

Learning and professional development

“It is the responsibility of the aid worker to become a good team-player and take the initiative to capture the new knowledge that is generated by his work, updating his knowledge profile in a way that it can be transmitted to peers and successors”

– © ODI 2004, Faulkner & Foster, ALNAP, *Managing Learning at the Field Level in the Humanitarian Sector*

How this is achieved will depend on the:

- particular knowledge, skills or behaviour the learner aims to acquire or develop
- level of knowledge, skill or behaviour the learner already demonstrates
- learner's preferred learning style
- resources available (people, money, equipment, opportunity and time)

DIRECTED GROUP LEARNING

- formal structured training and learning in different sized groups

- **Training courses /Workshops** (short courses run internally or by others)
- **Briefings** (short inputs on specific issues)
- **Road shows** (short sessions in many locations)
- **Conferences** (large meeting for consultation or discussion)

Advantages

- can target a wide audience
- builds skills and knowledge
- builds relationships and contacts
- two-way exchange of information

Disadvantages

- the larger the numbers, the more general the content
- takes time to plan
- expensive to run

SELF-DIRECTED GROUP LEARNING

- self-choosing groups where individuals learn from each other

- **Discussion forum** (in-person or electronic forum to exchange ideas, post questions, offer answers, offer help on relevant subjects)
- **Action learning sets** (regular meetings to explore solutions to real problems and decide action)
- **Communities of practice** (informal network of like-minded individuals sharing expertise)

Advantages

- real, live issues
- action based
- directly relevant
- can be easy to arrange
- useful for teams working on same site

Disadvantages

- coordination
- continuity
- can need skilled facilitation
- seen as gimmicky
- lack of focus
- becomes a talking shop

INDIVIDUAL LEARNING

- specific individual learning opportunities

- **Coaching / mentoring** (providing guidance, feedback and direction)
- **Shadowing** (following and observing experienced person)
- **Field visits** (visiting actual programme sites)
- **Practical demonstrations**
- **Placements/secondments** (temporary assignment in another organisation)

Advantages

- very specific
- on-going learning
- focused on needs of the individual
- practical learning

Disadvantages

- resource intense
- time
- can pass on bad habits

SELF-MANAGED LEARNING

- individual actions the learning in their own time

Self study:

- books, reports, downloadable resources
- CDs, videos, DVDs, podcasts
- distance learning

Personal reflection:

- Observing and listening
- Learning logs (written record of learning)

Advantages

- written materials give standardised messages
- can reach large audience
- individual responsibility and motivation for learning

Disadvantages

- relies on individual motivation
- written messages can be too general or misinterpreted
- materials take time to produce



ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING

In the rapidly changing environment of humanitarian relief, organisations need to continually adapt and learn.

In addition to M&E processes for your programme, you need to capture learning from your employees through, e.g.

Team Lessons Learnt meetings/debriefings

Regular meetings to capture essential lessons from what work has been performed and what was achieved.

Personal debriefing

Asking individual to reflect on, and share, experiences - high points, low points, readjustments made and recommended.

Exit interviews

Interviewing staff just before they leave to gather candid views on the work, organisation, programme, management etc.

All In Diary CD Resources:

© People in Aid (2004) HR Information Notes, Learning Styles and Methodologies; © People in Aid (2004) HR Information Notes, Training and Development.; © ODI (2004) ALNAP Review of Humanitarian Action 2003 – Field Level Learning

Web links for further information

www.aidworkers.net; www.networklearning.org
<http://www.actionlearningsets.com/php/news.php?id=4&item=->
<http://www.the-ecentre.net/resources/1-1-1-1.cfm>

