Annual Review of World Bank Staff Learning FY04

The Challenge
Knowledge sharing is an integral part of the World Bank's operations. To ensure that staff have the appropriate knowledge, skills, and behaviors beyond narrowly defined technical expertise, the Bank must function as a world-class learning organization. This vision is realized when tools, methods, and approaches are constantly updated and diversified to align learning activities with the changing context and growing decentralization of the Bank.

World Bank Intervention
The Learning Board and Staff Learning Framework (SLF) were established in FY01 to ensure the relevance, efficiency, and effectiveness of Bank learning programs. Since then, gradual changes designed to further enhance the quality of staff learning have been initiated. During FY04, 3,300 staff learning activities occurred, with a total cost of over $81.7 million. These learning activities spanned a range of formats, including formal face-to-face courses, e-learning events, and informal brown bag lunches. This number includes activities for Bank staff only as well as activities in which both Bank staff and clients participated. The World Bank Institute Evaluation Group (IEG) evaluates these learning activities with funding from the Learning Board.

Underlying Assumptions
The underlying assumptions of staff learning are:
- Staff participate in high quality learning events and acquire new or improved knowledge and skills.
- With increased capabilities, staff improve their job performance.
- Through enhanced staff performance, the Bank improves its ability to provide more effective services to its client countries.

Evaluation Methods and Instruments
During FY04, IEG evaluated staff training quality by examining participants' assessments of their training experiences on the following five dimensions:
- Relevance to the Bank's mission
- Overall quality
- Usefulness of training
- Applicability to job; and
- Perceived increases in knowledge and skills.

The annual review summarized in this Brief was based on (a) a random sample of staff learning events representing each sponsor, and (b) an analysis of the results from these evaluations using Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM).

Figure 1. Multi-Level Model Predicting Perceived Activity Quality

Activity Features
- Course Days
- Class Size
- Interactive Learning
- Designed by WB
- Course Topic
- Sponsor

Pedagogical Quality
- Content
- Presentation Order
- Materials

Activity Quality
- Composite score of
  - Quality
  - Usefulness
  - Relevance
  - Knowledge and skills
  - Applicability to job

Participant Traits
- Motivation (work)
- Headquarters
- Grade A – D
- Learning Plan

1. The Learning Board is chaired by the Chief Learning Officer and includes representatives from the Bank's six regions and 11 Strategic Learning Centers.
4. Four staff training events per sponsor were randomly selected from the Learning Catalog on a bi-weekly basis.
Random Sample of Staff Learning Events. Courses were eligible for selection if (a) they were registered as formal events in the Learning Catalog two weeks before the activity start date, (b) Bank staff comprised at least half of the attendees, (c) the delivery mode was face-to-face or distance learning, and (d) the course had not been evaluated previously by IEG in FY04. For each selected course, training coordinators were asked to submit the course agenda and complete a short questionnaire about event logistics (i.e., dates, number of participants, sponsor, learning approach). IEG's survey administrators delivered Level 1 evaluation questionnaires on the first day of each learning event and collected them at the end. The Level 1 questionnaires asked participants to rate training content, materials, and activity quality.

Analysis of Level 1 Evaluations. HLM—a statistical modeling procedure that analyzes hierarchically nested data such as participants within courses—was used to test whether factors such as activity features and participant characteristics affect quality. This multi-level approach was employed to identify effects that could have been missed by analyses focusing on only one level of data (see Figure 1).

Participants and Response Rates
Of the 480 learning activities selected for evaluation, 165 were dropped from the evaluation sample for an overall inclusion rate of 66 percent. Based on the activity content, the largest percentage of activities evaluated were Professional and Technical (44 percent); followed by Bank Operations (24 percent); Information Technology (17 percent); Behavioral and Social (13 percent); Executive Management, Trust Funds, and Other (2 percent) (see Figure 2).

The evaluated courses had 6,407 participants, and 4,750 of these, or 74 percent, completed a Level 1 questionnaire. The distribution of respondents by grade level in FY04 was generally similar to FY03, with nearly a quarter (23 percent) in grades GA-GD. In addition, 9 percent of respondents in FY04 came from GE level; 19 percent each from GF and GG; and none from the GH level and above. The sample also included short term consultants (10 percent), short term temporaries (2 percent) and participants identified as “other” (19 percent). Most of the respondents were World Bank staff (87 percent), of whom 71 percent were based at headquarters and 29 percent were stationed in the field.

