UNITAR Web Seminar: Conducting an Organization Needs Assessment
Presented by Howard and Sue Lamb and ACTRA Members
To the 2011 UNITAR Afghan Fellows
May 17, 2011

Webinar Goals

- Have participants understand
- What is involved in doing an organization needs assessment
- Why it is useful to do needs assessments
- How to do needs assessments
- Help participants get started on their assignment to conduct an organization needs assessment
Webinar Agenda

- What is an organization needs assessment ... Why bother to do one?
- Thinking about your organization as a "socio technical system"
- Conducting an environmental analysis ... ACTIVITY/DISCUSSION ... ACTIVITY
- Three types of organization needs assessments ... ACTIVITY/DISCUSSION
- Cautions to think about when conducting a needs assessment ... ACTIVITY/DISCUSSION
- The stages in an organization needs assessment
- Different data gathering methods
- Asking effective questions ... ACTIVITY/DISCUSSION
- Summarizing and analyzing your data
- Reporting on your findings
- Using your findings to think about a team project

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
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
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.

ACTIVITY 1:
- Review the handout, Conducting an Environmental Analysis in your small group.
- Discuss which of the examples in the handout might be important for your organization.
- Add any examples you can think of that could be important for your organization.
- Share key points that your group has discussed with the rest of the group.

Organizations as Open Systems

I. Environmental Factors

- Physical/Geographic Factors
- Economic Factors
- Technological Factors
- Sector/Industry Factors
- Demographic/Cultural Factors
- Political/Legal Factors

Stakeholder Requirements

Organization
Each organization has many different groups of stakeholders:

- Customers/Constituents
- Suppliers
- Owners/Managers
- Employees
- Regulators/Auditors
- Investors/Donors
- Community Members

A Question to Think About ....

- What are the messages your organization is receiving from its different stakeholders?

- ACTIVITY 2: Quickly write down one or two messages that you can think of that your organization is hearing from one of its important customers or stakeholders ....
Organizations as Open Systems

II. Stakeholder Influences and Requirements

- Customers
- Owners/Managers
- Employees
- Suppliers
- Investors/Donors
- Regulators/Auditors
- Community Members

Thinking about Organizations as Open Socio-Technical Systems, 3

- Organizations are constantly interacting with and being influenced by their environments and stakeholders
- They have “permeable” or open boundaries
Thinking about Organizations as Open Socio-Technical Systems, 4

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)

Organizations as Open Systems
III. Social Components of the Organization

Environment

Organization Mission & Strategy

Leadership & Culture

Human Resources Management

Technical Components

Organization Structure

Performance & Rewards

Stakeholder Requirements

Communicating & Coordinating Processes
Thinking about Organizations as Open Socio-Technical Systems, 5

“Technical” parts include:
- The building(s) in which the organization does its work
- Equipment and facilities
- Information technology
- Core work processes by which the organization produces its products or services

Organizations as Open Systems
IV. Technical Components of the Organization
Thinking about Organizations as Open Socio-Technical Systems, 6

All of the “social” and “technical” parts of the organization combine to form an integral system that works together to accomplish the organization’s mission ...

Changing one part of the system has impacts on other parts of the system

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.?
Three Different Kinds of Organization Needs Assessments, 2

**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? ... 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?

Three Different Kinds of Organization Needs Assessments, 3

**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?
Types of Organization Needs Assessments

Stakeholder Requirements Analysis
Environmental Analysis
Social Components
Technical Components
Individual & Group Performance
Operational Assessments
Tactical Assessments
Strategic Assessments

Activity 3: Discussion Questions

- 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?
Cautions to Think About When Conducting Needs Assessments

- Keep the needs assessment “doable” in terms of scope, time constraints and relevance to your role

- Have the right sponsorship to:
  - Have access to the organization
  - Have credibility with target populations
  - Ensure that the assessment results are used effectively

- 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

Note: If the assessment is being done only as a practice exercise to meet the UNITAR assignment requirement, this should be made clear to the target audience during the assessment activity so that they do not have unrealistic expectations about the results

