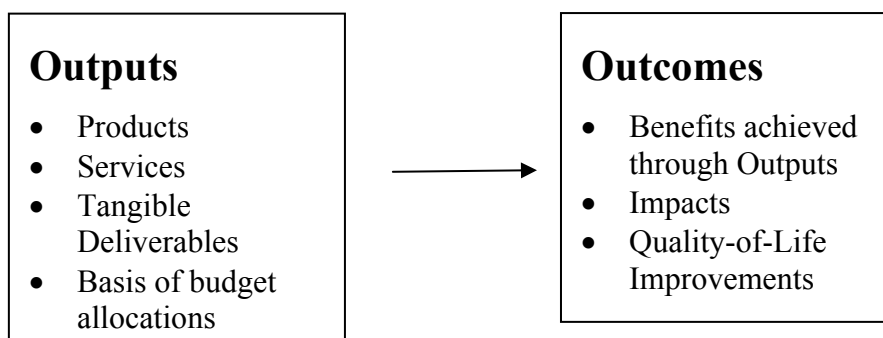
## THE STARTING POINT OF CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT – PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS

CD is about assisting organizations to perform efficiently and effectively relative to their assigned mandate. Thus, the very first step in a CD intervention is to ask – is the organization indeed performing to expectation? If not, what are the specific gaps in its expected performance? It is critical at this initial stage NOT to focus on the factors assumed to be responsible for deficient performance, but on WHAT the deficient performance is. Evaluations of past CD interventions by development partners often indicate inadequate or sloppy preparatory analysis in this area.

Analysis of organizational performance assumes that expected results are firstly made clear to all. While this seems an obvious management principle, it is not uncommon in the public sector in developing countries for there to be a great deal of fuzziness around expected results. The tradition of the public sector performance management in both developed and developing countries has been to focus on the ‘budget’ as the key management instrument of public management. While this approach has some justification, its emphasis on budgets has generally skewed management focus in public sectors to give preeminence to the budgeting process and to the public sector activities it is supposed to finance, and inadequate attention to the ‘results’ (the impacts) which such budgets and activities should be supporting.

The most valuable contribution of the ‘school of public management’ to public sector performance was introducing the concepts of “Outcomes” and “Outputs” to represent the two major categories of results of organizations in the public sector<sup>11</sup> (Refer Figure 1). The concepts were successfully translated into performance management systems and processes within the New Zealand, UK and Australian public sectors in the 1990s, confirming their validity and value in enhancing the performance of public sector organizations<sup>12</sup>.

*Figure 1: Clarity of Desired Results*



Source: Author, 2006

Clarifying expected results of a public sector organization involves some rather basic questions:

- Why does this organization exist?

- Who are its clients?
- What is it supposed to deliver for them?
- What benefits are its products and services supposed to bring?
- Is the organization delivering what is expected of it?
- Are its services acceptable in terms of quantity and quality?

Public sector organizations in developing countries rarely ask themselves these fundamental questions. Hence we encounter chronically poor performance of the public sector. However, there is an ongoing strong movement to introduce 'results-based management' in the public sector of many developing countries.

Clarifying results for service agencies such as in the sectors of health, agriculture, education, energy and transport is somewhat easier. The nature of their mandate allows for translating these expected results into rather concrete goods and services to be delivered to the public. This exercise becomes more difficult when dealing with government departments and agencies involved in planning, regulation, policy development or with oversight functions such as auditor general's offices.

The integration of output and outcome indicators into an organization's performance management assumes a relatively sophisticated performance management and information system. This includes the careful development of pertinent output and outcome indicators which indeed represent the mandate of the organization. It also assumes that these performance indicators and related targets have been tested for their achievability by the organization (if they are not achievable, they will never be taken seriously). It requires the disciplined collection and processing of performance information, and the application of management time to the analysis of implications on organizational performance.

In the public sector of developing countries, the use of such performance management and information systems for managing organization performance remains sporadic. While input information (in terms budgets allocated and disbursements by public agencies) is relatively easily available, output information is hard to come by. Outcome information is rare and only available when specially supported by a donor survey related to a specific aid program.

This underscores the importance of institutionalizing the 'performance report' as part of an organization's performance management system. Effective and results-focused public sector organizations typically adopt a performance reporting system as part of their public accountability responsibilities.

Effective public sector organization performance is fundamentally contingent on a clear results framework for the following reasons –

- (i) Clear results ensure the organization is delivering on the purpose for which it is established. If the purpose remains unclear, how can there be effective performance delivery?



- (ii) Clear results also allow the organization to further clarify the extent of resources it needs, the range of competencies required to fulfill its mandate, the types of organization structure called for etc. In effect, the results framework provides a basis for organizing the other variables which are essential to the achievement of sustained results.
- (iii) Again, ongoing performance analysis is not possible unless there is first the precise identification of the performance gaps (negative variances) or performance improvement opportunities (potentially positive variances). The greater the clarity and preciseness with which these are defined, the easier will be the subsequent diagnostic processes which isolate causal factors and consequently lead to institutional strengthening actions.

