

CAPABILITY BUILDING BEST PRACTICES, AND WHAT ELSE WENT WRONG

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Abstract

Any organization including quality assurance bodies should have the capacity to adapt to changes in order to be able to perform its activities. The capacity can be enhanced by capability-building programme which, as used in this paper, is the development of human resource competencies, specifically referring to the accreditors of the Accrediting Agency of Chartered Colleges and Universities in the Philippines (AACCUP). The AACCUP has a Register of over 4,000 accreditors who are involved in training and retraining aimed at improvement of their expertise in accreditation (evaluation) of the institutions and programs delivered by 112 state universities and colleges. In 2014, training of accreditors was mandatory due to the paradigm shift of quality assurance from the traditional input-process-focused approach to outcome-based quality assurance. This paper analyses the lessons learned from accreditors' training, the best practices implemented and the problems faced.

The results of accreditors' survey aimed at evaluating the capability-building program conducted at Mid-year Conference in 2017, showed that the total of 1,367 programs were evaluated by 1,420 accreditors in 2016. However, certain challenges marred what could have been an outstanding achievement. These weaknesses can be attributed to practices that went wrong in the training and will be addressed in the capability-building program in 2018.

Keywords: *accreditors, capability-building, outcomes, competencies, best practices.*

Introduction

This paper is a case study of one component of the capability-building program of a quality assurance agency, the Accrediting Agency of Chartered Colleges and Universities in the Philippines (AACCUP) which regularly holds a continuing series of training to build the competence of its Accreditors. It is about a specific case in the sense that the training was conducted in response to a dramatic change in the AACCUP's approach to quality assurance - a shift from the traditional input-process to outcomes-based quality assurance framework.

After the series of training sessions in 2014 – 2015, the Accreditors and their supervisors have noted certain deficiencies as well as strengths in the performance of the Accreditors who had undergone training. These observations have prompted the holding of an organized evaluation by the Accreditors who attended the training themselves. This evaluation came out with samples of best practices as well as the worst of them. This is the subject of this study which is published in detail in the following presentations. These will serve for a practical purpose – the lessons learned will be factored in redesigning and conducting the training activity in 2018.

Capability-building defined

Any organization should have the capacity to adapt to changes in order to be able to perform its activities. That capacity can be enhanced by capability-building through the sharpening of the competencies of its manpower resource, the infusion of more funds, and the adoption of technology.

Capability-building, as used in this paper is confined to the improvement of the competencies of the human resources, more specifically, the Accreditors (Assessors) required in the performance of their duties in enhancing the quality of institutions and programs of the 112 state universities and colleges in the Philippines. Timewise, this covers the period from 2014-2017.

Historically, the training of Accreditors started as early as the 1990s, and pursued regularly for all AACCUP Assessors as a requisite of the trade. As of 2014, more than 4,000 Accreditors have undergone training and retraining. The training activities were anchored on the traditional input-process of accreditation.

The year 2014 witnessed the dramatic shift of the paradigm of quality assurance from the old input-process evaluation to the measurement of outcomes or competencies. This dramatic shift called for the revision of the focus of accreditation, and the realignment of the goals, protocols, processes, evaluation techniques and the retooling of the Accreditors' competencies (knowledge, skills, attitudes). Thus, the need for the retraining of the Senior Accreditors and the training of new Accreditors.

Capability-building program of AACUP

As a standard practice, capability-building of Accreditors in AACCUP is a component of its Strategic Development Plan. The Agency follows a general approach in Capability-building with the following series of strategies.

1. Training needs as the benchmark of the training content. The training on the new Outcomes-based Quality Assurance (OBQA) framework naturally starts with an understanding of its fundamentals: outcomes as a new factor to be used and the concomitant realignment of the accreditation process. While it is difficult to make an expansive survey of training needs, the Agency made use of the evaluation reports made during the yearly Accreditors' National Conferences. The planning sessions for the implementation of the OBQA also suggested the focus of the training of Accreditors.
2. Preparation of the Training Design that included the objectives, course content, training content and schedules (usually 3 days) and evaluation of the participants' performance, and of the training venue itself. These are prepared by the regular AACCUP Training Staffs, situated in four (4) Training Centers in Luzon, Visayas, Mindanao and one (1) National Center located in Manila with a core-staff of 3-4 Members each Center.
3. Selection of trainees recruited based on qualification standards. The Accreditors are carefully selected using standards with the basic assumption that not everyone even with the best tertiary education can qualify as AACCUP Accreditor. Ninety-eight percent (98%) of the Accreditors are members of the teaching staff of the state universities and colleges. The AACCUP sets the qualification requirements for the training of prospective Accreditors. Only those who pass the series of training activities do become Accreditors. Even these very stringent qualification requirements do not give the guarantee that all will turn out to be effective Accreditors. A couple of the qualification standards (such as the educational attainment – at least a Master's Degree holder, or faculty rank – at least Assistant Professor, computer literacy, and even health requirements are easy to impose. However, some qualitative standards such as the possession of objective or professional standard, ability to work in teams, behavior and promptness are not easily established. Another requirement is the recommendations to be made by the Head of the educational institution who do not necessarily follow the

qualification standards set by AACCUP. Parenthetically, the recommendation of the Head of the State University of State College is necessary because the institution bears the cost training. More importantly, they are the ones who authorize the travel of their Accreditors when invited by AACCUP to on-site accreditation visits.