Evaluation Results
1. Overall, the quality of staff learning increased significantly in FY04. The percentage of respondents  

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5. When sponsors offered fewer than ten courses in the fiscal year, it was necessary to evaluate additional offerings of the same course to meet the minimum requirement.
6. WBEIG also conducts staff learning evaluations at Levels 2, 3, and 4, the results of which are published elsewhere in a series of separate reports.
7. Courses were dropped from the sample for many reasons. A few examples include that the sponsor or facilitator did not agree to the questionnaire being administered, the course was cancelled due to low enrollment, problems occurred related to the overseas mail delivery of questionnaires, or the activity was actually for clients rather than Bank staff but advertised as both in the Learning Catalog.
8. This response rate shows great improvement over the FY03 response rate of 67 percent.
9. This category refers to those respondents who selected “other” as their grade level.
giving high ratings on overall quality, usefulness, and relevance of courses significantly increased compared with FY03. Quality ratings in FY04 were overwhelmingly positive, with nearly all (87 percent or more) giving a rating of 4 or 5 for each of these three dimensions (see Figure 3). Learning activities provided by the Professional and Technical (P&T) Networks, Other Networks, and Regions statistically significantly improved in FY04 for relevance to the Bank’s mission. Those provided by the P&T Networks and Other Networks also improved for overall quality and usefulness of training.

2. There were no significant changes between FY03 and FY04 in applicability to one’s job or perceived increases in knowledge and skills. While participant ratings of both items remained statistically the same in FY03 and FY04, the average training applicability to one’s job fell below the most recent benchmark (4.25 on a scale of 1 to 5) set by the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD). Ratings for job applicability and knowledge and skills decreased significantly in FY04 among P&T Networks and Regions.

3. More than half of staff (59 percent) identified their primary motivation for participating in a learning activity was to “enhance performance in current/planned assignment.” The second most important motivation cited was “professional interest and growth” (32 percent). Only five percent indicated “networking” as their main motivation, suggesting that most participants select courses based on their current work more than their future career opportunities.

4. Five activity features were significant predictors of participant’s ratings of overall training quality.

- Training Content. In activities where participant ratings of training content were positive, individual ratings of overall quality were also high. Good training content significantly increased quality ratings by 38 percentage points. However, the effect of training content was mediated by class size, and content ratings were more important in larger classes.
- Presentation Order. Activities in which the presentation order seemed logical received significantly higher ratings. A positive rating for the order in which content was presented increased quality ratings by 19 percentage points.
- Course Materials. Activities where participants rated the course materials positively received higher ratings, by 11 percentage points.
- Class Size. Smaller classes received higher ratings for training quality. Increasing the average total number of participants in an activity decreased quality ratings significantly. For instance, increasing the average class size by one standard deviation from the average of 21 to 35, decreased quality ratings by three percentage points.
- Course Duration. Longer courses were perceived more positively. On
average, increasing course length by one day increases quality ratings by one percent. Increasing the course length from the average (nearly two days) to the maximum in our sample (11 days) increases quality ratings by nine percent.

5. Interactive learning techniques had no effect on participant satisfaction with training. Courses that administrators identified as using interactive learning were no more or less positively rated than average. This finding may be partially due to a social desirability bias—where course administrators are strongly encouraged to use interactive learning and therefore over-report the use of these methods.\(^6\)

6. Activity features that did not significantly affect quality ratings included the type of course (professional/technical, Bank operations, behavioral) and whether the learning activity was designed by Bank staff.

7. Three participant characteristics were significantly related to the assessment of training quality.

   - **ACS Staff.** Administrative staff rated training quality one percentage point higher on average than did professional level staff.\(^7\)
   - **Motivation for Participation.** Participants’ motivation for taking a course was also related to training quality. Those whose primary motivation was to enhance performance in their current work program rated the course more favorably by three percentage points, on average, than participants with other motivations for learning.\(^8\)
   - **Learning Plan.** Participants who registered their activities in their individual learning plans rated activities higher by one percentage point, on average.\(^9\) Inclusion of the activity in the learning plan may be another indicator of motivation for participation.

**Implications and Conclusions**

Overall, the evaluation findings highlighted the following points on staff learning:

- The Bank has markedly increased the quality, usefulness, and relevance of its learning programs in FY04.
- There were no significant changes between FY03 and FY04 in two dimensions of training quality: applicability to the participant’s job and increases in knowledge and skills. While ratings in these two areas remained statistically constant, responses for the applicability to one’s job in FY04 fell below the most recent ASTD benchmark.
- The quality of staff learning can be improved through the strategic use of significant activity features and participant-level variables including training content, presentation order, training materials, course duration, class sizes, participant motivation, and grade level.

**Acknowledgement**

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\(^{16}\) A comprehensive summary of IEG evaluations of WBI client training shows that interactive learning is a significant predictor of training effectiveness when the sources of information about action learning are course participants rather than course task managers. See Quizon, J., C. Chard and M. Lockheed, “The Effectiveness and Use in FY03 of WBI FY01-02 Activities: A Baseline Assessment in Five Countries,” WBI Evaluation Studies No. EIG04-86, May 2004.

\(^{17}\) b=0.01, p-value<0.01

\(^{18}\) b=0.03, p-value<0.01

\(^{19}\) b=0.01, p-value<0.05