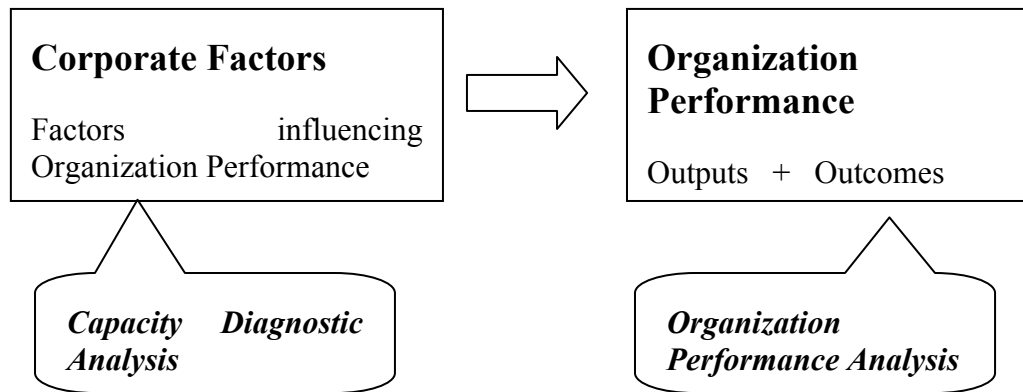
One could argue that if a clear results framework, with tangible and monitorable indicators, targets and up-to-date performance information does not exist, then the CD intervention should begin with putting in place the required results framework and performance management system. The issue clearly is – is it right and appropriate to embark on the capacity development of an organization when its performance gaps are not precisely identified and clear? Is not the purpose of building capacity to address these gaps in the first place? Equally important is the related issue - can the factors responsible for the performance gaps of the organization be identified if one is not clear what the performance gaps are in the first place?

Thus, the absence of information on performance gaps should be used as an opportunity to catalyze managerial effort in defining and clarifying organizational results, and establishing a performance management and information system to obtain and monitor these results for future organizational improvements. This must become the first and most critical step of the CD` process. Development partners should avoid the temptation of making assumptions of current performance gaps based on superficial data gathering, and moving on immediately to assumptions on the causes of these assumed performance deficiencies.

## **CAPACITY DIAGNOSTIC ANALYSIS**

The organization's results-framework and related performance analysis sets the stage for a systematic identification of the variables or factors influencing the organization's under performance. This latter process is termed capacity diagnostic analysis. It literally envisages a diagnostic process whereby the causes for a specific performance gap are sought and isolated. It is, in effect, a disciplined and systematic causal analysis. It assumes, however, that the performance analysis has indeed precisely identified the key performance gaps of the organization. Often, the initial performance analysis is not undertaken systematically, and therefore compromises the disciplined investigation for the variables or factors influencing underperformance.

Figure 2: Performance Analysis and Capacity Diagnostic Analysis



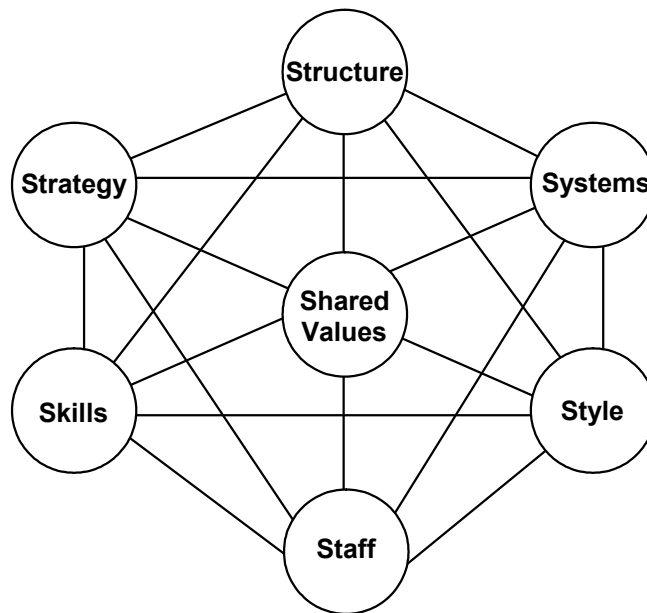
Source: Author, 2006

As shown in Figure 2, the underlying logic of capacity diagnostic analysis is that organization performance gaps are being primarily and directly caused by factors or variables within the corporate management of the organization, or due to corporate management's inability to cope with external environment factors.

The diagnostic process views the organization as *a system which comprises numerous variables*, all of which dynamically interact with each other and with the environment in which the organization operates with the primary purpose of delivering organization results. These variables can be *grouped into different categories*, each of which has a qualitatively different influence on organization performance. A systematic diagnosis of organization performance and capacity must take account of *each category of variables in sequence* to understand their overall inter-relationships and dynamics<sup>13</sup>.

The categorization of the variables influencing organization performance can be constructed in various ways. There is no 'right' way in this regard. It is important however, to ensure that no key variable is overlooked. A classic approach is the one developed by the McKinsey consulting company in the 1980s. The McKinsey Seven S' Model was developed to demonstrate that organizational performance is in fact contingent on *numerous variables*, each of which is mutually dependent on the others<sup>14</sup>. Organizational performance is, in essence, the result of complex interactions of various internal factors within an organization, and their linkages with the external environment within which the organization operates. According to this model (graphically presented in Figure 3), the key variables influencing organizational performance are represented by the seven S' which are *strategy, structure, systems, style, staff, skills, and shared values*. These key elements are present in every organization and they largely define the nature of internal organizational interactions, the way the organization deals with its environment, and the effectiveness of its operations.

