Capacity enhancement (CE) has increasingly been identified as a key priority in the World Bank’s development agenda. This article proposes a framework for reflection and action by Bank staff to better broker and adapt knowledge to help countries and communities enhance their capacity to deliver results. The focus is on identifying potential actions that would help nurture critical staff behavioral competencies that underpin effective knowledge transfer.

Capacity effectively translates into the knowledge of what to do and how to do it, and the capability to transform that knowledge into effective decisions and actions to solve development problems for both the short and long-term. To date, the Bank has generally tended to focus relatively more on the ‘what’ and not sufficiently on the ‘how’. The knowledge base of what needs to be done in a particular sector context is comprehensive. However, the Bank has been much less effective in how to effectively transfer that knowledge to the country partners and how to help the stakeholders transform that knowledge into action to deliver results.

The article seeks to answer four key questions: what are the critical success factors in CE; how is the Bank doing in these critical success areas; what are the key challenges for the Bank in using knowledge for CE; and what actions at the various organizational levels might help meet these challenges? The analysis is based primarily on available data from two sources: the Africa Region’s Debriefing Program, which provides syntheses of reflections of teams and country partners on ‘what works and why’ in CE; and the Client Feedback Surveys (CFS), which provide information on country perceptions on how the Bank is doing in some of the critical success factors in capacity enhancement.

**Critical success factors in country capacity enhancement**

The synthesis of staff and country stakeholder reflections reveals the importance of behaviors, including the following key success factors in CE:

- **Empowering the country partner:** It’s more about ‘creating space’ for the country stakeholders to ‘learn by doing’ than ‘filling the space’ with Bank-prepared solutions. The suggested approaches can be summarized as stepping aside for the country to get into the driver’s seat, but not becoming a ‘back seat driver’.

- **Adapting knowledge to the local context:** It’s more about creating the ‘best local fit’ than ap-
plying the ‘best global practice’. The suggested approaches can be summarized as looking at the issue through the lens of the particular country or institution, paying attention to local specificity, and involving local experts and knowledge sources to be part of the search for solutions to development problems.

- **Behaving as an enabler:** It’s more about nurturing effective behavioral competencies than strengthening staff’s technical skills. The suggested core competencies are: ‘listening’, ‘curiosity’, ‘patience’, ‘humility’, ‘flexibility’, ‘empathy’ and ‘building trust’.

**Bank performance in the critical success areas for capacity**

There are indications that Bank teams could do better in empowering the country stakeholders, adapting knowledge to country contexts, and in playing the role of enabler/broker to help countries enhance their capacity. The data from 78 CFSs undertaken Bank-wide during 1995-2003, and supplementary information from other recent Bank evaluations bring out the following key messages related to knowledge transfer and capacity enhancement (the charts in this article are a partial representation of the data. The full data set and additional charts are available online at [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTAFRICA/Resources/capacity_knowledge.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTAFRICA/Resources/capacity_knowledge.pdf)).

(i) countries perceive the Bank as being relatively less effective in empowering the stakeholders and in helping enhance capacity of institutions, especially at the local level;

(ii) countries perceive a major ‘knowledge adaptation gap’ in the way Bank staff transfer knowledge to the countries and its stakeholders;

(iii) countries suggest that Bank staff could do better on some behaviors such as flexibility, realism and respect for local culture that are critical to playing the enabler role;

(iv) there are some variations by regional country groupings, which point to the need for an agenda for action that differentiates across regions. In some areas there are also large variations across countries, which points to the need to learn from the experience of the more successful cases of capacity enhancement through knowledge transfer; and

(v) Bank staff believe they are doing better than they are perceived by the countries on a number of dimensions related to capacity enhancement, knowledge adaptation and enabling behaviors.

**Key challenges in using knowledge for capacity enhancement**

Overall, the analysis suggests that the most effective approach to enhancing country capacity is to use or build on existing capacity, and in the process create learning opportunities that make sense in the local social and institutional contexts. To meet this challenge, the Bank may have to do business in a different way. This will require a change of mind-sets, behaviors, and the way staff think about enhancing country capacity to deliver results. Doing business in a different way will involve specific challenges.

