Conducting an Organization Needs Assessment

What is an Organization Needs Assessment?
- A systematic way to analyze:
  - The priority concerns and requirements of an organization’s customers and stakeholders
  - The state of organization performance in relationship to its mission and goals
  - The state of knowledge and ability of organization employees
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Why Should We Bother to do Organization Need Assessments?

- To help us get useful information and documentation about:
  - Unmet service needs of a target population
  - The gaps between actual and desired organization performance results
  - Employee training and development needs
- To help us consider alternatives and options in our decision making about:
  - Priorities
  - Program objectives
  - Strategies to be used
  - To establish baseline data for use in assessing progress and future performance

Thinking about Organizations as Open Socio-Technical Systems

- Organizations exist within particular settings or environments, including:
  - Geographic and physical settings
  - Economic conditions
  - Current and developing technological capabilities
  - Political and legal considerations
  - Demographic and cultural factors
  - The sector or industry in which they belong
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Conducting an Environmental Analysis

The first step in doing an organization needs assessment is to conduct an environmental analysis to discover how any of these different settings may have positive or negative impacts on your organization’s effectiveness.

Organizations as Open Systems

I. Environmental Factors
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Organizations are constantly interacting with and being influenced by their environments and stakeholders.

They have “permeable” or open boundaries.

Organizations are made up of “social” (human/relational) and “technical” (non-human/technological) parts.

“Social” parts include:
- Organization mission/strategy
- Organization structure (roles, reporting relationships)
- Leadership
- Organization culture
- Human resource programs (hiring, training, development)
- Performance and reward systems
- Communication and coordinating processes (planning, decision making, problem solving)

Environment

Organization Mission & Strategy

Leadership & Culture

Stakeholder Requirements

Communicating & Coordinating Processes

Human Resources Management

Technical Components

Performance & Rewards

Organization Structure

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Three Different Kinds of Organization Needs Assessments

Strategic Needs Assessments
- Focused on environmental trends
  - What will the organization have to do to be prepared for changes in the economy, technology, political regulations, employee or customer demographics, etc.?
- Focused on the needs of the organization’s stakeholders
  - What will the organization have to do in the future to meet the needs of customers, community groups, clients, suppliers, investors, donors, employees, etc.?

Tactical Needs Assessments
- Focused on overall organization performance and results
  - How is the organization currently doing in terms of accomplishing its mission and meeting its program or service goals?
  - Did Project X accomplish its objectives?
- Focused on the performance of specific social and/or technical parts of the organization
  - Does the organization structure and culture support the organization’s mission and strategy?
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Three Different Kinds of Organization Needs Assessments

- Are the communication and coordination processes effective?
- Do employees get rewarded for performance that supports organization goals?
- Does the information technology help coordinate work?
- Are social and technical parts of the organization aligned?

Operational Needs Assessments

- Focused on individual or group performance
- What are the training and development needs of different classifications of employees and/or different work units?

ACTIVITY – Please discuss:

- Has your organization conducted needs assessments in the last few years?
  - If so, which type(s) of needs assessments?
- What, if anything, happened as a result of the needs assessment?
- What type of needs assessment do you think it would be most useful and “do-able” for you to conduct with your organization?
  - Why?
- What would the purposes of your assessment be?
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■ Cautions to Think About When Conducting Needs Assessments
  ■ The importance of having the right sponsorship in order to:
    ■ Have access to the organization
    ■ Have credibility with target populations
    ■ Ensure that the assessment results are used effectively
    ■ The need to have agreements with the sponsor about:
      ■ The scope of the assessment
      ■ How the results of the assessment will be used
      ■ Who will have access to the results

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■ The Stages in an Organization Needs Assessment
  ■ Pre-Assessment
    ■ Obtaining appropriate sponsorship
    ■ Agreeing on the purpose and scope of the assessment
    ■ Determining the questions to be asked
    ■ Deciding on data gathering methods
  ■ Assessment
    ■ Collecting the data
    ■ Summarizing and analyzing the data
    ■ Writing up the results of the assessment
  ■ Post-Assessment
    ■ Reporting back to the sponsor and others
    ■ Making decisions about what to do in response to the data
    ■ Deciding on a team project
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The Stages in an Organization Needs Assessment

- Reviewing existing data
  - Conducting interviews
    - Key Informants/decision makers
    - Representatives of target groups
- Conducting focus group interviews
  - Key informants/decision makers
  - Representatives of target groups
- Administering surveys
- Holding public meetings/community forums