**Figure 3: McKinsey Seven S' Model**



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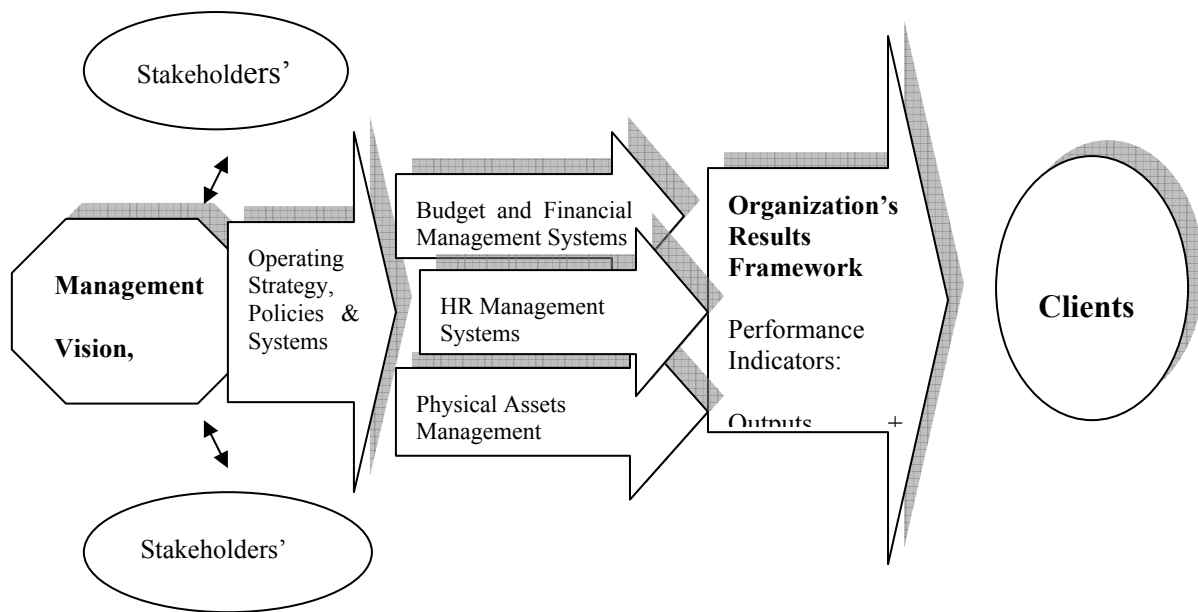
Source: McKinsey 7-S Framework (p. 10) from *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best Run Companies* by Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman, Jr. Copyright 1982.

The model underscores the need to take a holistic view of an organization before practitioners jump to recommendations for organizational change. It warns against simplistic solutions to performance improvement such as organization restructuring or training. Organizations are complex institutional systems with interdependent variables, all of which need to be taken account of to explain the level of results being achieved.

While the 7-S model provides for understanding the spectrum of factors or variables which influence organization performance, it does not provide a methodology or means to assess their linkage to organization results. It does not assist in developing the important *diagnostic link* between the variables and organizational performance, which can explain the causal influence of specific variables on deficient organizational performance. Such a link is necessary to facilitate the identification of which variables should have priority in being addressed in a particular organizational change program.

This article suggests another perspective to viewing and categorizing the internal corporate factors influencing organization performance, as shown in Figure 4.

*Figure 4. Corporate Factors Influencing Performance*



Source: Author, 2006

In this model, organizational factors influencing performance are structured into four categories as follows -

1. **Management's Vision, Coordination, Direction.** This is the critical and overarching driving force of the organization's effectiveness. It influences the strategic direction of the organization, its commitment to its clients, its internal culture and work ethic. It reflects management efficiencies with regard to decision making, internal coordination and teamwork. If management's leadership, vision and direction are weak, performance will inevitably fall.
2. **Mobilizing Stakeholder Support.** All organizations work within a broader environment requiring them to mobilize the support and collaboration of key stakeholders. Key stakeholders also often bring to the table valuable additional resources to assist the organization in meeting its performance objectives. Effective collaboration with stakeholders is a good reflection of the effectiveness of management.
3. **Operating Strategies, Policies and Systems.** The key challenge for an organization's management is to understand changing client needs in an ever-increasing dynamic environment on the one hand, and to match the organization's core competencies or capacities to these needs on the other, thus making the organization competitive and responsive. This is essentially the business of developing appropriate strategies, policies and operating systems to suit the client.

Strategy and policies of an organization influence both organization efficiencies as well as effectiveness. They clearly influence recent and prevailing trends in the public sector such as the use of the contracting-out selected functions of government<sup>15</sup>, greater collaboration with local communities in empowering them to become less dependent on government services<sup>16</sup>, and the adoption of e-government to cut costs and improve responsiveness to clients<sup>17</sup>. Organizations which are strategically agile and responsive are better able to respond to client needs.

In public sector organizations in developing countries, the issue of strategy is critical given chronic scarcity of public resources. Thus, the challenge continuously confronting the public sector organization chief executive is – how can the organization deliver optimal results with constrained resources? In answering this question, the CEO is led to make strategic choices on other critical variables influencing performance such as the structure he will use, the types of systems and processes he will adopt, the levels of delegation he will promote and the like.

