



A·P·O news

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Productivity education and certification

All NPOs conduct training programs and activities on various productivity and quality improvement tools and techniques. However, there are differences in the frequency and regularity of the training; target groups; and qualifications, backgrounds, and experience of the trainers. The workshop on Enhancing NPOs' Core Competence: Productivity Education and Certification, under the Development of NPOs Program, examined options for establishing a common framework and standards for productivity competencies among NPOs. Fourteen participants from 14 countries and five resource persons met in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, 23–27 August 2004, to debate the issues involved.

A common framework and standards for productivity training activities could serve as a platform for joint training and education programs, including joint certification and accreditation. The workshop defined standards as: “a level of quality that is accepted as the norm by which actual attainments are judged by an authority.” To validate conformance, standards typically include specific benchmarks or tests given by a competent authority. Standards are directly linked to quality. In the current environment characterized by intense competition and rapid globalization, acquiring standard certification has strategic importance for enterprises. Standards are frequently used by competitors as a winning factor and competitive edge, thus making certification among the prime means for promoting its products and services in regional and global markets.



Participants in the workshop

To ensure credibility, however, certification and accreditation are necessary. Certification was defined as “a procedure by which a third party gives written assurance that a product, process, or service conforms to specified requirements.” The definition of accreditation was “a procedure by which an authoritative body gives formal recognition that a body or person is competent to carry out specific tasks.” Putting the three together, the task of the workshop was to “explore and develop a common framework and standards leading to joint APO-NPO training programs and activities and... to identify the necessary processes of certification and accreditation therein.”

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“Nothing limits achievement like small thinking; nothing expands possibilities like unleashed thinking.”

William Arthur Ward

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The profession of productivity specialist entails a set of distinct competencies, paving the way for competency-based certification. There are two streams for imparting productivity competencies: the “professional track,” i.e., for those already engaged in the profession; and the “academic track,” through formal education programs or courses. NPOs are mostly active in the professional track, with only a few engaged in the academic track. In recognition of their equal importance, the workshop proposed competency-based certifications covering both the professional and academic tracks.

Many NPOs presently lack recognition and credibility due to the absence of authoritative certifying bodies or partners. Only a few NPOs have received accreditation from the designated national authority such as done by Development Academy of the Philippines and/or validated by a credible external party/parties, as exemplified by the PSB Academy, Singapore. Joint training programs based on a common framework and standards would help to raise the overall quality of the training activities of many NPOs. Most important, once an authoritative external partner exists to validate compliance with commonly agreed standards, NPO certification will be perceived as more credible.

Other regional organizations like ASEAN are pushing ahead with initiatives that will have wide repercussions on the regional economy, such as free trade and open exchanges of services. The new arrangements will also include provisions to facilitate freer movement of professional workers. Accordingly, if approved, the APO’s common framework and joint certifications of productivity proficiencies will be in line with prevailing trends. Overall, APO efforts will contribute to faster achievement of regional development goals.

Establishment of a common framework and standards on productivity competencies and subsequent joint training and certification would mark a new role for the APO. Productivity training and education were previously left

for NPOs to pursue as they chose. In contrast, the establishment of a common framework and standards would be tantamount to a collective obligation for all to comply with. Depending on the level of individual NPOs, the new scheme may require adjustments in existing productivity training programs.

To ensure the credibility of the standards, the APO must monitor compliance in productivity training activities requiring certification and accreditation, ideally through an external third party such as reputable universities or professional bodies.

The participants prepared a preliminary draft outlining the basic elements of the common qualifications framework, on which a small group of experts will continue to work. Specific priorities suggested for the immediate term are:

- 1) designing a comprehensive productivity qualifications framework;
- 2) determining the elements in standards of competencies, including the skills, knowledge, and experience required in each level of productivity proficiency qualifications; and
- 3) preparing for publication of the framework and standards for formulating joint training, education, and certification programs.

Priorities and goals for the mid to long term are:

- 1) enhancing competency-based certification of NPOs;
- 2) promoting the APO as an accreditation and certification body;
- 3) building networks/partnerships with internal and external stakeholders;
- 4) resource mobilization; and
- 5) sharing the productivity and quality learning resource system across the region. 