**Capability to broker knowledge for country learning and capacity enhancement:** The analysis suggests that countries look to Bank teams to broker knowledge of successful practices from a variety of sources (including, but not limited to the Bank), while at the same time considering the knowledge systems that are embedded in local sources and practices. Brokering/enabling services provide opportunities for ‘creating space for the country stakeholders to learn’ in such an environment, and for Bank staff to learn from their country stakeholders.

Country feedback suggests that
Bank teams are relatively more effective in playing the role of knowledge providers and less so as enablers of client learning. Country perceptions of Bank staff’s excessive focus on ‘best practice’, ‘condescension’ towards local knowledge and experience, and insufficient readiness to consider alternative solutions to adapt advice to the local context point to the issues that Bank teams need to address if they are to be more effective in their enabler role. It also suggests the need to look into the prevailing institutional incentive systems and signals, which may in fact be discouraging deviation from ‘best practice’.

Another challenge is to better recognize free-standing brokering/enabling services outside the regular operational products and services as important Bank contributions to the development process. It may, therefore, be necessary to revisit the existing institutional processes for resource allocation, outcome monitoring, etc., which may be more oriented toward the traditional operational products and may not provide the needed ‘space’ for inclusion and recognition of free-standing knowledge brokering services.

**Capability to help stakeholders adapt global knowledge to local conditions:** Country feedback suggests that adaptation of ‘global best practices’ to find the ‘best local fit’ may be at the core of an effective knowledge broker/enabler role to help enhance country capacity. Countries generally expect Bank teams to work collaboratively with stakeholders to leverage the various practices and adapt them to the local conditions to help obtain better results.

The Bank’s record in the area of adaptation appears to be mixed. While countries generally value the technical competence/soundness of the Bank’s knowledge and advice, they are often critical of the realism/relevance of such advice in the light of local circumstances. Nevertheless, there are some country level relative ‘bright spots’. These suggest that with the right combination of technical skills and behavioral competencies, Bank teams can make substantive contributions through effective knowledge transfer to help enhance country capacity to deliver results. Effective adaptation requires a combination of skills and approaches, and there is no one way of doing things. Knowledge of global ‘best practices’ may be needed to do the ‘right things’, but finding the best ‘local fit’ will help do the ‘right things right’.

The importance of knowledge adaptation is likely to grow further as the nature of the Bank’s products and services evolves in response to the changing external business environment. Adaptation is not an end in itself, but a critical success factor in obtaining results. It needs to permeate our way of doing business. This implies a changing role for the Bank, from a depository of knowledge and development advice that is transferred to countries, towards the idea of the Bank as a facilitator of country partner learning to enhance capacity. It also suggests that the Bank needs to build stronger staff competency in this area to help improve the impact of its services through more effective application of adapted knowledge.

**Institutional capacity to recognize and nurture the needed staff behavioral competencies:** Playing the role of broker/enabler effectively, and adapting advice to local contexts in a manner that contributes to CE, will depend to a large extent on Bank staff’s behavioral competencies. These competencies are facilitators of good learning and effective transfer of knowledge: listening opens up opportunities for learning new things about country needs and constraints; the patience of a good knowledge broker/enabler recognizes the fact that people, groups, countries learn and adapt at different speeds; it is the capacity for empathy that provides the context in which people develop trust and choose to readily exchange tacit knowledge or adopt practices recommended by others; intellectual humility and flexibility similarly help nurture trust and confidence that the provider of advice is seeking realistic answers, and not imposing pre-determined solutions.

Another challenge is to nurture mindsets that are consistent with enabling the country partners through knowledge to deliver results. The same behavior can be manifested with different implicit intent depending on the prevailing mindset. The impact on the quality of the exchange with the country partner may vary depending on the mindset involved: listening can be done with the objective to confirm what one already thinks, or it can be seen to provide an opportunity to discover something new; in practicing patience, the intent may be either to ‘learn to listen’ or ‘listen to learn’; exhibiting humility may be with the intent to prove others wrong or with a willingness to admit one’s advice may be wrong; showing empathy may be with the
intent to force others to accept one’s views or with a willingness to explore and learn about other viewpoints and approaches.