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Review existing data</td>
<td>Available</td>
<td>May be dated</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Objective information</td>
<td>May be incomplete</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conduct interviews</td>
<td>Facilitates openness</td>
<td>Time requirements</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Permits follow-up Q's</td>
<td>Selective perspectives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conduct focus group</td>
<td>Less time required</td>
<td>May impact openness of communications</td>
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<tr>
<td>interviews</td>
<td>Includes more people</td>
<td>Requires careful facilitation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Permits follow-up Q's</td>
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<td>Administer survey</td>
<td>Facilitates openness</td>
<td>May be misunderstandings re:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Broad representation of target group</td>
<td>meaning of Q's or A's</td>
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<td>Representation level depends on % responses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hold public meeting or</td>
<td>Broad representation of target group</td>
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<td>community forum</td>
<td>Buy-in/engagement</td>
<td>May impact openness</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Requires careful management</td>
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- Asking Good Questions
  - For strategic needs assessments
    - Questions about environmental trends
      - What is happening in the economic, technological, political, demographic/cultural, physical environments?
      - What is happening in your sector/industry?
      - How will what is happening impact on your organization?
    - Questions about stakeholders
      - What changes are happening for your organization’s customers, constituents, suppliers, owners, employees, regulators, donors, etc.?
      - What are their needs and requirements?
      - What issues are important to them?
  - For tactical needs assessments
    - Questions about organization or project performance against goals
      - How has the organization or project performed against its goals in the areas of fiscal management, constituent/customer service and satisfaction, employee retention and development?
    - Questions about the social components of the organization
      - How are our strategic goals aligned with our mission?
      - What is effective or needs improving about our communications and coordinating processes?
      - How are our cultural norms contributing to or detracting from organization performance?
      - What kinds of candidates are we attracting with our current recruitment processes?
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- Asking Good Questions
  - For tactical needs assessments
    - Questions about the technical components of the organization
      - What about our core work processes is effective and efficient?
      - What needs changing?
      - How does our information technology support our work processes?
      - What changes are needed to our facilities and equipment?

- Asking Good Questions
  - For operational needs assessments
    - Questions about individual or group performance
      - At what level are individual employees or classifications of employees performing?
      - What new knowledge bases or skills will employees need in order to perform new or redesigned work processes?
      - What percentage of our employees are cross-trained?
      - In what areas?
      - What types of leadership development opportunities are needed by management?
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- Asking Good Questions
  - For operational needs assessments
    - Questions about employee interests or attitudes
      - What motivates our employees to perform at their best?
      - What do our employees think about supervisory practices in our organization?
      - How would employees like to be asked for their input when we are developing strategic or tactical plans?

Conducting an Organisational Needs Assessment

- A Check List for Asking Good Questions
  - Questions cover all key areas included in the scope of your assessment
  - Each question is focused and covers just one thing
  - Questions are simple and clearly understandable
  - Questions are phrased in ways that:
    - Do not lead the respondent to a particular conclusion
    - Do not imply judgment or blame
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A Check List for Asking Good Questions

- Questions usually solicit factual information rather than opinions
- What ... How ... When ... Where ...?
- Questions about attitudes may be more focused on opinions
- Questions usually are open-ended rather than answered by yes/no
- (If conducting a survey), responses to questions can be tabulated easily

Practical Exercise

Case Study 1:
- You are conducting a needs assessment to determine what the priorities are for the overall Anti-Corruption performance of your Ministry.
- Work with your group to write down 5 good questions to include in your assessment

Case Study 2:
- You are conducting a needs assessment to determine what the priorities are for improving the transparency skills for managers in your agency.
- Work with your group to write down 5 good questions to include in your assessment
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Tips for Analyzing Needs Assessment Data

- Differentiate between
  - Factual data
    - behaviors, events, statistics
  - Hypothetical data
    - analysis of intentionality, motivation
- Consider the reliability of the data
  - How frequently were concerns raised?
  - By how many respondents?
  - From different parts of the organization or just one area?
  - How current or historical are the concerns?

- Acknowledge the reality of people’s perceptions, recommending appropriate actions to address misperceptions if this is the root problem
- Recognize that the political realities of the organization are as important as the functional realities
- Treat the data as a “snapshot” of the organization in time
- Focus on the bottom-line impact
  - the “so what” of the data
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Tips for Reporting Needs Assessment Data
- Keep in mind your purposes for reporting:
  - Education and understanding
  - Establishing accountability
  - Involving others
  - Gaining support
  - Public relations
- Be clear about your target audience(s)
  - Adjust the content of your report based on your purposes and target audiences

Keep the report simple, focused, easy to read and understand:
- What: The issue, need, performance gap, etc. being analyzed
- Why: The purpose for doing the analysis
- "So What:" The findings, conclusions and recommendations
- Include an executive summary
- Present an objective, balanced and fair analysis
  - Equal attention to strengths and areas for development
  - Balanced representation of different points of view
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Tips for Reporting Needs Assessment Data

- Describe the procedures followed and information sources used in the assessment, as well as any limitations to the analysis
- Issue the report in a timely manner
- For oral presentations, allow time for dialogue and discussion
- For written presentations, follow up to ensure understanding and identify any concerns

SOURCE:
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Lamb & Lamb, Organizational Consultants
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