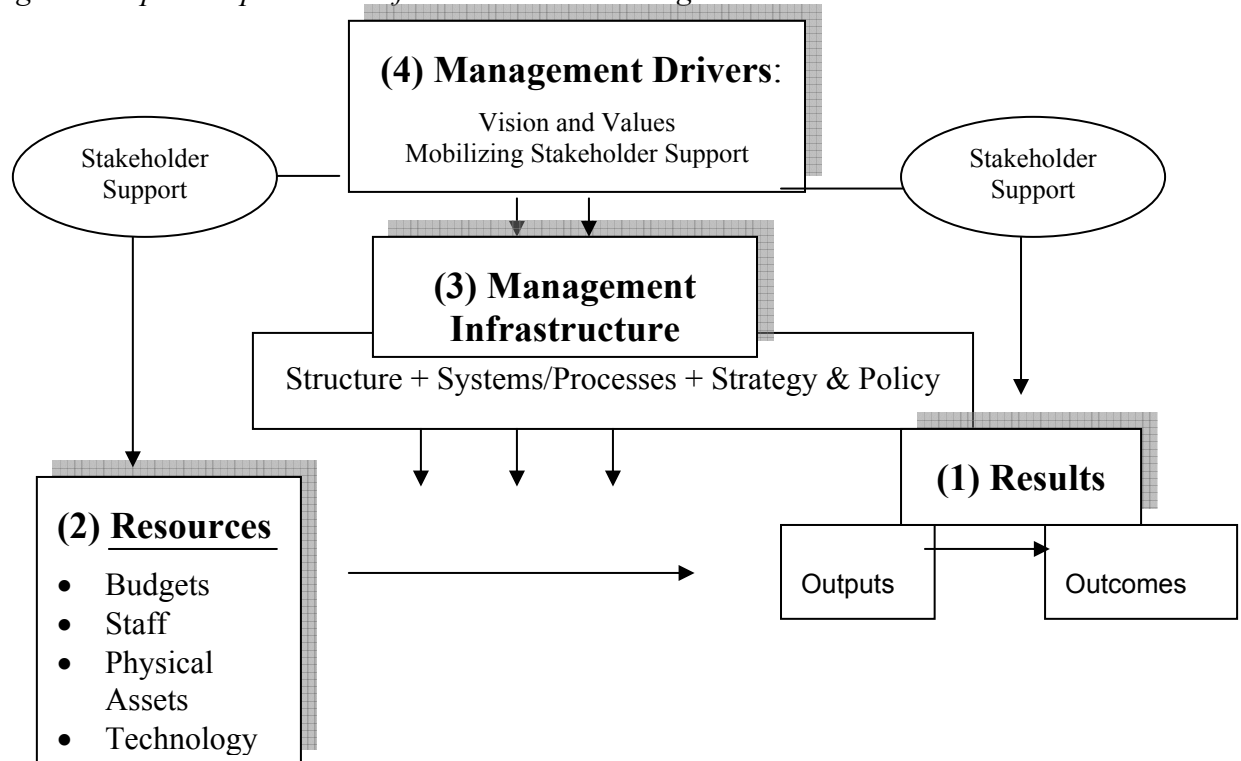
4. **Managing the Organization's Resources.** The management of an organization has essentially three sets of resources with which to deliver expected results. With its vision and direction, and using appropriate strategies, policies and systems, it is expected to make best use of these sets of resources – budget/finance, human resources and physical assets.
  - a) **Budget and Financial Management.** Key questions that each management should be asking with regard to the use of its financial resources are –
    - Is the budget effectively linked to the priority results to be delivered?
    - Is there proportionality between the budget available and expected results?
    - Are the financial management systems, including financial reporting, effective?
  - b) **Management of Human Resources.** Human resources are the most critical resource for the organization. Key questions in this regard are
    - Are currently available HR skills relevant and responsive to client needs and expected results?
    - Are staff deployed through the organization structure in a way conducive to achievement of results?
    - Are basic HR systems in place i.e. recruitment, compensation, training and development?
  - c) **Physical Assets Management.** Finally, it is important to manage and maintain available physical assets to optimum efficiency by ensuring effective asset registration, maintenance, storage and disposal. Assets include equipment, vehicles, buildings materials and the like.

When asked about the kind of CD assistance they need to strengthen performance, most client organizations generally focus on increasing their resources – budgets, staff,

equipment and other physical assets. This is because they tend to blame their organization's poor performance on the quantity and quality of inputs: constrained operating budgets, the number and quality of staff, and the availability or age of equipment and technology. Thus, typical CD requests are for 'training', 'computerization' and 'increased operating budgets'. However, these are not necessarily the most productive options for improvement. In fact, most times, the variables primarily responsible for performance deficiencies are not the number or quality of resources or inputs available to the organization, but the manner in which these resources and inputs are *managed*. Thus, the factors of management, leadership, effectiveness of strategies, policies and systems, and the motivation of staff are often the issue.

To deal effectively with this concept of the role of 'management' in the conversion of resources and inputs to effective outputs and outcomes, the above model may be presented alternatively as suggested in Figure 5.

*Figure 5. Input-Output Model of the Public Sector Organization*



Source: Author, 2006

This schematic presentation emphasizes the following:

- The focus of capacity must be on the delivery of specific and expected **results** for the client.
- The key function of the organization and its management is the conversion of available **resources** (inputs) into **results** (outputs and outcomes).

- There should be **proportionality** between the results expected and resources available.
- The role of **management capacity** in converting resources to results is key. This is achieved by better managing key corporate variables such as management direction, strategy, structure and systems to make better use of available resources.
- The overarching variable is **management vision and drive**. This also influences the culture and work ethic of the organization thus influencing all aspects of operations and results.

The crux of CD, therefore, is not ensuring adequacy of resources (by assisting to enhance them) but: (i) facilitating the proportionality of expected results to available resources (through a realistic results framework), (ii) strengthening the management of available resources to deliver optimal results, and (iii) supporting the leadership and vision provided by management.

Besides the internal corporate factors which influence organization performance, *external factors* also do have an influence on performance. Typical external factors include:

- The larger political, social and cultural context;
- Support from key stakeholders, including their resource support;
- Boarder government policy and resource availability, and
- Physical factors such as climate and geography.

While these factors could potentially play a major role in organization effectiveness, the initial and primary focus of CD must remain on the internal organizational factors. A public sector organization (or for that matter any organization) has little control or influence on external variables. However, the impact of these factors on its performance can and should be managed. This is done through one or more of the internal factors or variables within control such as strategy, policy and systems. For instance, the impact of an overarching constrained budgetary environment and related cuts in an organization's budget can and should be addressed through the internal variable of better strategy (reducing targets or better use of available resources), or greater efficiencies of systems or processes, or even improved competencies.

It is for this reason that one finds that public sector organizations operating in the same environment often do so at differing levels of efficiencies and effectiveness, based on their respective management capacities.