Currently, the Bank has very few systematic mechanisms to enable managers to determine whether staff possesses the needed behavioral competencies and mindsets. Furthermore, the institutional learning approaches and processes that help nurture such competencies are not yet very well developed. These issues have implications for building effective teams. In the past, the emphasis was on fielding good sector experts, while the current preferred practice is to seek good team players who can work across sector boundaries. As the Bank’s business evolves further in the direction of helping enhance country capacity to deliver results, the emphasis will have to be placed more on ‘striving for impact’ than producing quality outputs; and the importance of behaviors as sufficient conditions for higher impact is likely to grow further.

One way of responding to these challenges is to build teams that are ‘whole-brained’. A critical task for the leaders who build such teams will be to ensure that in addition to good technical and team skills, behavioral competencies such as listening and adapting are represented in the team. It is the combination of all these skills that is most likely to develop good enablers, i.e., practitioners who can help broker the most effective advice to the country partner and to help the stakeholders adapt it to the local context in a manner that empowers the stakeholders and provides them space to learn how to deliver better results.

**Readiness to develop results frameworks in using knowledge for capacity enhancement:** The analysis suggests that teams would be more effective in enhancing client capacity if the knowledge is transferred ‘just-in-time’, ‘just-enough’, is practical, and is adapted to the local context to ensure the ‘best local fit’. Country feedback reveals that Bank teams could be much more effective in reaching the critical stakeholders through knowledge products in a manner that is helpful to the recipient. Furthermore, the Bank has yet to develop robust metrics to monitor the behavioral competencies that underpin the effective sharing of knowledge to help enhance country capacity. Moreover, the current incentive structure and the resource allocation processes tend to favor the creation of knowledge relative to its sharing, adaptation or adoption.

Results frameworks that systematically track the dissemination and adaptation record need to be made explicit and integrated into the design of operational work, especially the AAA products. Key elements to monitor are: how knowledge is adapted to fit the local context, how a knowledge product is disseminated to the country stakeholders, how many stakeholders it reaches, and what value it brings in terms of CE. The content dimension of knowledge is a necessary condition for bringing value to the country. Nevertheless, this may not be sufficient if the right mechanisms and approaches are not applied in sharing that content with the country partner. Emerging practice (e.g., in the Africa Region) provides a basis for developing specific methodologies to measure the knowledge adaptation gap using CFS data, and to assess the effectiveness of the dissemination of knowledge products.

**Addressing these issues strategically through the CAS and other operational processes:** The analysis suggests that the Country Assistance Strategy (CAS) and the related operational processes could be used more effectively to address the issues that are raised in this study. Client feedback surveys have not yet been done in many countries. Where these have been carried out, the results may not have been systematically reported in the CAS. And, finally, where the results have been reported, the strategic implications of the feedback for the way we work may not have been systematically addressed. Similarly, there is a need to rethink the assumptions that underpin some of the operational tools and processes in terms of their contribution to the capacity enhancement agenda.
What actions might help the Bank meet the challenges?

The following suggested approaches are an initial attempt to stimulate a process of reflection around a few key potential actions that could be taken at various levels of the institution to address the issues that have been raised in this paper.

**Country Assistance Strategy:**
The starting point could be to analyze client survey results in a strategic manner. The persistence of a large ‘knowledge adaptation gap’ could be an indication that Bank teams may not be very effective in transferring knowledge in a manner that is perceived to be useful and relevant to the country. In such cases the CAS could:

(i) address the issues related to knowledge transfer for capacity enhancement:
- how capacity development needs are to be diagnosed, the capacity development support structured, and the key stakeholders engaged; and
- what to do and how to do it to better adapt knowledge or disseminate it in a manner that reaches the people that need the material the most;

(ii) set specific goals to reduce the perceived knowledge adaptation gap;

(iii) propose mechanisms for monitoring progress in achieving these goals;