Cautions to Think About When Conducting Needs Assessments, 2

- Communicate clearly about the purposes for the assessment and what will be done with the results to:
  - Avoid raising unrealistic expectations
  - Keep people focused on the assessment purposes

- Have well-formulated, neutral questions to avoid:
  - Influencing responses
  - Implying judgment, fault or blame
Activity 4: Thinking about Sponsorship for Your Organization Needs Assessment

- What do you think the target group for your organization needs assessment will be—e.g.,
  - A group of customers or clients?
  - A community?
  - A government organization?
  - A university department?
  - An NGO office?
  - A division within a government agency?
  - A school?
  - A group of employees?
  - Etc.?

- Given your possible target group, who will you need to have serve as the sponsor of your needs assessment in order to have access to your target organization and credibility with the target population, and to ensure that the results of your assessment are used effectively?

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
Typical Data Gathering Methods for Organization Needs Assessments

- 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

Advantages and Disadvantages of Different Data Gathering Methods

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<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
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<tr>
<td>Review existing data</td>
<td>Available Objective information</td>
<td>May be dated</td>
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<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>Permits follow-up Q’s</td>
<td>Selective perspectives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conduct focus group interviews</td>
<td>Less time required</td>
<td>May impact openness of communications</td>
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<td>Includes more people</td>
<td>Requires careful facilitation</td>
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<td>Permits follow-up Q’s</td>
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<td>Administer survey</td>
<td>Facilitates openness</td>
<td>May be misunderstandings</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Broad representation of target group</td>
<td>re: meaning of Q’s or A’s</td>
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<td>Representation level depends on % responses</td>
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<td>Hold public meeting or</td>
<td>Broad representation of target group</td>
<td>May impact openness</td>
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<tr>
<td>community forum</td>
<td>Buy-in/engagement</td>
<td>Requires careful management</td>
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Asking Good Questions

Types of Study Questions Needed

For strategic needs assessments
- Questions about environmental trends -- e.g., 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 -- e.g., 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 -- e.g., 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, etc.?
- Questions about the social components of the organization -- e.g., 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?
- Questions about the technical components of the organization -- e.g., 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?
Types of Study Questions Needed, 3

For operational needs assessments

- Questions about individual or group performance -- e.g., 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?

- Questions about employee interests or attitudes -- e.g., 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?

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
- 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
Activity 5: Developing Good Questions

Case Study 1:
You are conducting a needs assessment to determine what kinds of health care services your Ministry should be providing to a particular area of Lowgar Province. 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 overall organization performance of your Ministry. Work with your group to write down 5 good questions to include in your assessment.

Case Study 3:
You are conducting a needs assessment to determine what the priorities are for improving the supervisory skills for managers in your agency. Work with your group to write down 5 good questions to include in your assessment.

Tips for Analyzing Needs Assessment Data

- Differentiate between factual data (behaviors, events, statistics, etc.) and hypothetical data (analysis of intentionality, motivation, etc.).

- 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.
Tips for Reporting on 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

Tips for Reporting on Needs Assessment Data, 2

- 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
Tips for Reporting on Needs Assessment Data, 3

- 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

Using Findings from Individual Organization Needs Assessments to Determine Team Projects

- Read the needs assessments of each member of your team carefully
- Individually, write down issues, needs, etc. that are common to your different organizations, or known to be concerns in your sector as a whole
- Share what you each have written down to identify areas of agreement or similar themes
Using Findings from Individual Organization Needs Assessments to Determine Team Projects, 2

- Discuss ideas for team projects with the following criteria in mind....
  - The project would be of interest to all members of the team
  - The project would use existing knowledge and skills of team members, as well as help them to develop new knowledge and skills
  - The project would be do-able given the resources available to the team
  - The project would be within the scope of authority of the team members or the individual whom they could get to sponsor it
  - The project could be completed -- or a phase of the project could be completed -- within the time frame of the Fellowship Program
  - The project would contribute to post-conflict reconstruction of Afghanistan

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