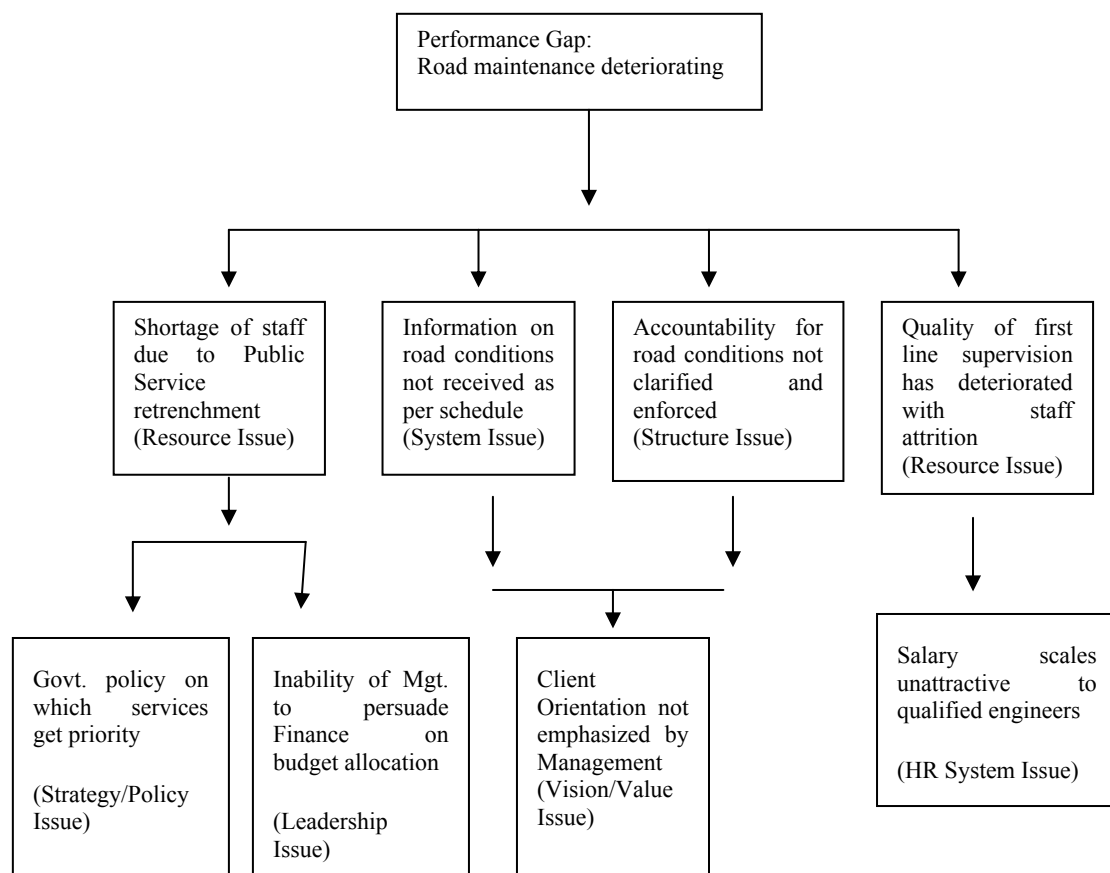
In view of the above, it is appropriate and more productive to focus on internal variables and their management, keeping in mind however the constantly changing external environment.

## THE PROCESS OF DIAGNOSTIC ANALYSIS

The process of diagnostic analysis itself is not complex. It envisages starting with the specific performance gaps identified through the initial performance analysis, and asking ‘Why?’ repeatedly until arriving at the specific factors causing the underperformance.

Take, for instance, the case of a public works agency charged with maintaining the roads of a specific district or province. Continuing potholes in the road and delays in their repair is a significant performance gap. A capacity diagnostic analysis would probably surface the following causal analysis shown in Figure 6.

*Figure 6: A Simplified Cause-Effect Analysis of the Public Works Agency in a Developing Country*



Source: Author, 2006

At the first level of causes, inadequate staffing of maintenance gangs is typically a primary cause. This in turn is caused by inadequate budgetary outlays for maintenance (resources), which in turn is usually due to the priorities of the government on allocation



of budgetary resources (strategy). If therefore, constrained resources are indeed given, the issue then becomes - how can constrained resources be used more effectively to at least minimize the problem (systems and structure)? The information system on the status of various roads is another primary cause. If it is addressed, perhaps the constraint of inadequate staffing could be circumvented by allowing for prioritization of road maintenance programs. Another key cause is that first line supervisors are generally not held accountable for road conditions. Thus, there is no incentive in place to motivate them to better performance. This process of questioning and searching for root causes must continue till key causative variables are identified.

It is extremely difficult for an outsider, without an understanding of the inner dynamics of the organization, to undertake this causal analysis in any useful degree of depth and accuracy. On the other hand, process consultants do have special skills to assist managers and staff within the organization move systematically through this causal analysis. The most practical and effective approach appears to be *group-based cause-effect tree analysis*.

It is important to identify which specific variable/s lies at the root of the performance gap because the appropriate corrective or improvement action will differ depending on the variable. For instance, addressing a system or process inefficiency will require a very different approach to that required to address an issue related to leadership and values of the organization.

The cause-effect analysis process must be an interactive and participative process involving experienced and knowledgeable staff, and facilitated by a process analyst.

In the year 2000, the ADB undertook the evaluation of a number of its capacity development technical assistances (TAs) to Bhutan, India, Kiribati and Laos PDR for strengthening expenditure management. In Bhutan, a series of four TAs aimed to strengthen the capacity of the Ministry of Finance to efficiently monitor, manage, and account for public sector resources. Assistance to the Government of Gujarat, India, was provided to cover resource generation and expenditure aspects, the latter comprising assistance to improve the budget and for the reform of state-owned enterprises. In Kiribati, assistance was provided to improve financial and economic management by addressing the range of macroeconomic policy making, investment management, and budgeting. In the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), a TA grant was given to help with the country's economic and financial management, while a second TA was provided to set up an oversight function.