(iv) suggest more innovative approaches to project design:
- look for more simple, and, where appropriate, community-based practices that help achieve development objectives and empower the communities;
- design some operational missions as ‘joint learning exercises with the country’;

(ii) identify entry points for more effective dialogue with the country on CE issues:
- more strategic integration of country office staff as knowledge brokers;
- more effective utilization of local knowledge and expertise in the country;
- more systematic use of South-South knowledge and learning exchanges;
- peer-to-peer learning exchanges facilitated by distance learning technologies, and focused on priority development challenges such as HIV/AIDS, could be especially useful in enhancing capacity at the community level.

**Analytical and Advisory Activities:** To help measure the quality of dissemination and assess whether the knowledge products and services provide ‘just-in-time, just-enough’ advice to the country and bring value where and when the key stakeholders need it most:

(i) Economic and Sector Work (ESW) activity would be authorized only if the Concept Note includes a dissemination plan, including ‘who, what, when, how’, and monitorable outcomes indicators;

(ii) An ESW task would be considered completed only after the dissemination plan has been implemented.

**Other operational entry points:**
Design and purpose of several operational products could be modified to help deal with issues such as adaptation and creating country learning opportunities:

(i) **Project Appraisal Document:**
- critical risk section to list lack of knowledge adaptation as a risk;
- lessons of experience sections to discuss the need to adapt to local contexts;
- components designed to help the stakeholders develop knowledge and information sharing systems to facilitate peer-to-peer learning as well as better governance;

(ii) **Country Portfolio Program Review (CPPR):** re-design the exercise into a ‘learning CPPR’ that provides opportunities for Bank teams to play the role of broker/enabler to facilitate staff/client emergent learning;

(iii) **Implementation Completion Report (ICR):** abandon the current distinction between regular and learning ICR, and turn all such assessments into intensive learning exercises;

(iv) The Operations Evaluation Department (now the Independent Evaluation Group – IEG) and the Quality Assurance Group could revisit their approaches to evaluation of task quality and development effectiveness to:
- focus more sharply on integrating CFS results into such assessments;
- adapt the methodology for assessing the quality of ICRs by focusing more on whether and how effectively the task team may have adapted the initial design to respond to the changing local context.
· develop a methodology to evaluate the impact of behavioral competencies on the achievement of outcomes, especially in capacity enhancement; and

Recognizing and nurturing behavioral competencies: To help leaders and managers to better nurture the behavioral competencies needed for effective work with country stakeholders on CE issues, Human Resources personnel will need to partner with the Knowledge and Learning Board and other operational units to:

(i) develop systematic tools for objective assessment of staff behavioral competencies;
(ii) adapt the Overall Performance Evaluation framework to specifically cover behaviors that are critical in bringing value to the client in CE;
(iii) design special learning processes and events to help nurture behavioral competencies;
(iv) identify incentives to promote desired behaviors;
(v) develop systematic mentoring/coaching programs for inexperienced teams:
· include experienced staff ('mentor/coach') on the team, at least when the team is dealing with the country partners. Such a role would be ideal for staff who are approaching retirement;
· expect all future retirees who possess the needed behavioral skills to spend the last 9-12 months of their career in such a mentoring/coaching capacity;
(vi) introduce mandatory mentoring/coaching for staff who are assigned a task team leader role for the first time;
(vii) establish an “Exodus Program for Retirees” to capture some of the lessons of the experiences of Bank staff who are about to retire.

“Walking the talk”: A starting point could be for all managers and staff to ask themselves some pointed questions: Are we listening with the intent to discover something new?: Are we being humble, patient and empathetic to create sufficient space for the country partner to learn and enhance capacity to deliver results?

This article has been excerpted from the publication “Capacity Enhancement for Knowledge Transfer – A Behavioral Framework for Reflection, Action and Results” by Nicolas Gorjestani, Senior Advisor and Chief Knowledge and Learning Officer, Africa Region, the World Bank. The full publication is available online at http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTAFRICA/Resources/capacity_knowledge.pdf.