4. The actual training of Accreditors usually takes place in the training centers for a period of three (3) days for
 - New Accreditors, i.e., they have never attended previous trainings, and, therefore, are not yet accredited (by AACCUP) Accreditors;
 - Senior Accreditors, i.e., trained and experienced Accreditors;
 - Senior Accreditors for higher level Accreditation, i. e., select corps of Accreditors already trained in OBQA, and will be assigned to accredit advanced level of Accreditation for Level III and Level IV (Accreditation status is awarded in an ascending level of quality, such as Level I, II, III, and IV, the last level (Level IV) being the highest).

From 2014 to 2017, 3,276 Accreditors attended training on OBQA composed of a total of 2,300 New Accreditors, and 1,436 Senior Accreditors. Out of this number, 362 attended further training for higher level programs (Level III and Level IV). Not all are, however, active in Accreditation. In 2016, only 1,220 were actually included in accreditation on-site visits; and only 1,420 in 2017. Only about 1/3 of the trained Accreditors are actually active. The non-participation of trained Accreditors is one of the challenges that hinder AACCUP's capacity to respond to SUCs' applications for accreditation visits. In 2017, while 1,367 programs were subjected to on-site visits and awarded accreditation status, some 50 applications were placed in the waiting list due to the lack of Accreditors. This problem merits a separate report.

Evaluation of the impact of Training is actually confined to the outcome of the training activity as shown in the objectives on the part of the learners, which is very inadequate, and post-evaluation which is actually on the training activity itself, like, effectiveness of speakers or trainors, adequacy and relevance of materials, the venue, the group or workshop groups.

Evaluation of the individual Accreditors in the on-site accreditation performance are also made, but so far are not properly and adequately done. This is one aspect of the training which must be seriously attended to as it will redound to the real strengths and weaknesses of the Accreditors which can be addressed by further training.

What else went wrong? A modicum of success in the AACCUP capability-building program can rightly be claimed as demonstrated by the output of the Accreditors; 1,367 programs accredited by 1,420 Accreditors alone. But, certain challenges mar what could potentially be an outstanding performance. These challenges can be attributed to certain weaknesses in the conduct of the training program.

Lessons learned

In the 3-day Accreditors' Annual Mid-Year Conference held in Manila on July 24-26, 2017, the workshop participants came out with the following "areas of concern" regarding the training program:

- Too many participants in training activities. A maximum of 60 to 65 participants to a 3-day training, but walk-in participants check-in. Measures are adopted to solve this problem. The unexpected number consequently results in overcrowding, less-manageable workshop programs, inadequacy of training materials, and ineffective results.
- Lack of training staff to attend to the needs and concerns of participants in cases where the maximum number of program participants is exceeded. The Trainers are selected from among the best college professors, but this does not guarantee

effective learning when they use irrelevant training techniques as in teaching a “how-to” subject with a full lecture.

- Participants generally complain about very limited time devoted to training sessions, like, workshops, simulations, role playing, etc. Close monitoring by the training staff would alleviate this problem. Probably, a training activity should be limited to a manageable number of objectives that can be successfully achieved should be set.
- Some training materials, especially those that were expeditiously prepared by overloaded members of the training staff are not very useful to the trainees. This is further aggravated when an unexpected number of participants exceeds the number of materials that are prepared.
- Some trainers use very limited, irrelevant and ineffective methods. This suggests that the training staff should also be subjected to a capability-building program, and not just orientation or briefing done and led by Senior Training staff.
- We still have to devise a part of the capability-building program that address behavioral problems, like negative attitude, etc.

Application of Lessons learned

The AACCUP Capability-Building Program is probably one of the most extensive among Quality Assurance Agencies. It is probably the main factor considered by the APQN in awarding the 2016 APQN Quality Award in the category of Strengthening Quality Assurance as a Profession. The Program is indeed rich in experience in the good and the bad practices in building the capability of QA Agencies with particular reference to their Accreditors. This year 2018 would like to explore the lessons learned from its capability-building program by conducting a formal study that will result in the revision of the OBQA Framework.

This paper presented just a snapshot of the lessons learned from the AACCUP Capability-Building Program. It will be a useful teaser to the full-blown study to be made early this year. Of course, it will be more because we have not included in this presentation the AACCUP Capability-Building Program of the Internal Quality Assurance Units of the State Universities and Colleges, and its Internal Quality Assurance Program that address its own office staff.