The TAs were not considered generally successful. The evaluation report suggested the following

The TAs were reviewed to identify whether they analyzed capacity components. All TAs described the functions of the counterpart, although shortcomings are discussed in a cursory manner without detailed analysis of the causes or a clear description of how functions should be ideally performed. The brevity of these descriptions is in part due to an implicit assumption that "ideal functions" should be self-understood, and because problems are attributed to shortages in staff and/or deficiencies in their skills. The analyses do not consider other potential problems, such as process inefficiencies, power structures, and communication gaps. This problem is also

reflected in the resource analysis, which mentions the lack of staff and/or skills, but none of the other resources (informational, financial, and technological). None of the TAs provided details on the resources required to perform the envisaged functions.<sup>18</sup>

The evaluation report essentially makes the point that systematic and disciplined diagnostic analyses were not undertaken, leading to a less than satisfactory outcomes of these CD TAs.

One reason why both performance analysis and the follow up capacity diagnostic analysis is not undertaken is the typical bias and aid preferences of development partners with regard to CD interventions. Partners sometimes favour interventions such as training, scholarships, institutional twinning arrangements or a transfer of technology focus either because these are the simplest form of CD assistance, or since they coincide with the partner's own strengths and/or interests. A systematic capacity diagnostic analysis is thus pre-empted giving way to pre-favoured interventions.

A second reason why capacity analyses are frequently inadequate is the often encountered lack of technical capacity in CD on the part of consulting firms who are regularly contracted by donors. This simply compounds the problem. Given the emphasis and investment in CD, numerous consulting firms have diversified into CD, claiming technical capacity which in fact does not exist. Their reputations in their true fields of expertise, be these economics, agronomy, health, or engineering, often carry them forward in their bidding for CD contracts. The point being made here is that investment in CD cannot be justified unless there is a holistic, systematic and disciplined prior analysis of capacity.

## CAPACITY ASSESSMENT OR DIAGNOSTIC ANALYSIS

Assessment is a very different analytical tool to diagnosis. A performance assessment of an organization is typically an *audit process* of organization capacity. It focuses on assessing (and rating) how different and key aspects of the organization function such as the decision making processes, planning, quality control, human resource management, financial management and even the quality of leadership. Fundamentally, it *does not seek causes of underperformance*. Rather, it is intended to rate the organization and how its different internal corporate factors and processes perform against a standard or norm. An *a priori* selection of factors or processes is made under the assumption that these are the most critical to the organization's performance. These factors or processes are then examined as to whether they compare favourably or otherwise with acceptable standards, norms or ideal practices. The standards are typically internationally developed and accepted practices. The International Standards Organization (ISO) as well as various quality award foundations<sup>19</sup> provide specific assessment guidelines and instruments in this regard.

Thus, the assessment approach implies a comparative scoring rather than trying to understand the dynamics of the organization and diagnose causative factors responsible for above or below required performance<sup>20</sup>. It assesses specific organization variables against an idealist model which is described in qualitative fashion. The assessment of

each variable is done in isolation of the others and without due consideration of its impact and influence on other organization variables. The assessment does not use as its starting point any kind of prior performance analysis and the identification of specific performance gaps. The methodology therefore, remains inadequate as a diagnostic instrument since it lacks a process which identifies cause-effect linkages between organization variables and organization results.

A recent review (2005) of AusAID's Education Capacity Building Program (ECBP) in Papua New Guinea has highlighted the need to make a clear distinction between the 'Assessment' and 'Diagnostic' approaches to capacity analysis. Each approach leads to very different strategies for CD. Hence, the significance and need of clarifying which capacity analysis approach is adopted and why.<sup>21</sup>

The AusAID funded ECBP in PNG is a major five year CD program targeted at improving service delivery in the critical education sector. It has the broad mandate to address capacity constraints at all levels of government in the education sector, the intent being to enhance provision of education services.

The ECBP began with what could only be considered as a broad-brush performance analysis of the sector, mainly based on available studies, assisted with some short term stakeholder consultation. On this basis, a detailed design was put in place and implementation begun. Belatedly, there was a realization that a more detailed analysis was needed of capacity constraints. Hence, an extensive Review of Organization Capacity (ROC) was undertaken of the national agency, though not of the provincial and district agencies which are at the frontline of service delivery. The ROC began with an *a priori* selection of the organization variables to be 'assessed'. The assumption was that one or more of these variables / organizational factors is / are the causes of underperformance in the sector. The variables of culture, structure, systems and partnerships were singled out for assessment. These in fact may or may not be the most significant variables in influencing poor performance. There was also consideration for pursuing ISO accreditation as part of the assessment process.

The ROC has led to the identification of 174 capacity building recommendations. These are offered in no pattern of priority or with any suggested sequence of implementation. Most are focused on the national level agency which is not at the frontline of service delivery. The question that comes to mind is that if indeed the primary objective of the capacity building program is to improve service delivery, why begin with the national agency which is not substantially and directly involved in service delivery? Moreover, how will addressing the 174 recommendations within the national agency affect final service delivery?

Were a diagnostic analysis approach adopted, it would have started with the point of service delivery, and therefore with the frontline education agencies at the district and provincial level. The process would have then worked backwards and up the institutional hierarchy within the sector, to identify those specific variables within the district, provincial and national agencies which contribute to specific underperformances at the frontline. The process would probably have tabled a few key CD actions, appropriately sequenced in recognition of their linkages, and not 174 actions primarily focused within the national agency, and which will continue to have an uncertain relationship with poor service delivery. It is also questionable whether

applying optimal/international standards and norms to key organization variables such as organization structures and systems is appropriate in PNG which is virtually unique with respect to its complexities of culture and ethnicity, geography, financial and skills constraints.

The assessment approach is indeed useful as a periodic organizational audit. However, it is risky to use as the primary basis for developing CD strategies. Standards and models may not be applicable in developing country situations; the strategies that emerge from the assessment may not deal with root causes of underperformance.

In connection with the above, mention should be made of the *governance and capacity assessments* promoted by the multilateral development organizations. The ADB<sup>22</sup> and the World Bank<sup>23</sup> have introduced these into their operations and regularly apply them in their work with developing countries. These are important and valuable instruments and processes. However, they are quite distinct in terms of scope, methodology and purpose to diagnostic analysis for CD.

The intent of these analytical instruments is to assess the capacity, efficiency and effectiveness of governance in a country as a whole, or large facets of it. Some of the specific assessments included by the World Bank<sup>24</sup> under the 'governance assessment' title are –

- Assessing Constraints on Service Delivery
- Civil Service Institutional Assessment
- Commitment to Reform
- Framework for Revenue Administration
- Governance and Poverty Toolkits
- Inter-Governmental Relations Institutional Review
- Legal and Judicial Institutional Review
- Public Expenditure Institutional Assessment

In terms of their *scope*, governance assessments attempt to pass a normative judgment on the whole of government or on major aspects of government functioning – not specific public sector organizations that comprise government. Thus, typical governance assessments will focus on the facets of – transparency, accountability, efficiency and participation of government as a whole. They also tend to deal with broad functions of government such as: expenditure management, resource allocation, budget management, corruption, civil service assessments, legal and judicial reviews.

In terms of their *methodology*, they assume widely applicable norms and standards. The development institutions have developed, through consensus and through observing the functioning of developed country governments, a set of norms and criteria based on which judgments can be made as to whether a developing country is performing adequately or not with regard to key facets of governance. The norms or criteria generally form a checklist against which the developing country's performance is assessed. Thus, these governance assessments are not very different to the 'quality awards' used by the private sector to award private companies for performance excellence. They are contingent on an agreed set of norms or standards of organization behavior.

With respect to *periodicity and usage*, governance assessments are also very much like financial audits. They are undertaken at regular intervals, primarily by external agents, culminating in a report presented to the authorities concerned - generally the sitting government in a developing country and donors who are assisting the development process of the country. The report/s trigger, debar and otherwise influence the form and continuance of various aid programs. They generate a number of recommendations on aspects of governance that need to be improved. They often identify critical performance gaps which then will need to be addressed through follow up diagnostic analysis to arrive at root causes.

Thus, governance and capacity assessments are very different from the process of measuring/monitoring the specific outputs and outcomes of public sector organizations, identifying where they are underperforming, and seeking the causes of such underperformance. This latter process can be truly called 'diagnostic'. It seeks causes of underperformance, and targets correcting these causes so as to improve performance. It also is not dependent on norms and standards which may be questioned as inapplicable to varying country situations.

## **STRATEGIES FOR CD**

### **Need for Holistic and Organic Approach**

A key lesson emerging from all of the discussions above is that organization capacity is influenced by a multitude of variables which have interdependencies and synergies between themselves. Thus, CD strategies similarly need to be multi dimensional. Addressing single variables in isolation of others will not work.

Organizations are organic. While some variables have a dominating influence, such as the variable of leadership, no single variable dictates the level and quality of performance. The organization change process is similarly organic. It requires key variables changing their dynamics and inter-relationships before change in overall organization performance can be achieved. The CD process needs to recognize the nature of this change process.

Technology-led CD such as computerization and e-governance initiatives must take account of organization dynamics. While the introduction of new information technologies can indeed change the way of doing business and ultimately performance, related changes in structures, systems, processes, staff inter-relationships and even the organization culture are necessary. Ignoring such parallel changes risks undermining the often extensive investments made in the introduction of such technologies. CD is not and never can be simply a matter of 'transfer of technology'. To be sustained, technology transfer must take account of all key variables influencing its 'institutionalization'.

## Client-led Diagnostic Analysis and CD Strategies

Effective diagnosis must be led by and involve all key actors in the organization. They have the best knowledge of what goes wrong and why. They need to buy into the solutions; and they will do so only if they agree with what is the problem. The role of the consultant is to facilitate.

Another aspect of the organic nature of the CD process is that its pace must be dictated by the client; it cannot be imposed from outside. If it is, internal ownership proportionately diminishes and sustainability is compromised. The specific strategies, pace, and sequence of CD actions must be developed and led by the Client, if it is to take root and have sustained impact. The role of the consultant facilitator must be to provide the roadmap, continuing feedback each step of the way, options, and experiences of others from which the client can take lessons.

### No Blueprint Designs – only Principles and a Roadmap

There are no formulae, no blueprints, no proven designs for successful CD. There are however well grounded principles and a broad roadmap which if carefully adhered to will lead to successful, effective and sustained CD. These principles and the roadmap may be summarized as follows –

- a) **An Organization Focus.** The CD process should initially *target specific organizations*. It is the individual public sector organizations which make up the institutional framework of the public sector and governance. If the specific organizations work effectively, the broader governance and public sector institutional framework will deliver results. Thus, focus on the organization. If the focus is a specific sector, eg education, health or law & justice, focus on the lead organization within the sector.
- b) **Clear Results Framework.** The targeted organization must have in place a *clearly defined results framework (sometimes called its strategic or corporate plan) and a functioning performance management system*. If it does not have this, then the CD process must begin by assisting management to set this in place. This in itself is a major task and well worth investing in. An organization that has a clearly defined mandate, well articulated client expectations, and a realistic results framework is in a much better position to begin capacity improvement.
- c) **Performance Gaps.** Start with *specific and priority performance gaps or improvement needs* which emerge from the results framework and the periodic performance reports. This provides CD interventions with tangible and concrete objectives. The success of the CD intervention will be judged by the closing of the targeted performance gaps. Value for money invested in the CD intervention can then be more easily assessed, in the context of the significance of the performance gap to be closed and the consequent impact on clients.

- d) **Diagnostic Analysis.** Use *diagnostic analysis, not assessments*. The diagnostic analysis approach forces the organization to begin with its client expectations and the pertinent performance gaps. The diagnostic analysis then assists in arriving at root causes of the underperformance. The assessment approach is not necessarily rooted in the results framework.
- e) **Client Led.** The diagnostic analysis must be *led and managed by the client organization*. This is necessary for two reasons – (i) it is the staff of the client organization that best know the dynamics of different key variables within the organization and how these interact to compromise performance; and (ii) self-led diagnosis promotes ownership of the eventuating CD strategies.
- f) **Senior Management Commitment.** If *senior management commitment* for leading the CD process is lacking, the CD process must first work on *fostering this* rather than proceeding with an externally led intervention or diagnostic analysis. After a clear results framework, this is the most critical foundation to effective and sustained capacity development.
- g) **Internal (not External) Factors.** Focus on *causes internal to the organization*. While there are indeed many external factors which substantially influence the performance of the organization, most if not all are outside the control and influence of the organization. However, the leadership of the organization does have scope to manage the influence of these external factors in the internal workings and performance of its organization. Hence, focus on internal factors (such as strategy, structure, systems, competencies) which can manage the influence and impact of external factors on the organization.
- h) **Long Term Process.** Recognize that *organizations are organic*, and that *organization change* is a *gradual and organic process*. CD is about organization change. Thus, it is necessarily a long term process. It is also a meandering journey, with progress often being two steps forward and one step back. However, a clear results framework and an internally led diagnostic approach will provide a firm anchor to the process.
- i) **Holistic Approach.** *Adopt a holistic strategy* to address capacity – one which deals with all key influencing variables. Do not be tempted by single-variable CD strategies such as training, restructuring, computerization and the like. They can never succeed on a sustained basis given that organizations are organic and multiple-variable influenced.
- j) **Process Approach.** Use the *process approach* in designing and implementing CD. Effective CD interventions can never be completely designed upfront as in the case of a typical of project or program design (even in the case of the latter, it remains debatable whether upfront detailed designs are indeed of value). Phase the CD process, focusing on a phase by phase approach with each phase defining the next. What is important is to adjust to where the leadership of the organization is in the change process, while all the time keeping in mind the performance gaps to be addressed.

- k) **Skilled CD Consultants.** Guiding the CD process and catalysing organization change is a *highly skilled task*. Entrusting this task to consultants who are highly qualified in fields other than CD and organization dynamics, is generally unwise. CD is both an art and a science. It is important to find consultants who are skilled in both aspects.

## THE ROLE OF DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS IN CD

If the above described principles and roadmap of CD are seriously applied by development partners in their work and collaboration with client developing countries, development partners will need to make major adjustments with the way they currently do business. These principles and roadmap have significant implications for donor policies, processes, client relationships, CD intervention financing, and contracting of consultants.

The implications for development partners are summarized as follows –

- a) **CD Design.** In terms of design, partners will need to forsake the typical detailed *a priori* designs with supposedly accurate costing. The detailed design approach is not conducive to effective capacity development. A phased approach to CD will be necessary, beginning with engendering management commitment to change, and establishing an effectively functioning results framework in the client organization.
- b) **Involvement of the Client Organization in Design.** The management of the client organization will need to have a major role in the design of each phase of the CD process. This is implied in the principle of the local management leading the CD process. Development partners will thus need to adjust CD design process to take account of this involvement.
- c) **Costing and Financing Approval.** Funding of CD interventions will need to be tranced, with the design and cost of each succeeding tranche contingent on the process, path and success of its predecessor phase. This implies that large one-time donor commitments of financing for a CD project will no longer be feasible. Multi-year financial commitments become meaningless and possibly counterproductive. For instance, it is quite possible that a potentially five year CD process may need to be abandoned within the first three months if the client organization's management does not climb aboard with a commitment to leading the change process. Thus, the level of aid provided for CD will possibly drop dramatically.
- d) **Consultants.** CD interventions should not be facilitated by 'technical' consulting firms, i.e. consultants from fields other than CD or organizational dynamics. Development partners will need to encourage CD specialist firms since this type of skill remains currently in serious short supply. If such so called 'technical consultants' are required for transfer of technology, they should be working under the guidance of a professional CD consultant.



- e) **Contracting Arrangements.** Typical contractual arrangements with consultants to facilitate such a process approach will also need substantial adjustments. It is in the interests of the CD process that the consultant facilitator of the CD process remains on hand on a relatively long term basis for the following reasons – (i) the consultant needs to develop a trust relationship with the client organization management, (ii) the consultant needs to understand to the extent possible by an outsider, internal organization dynamics as well as the influence of significant external factors, (iii) the role of the consultant in guiding the organization along the CD roadmap assumes that he/she gets deeply involved with the process and is thus able to guide the organization through each phase, adjusting the CD process to the needs of the moment. However, dependency should be avoided. Thus, periodic visits may be an option to consider.
- f) **Development Partner – Client Organization Relationship.** A relationship of trust and close collaboration between the development partner and the client organization is critical. This will involve respect and understanding on the part of the development partner for the issues and constraints the client organization management will have to inevitably deal with as part of the organization change process. Change is not easy. And the role of the development partner will need to include gentle counsel and support for sometimes difficult decisions. Such counsel will only be welcome if it is based on a relationship of respect and trust.

## CONCLUSIONS

This article suggests that CD as is currently being undertaken and financed by development partners needs to change substantially in terms of its strategic approach, methodology and resourcing. Admittedly, this is not easy for development partners. It involves serious questioning by development partners of the capacities of their own development aid organizations to undertake a process of assistance which is quite alien to their typical approach of doing business. Traditionally, such organizations are in the business of designing and financing programs and projects. CD is neither. Yet, it does have a discipline and science about it. The issue is – are development partners willing to change and adapt their own organization so that they are better able to undertake the CD process which is so central to development?

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