DIAGNOSING TRAINING NEEDS IN PUBLIC SECTOR INSTITUTIONS

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Generalitat de Catalunya
Escola d'Administració Pública de Catalunya

DIAGNOSING
TRAINING NEEDS
IN PUBLIC SECTOR INSTITUTIONS

TOOLS FOR HUMAN RESOURCES

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DIAGNOSING TRAINING NEEDS IN PUBLIC SECTOR INSTITUTIONS

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Preface

I am pleased to present the book *Diagnosing training needs in public sector institutions*, the first training-related work to be in our Tools for Human Resources collection. Improving the recruitment and training of public sector employees is an activity of strategic importance in ensuring powerful public sector institutions, one of the key elements of any developed society. Our public sector is meritocratic in nature, but, unlike in the English-speaking world, it is based on in-house training and versatility. On the one hand, this means that our system for recruiting new civil servants places more emphasis on applicants' potential than their technical know-how or any possible professional expertise. It is the public administration itself that, in their initial and continuing training, must provide its employees with their professional knowledge and skills. On the other, throughout their career, a large number of civil servants may carry out a range of very different jobs. To use the current buzz phrase, a civil servant shouldn't feel limited by his or her functional area of access, but should be able to move from one area to another on the basis of his or her skills and professional interests. These two basic features of our public sector mean that our institutions' training policy is of vital importance. It would be no exaggeration to state that the performance of our public sector is closely linked to its training strategy.

The Catalan School of Public Administration, EAPC, boasts a wide range of training solutions: basic training, strategic training, tailored training, master's degrees, etc. This training is focused on adding value and improvement, making use of new learning tools that go beyond the master class (distance learning, coaching, and more recently, the use of collaborative environments). However, whatever the kind of training or the way it is delivered, we always come across the same conceptual and methodological problems: detecting training needs and assessing the training provided. These are two key factors

in any good training strategy, which seek answers to the following questions: what are the shortcomings in terms of knowledge and skills of professionals in a specific field of management, to achieve the greatest possible institutional efficiency within a framework of continuous improvement? And, what is the result of a specific training strategy and how has it impacted upon institutional performance?

The question of detecting training needs is, surely, the trickiest aspect of the entire training cycle. In practice, there is a mix of the subjective impressions of the professionals themselves and their superiors with more objective, but still difficult to define, organisational weaknesses. Traditionally, needs detection has been the result more of specialists' intuition than of a scientifically grounded system. This manual aims to tackle this challenge and provide objective criteria and methodological tools designed to achieve greater rigour when it comes to detecting training needs. Whilst it is clear this function is carried out in a subjective manner based on trial and error, I truly believe that it can help ensure that the tests carried out are more reliable and that the possibility of error is reduced.

Lastly, it must be stressed that this book is the result of contributions from all of the EAPC's technical staff and managers. It has been a collective endeavour. Special thanks should go to Sylvia Alonso and Joana Martínez, the authors, who have contributed their great theoretical and, above all, empirical know-how to the project. I would also like to thank Águeda Quiroga for her contribution as editor of this manual.

Carles Ramió Matas
Principal of EAPC, the Catalan School of Public Administration

Introduction

The goal of this book is to discuss training needs in public sector organisations. This idea stems from preliminary research that reviewed theoretical texts and practical approaches, both national and international in scope. The research laid bare both the complexity of the language and the lack of standardised criteria on professional education. The vocabulary used to identify and define concepts is as diverse as the authors and institutions consulted. Generally speaking, public and private sector institutions alike lack any real structured, systematic model for needs detection. In the best cases, we found more or less formalised schemes using preferences for specific research techniques, habitually applied to the detection of training needs.

With this book, the Catalan School of Public Administration seeks to contribute to the debate by defining and characterising its detection model and sharing the know-how and experience on which it is based. Public sector training institutions clearly wish to design training plans that create real learning opportunities, and that get people involved in taking on board behaviour and knowledge that improve public services. However, designing applicable training plans and strategies means having a solid understanding of the goals, potential and peculiarities of the organisation for which the project is designed. Dedicating resources to intensifying and diversifying the process of detecting training needs is a challenge to be met by those responsible for promoting learning in organisations.

The book consists of two parts. The first presents the rationale and key features of the most common approaches to detecting the training needs of public sector organisations and, particularly, describes and justifies the approach proposed by the EAPC. Broadly speaking, it is a flexible approach that encourages the detection of training needs based on an analysis of the gap between actual and ideal staff competence, applying, where possible, an orientation that

stresses strengths over weaknesses and that takes into account both the official vision of goals and training-related discrepancies and the points of view of the workers themselves. The second part of the book focuses on ascertaining the key points to be borne in mind when it comes to putting the EAPC approach into practice, including key project planning and control tools.

This is not a university/academic study providing an up-to-date overview of the arguments of current national and international literature on the subject, but a document that gathers together a series of systematised considerations upon its practical usage. A significant part of these considerations stem from the experience of exchanging ideas with public administration professionals and institutions with which the School has established a partnership over the years, and whom we would like to acknowledge and thank for their input. The authors would also like to give special thanks to the contributions made by Lluís Casado, Francisco Elejabarrieta, Francesc Imbernon, Carme Ledesma and Pilar Pineda, for their inspiration and help in referencing the technical concepts represented in the EAPC's practical work in this field.

1 The bases of the model for diagnosing training needs in public administrations

1.1. General thoughts

Detecting an organisation's training needs is a formal process of research, data processing and analysis that is implemented with a view to securing substantive information for designing a training strategy of use to those making up said organisation, so that they may acquire the competence necessary to achieve its goals and for their own professional development.

The approach involves questioning those making up the organisation, using some of the most common social research techniques, complemented by an in-depth documentary analysis of the institution, which is vital for obtaining the necessary context and the link with its strategic goals.

The end purpose of this process is to identify the discrepancies between the current skill set of the people providing professional services and those considered ideal for their optimal provision. It is this gap or discrepancy that constitutes the training need. Although apparently simple, this definition hides more complex issues, some of which will be dealt with in this manual. Particular emphasis will be placed on the orientation of the detection and the standpoint from which this discrepancy is perceived.

It is worth remembering that the purpose of the process of detecting training needs is to provide effective support for designing training plans of guaranteed impact that ensure continuous improvement in the organisation. Applicability must therefore be prioritised over technical complexity. The goal of those designing training plans is not social research, but rather to achieve concrete results, bringing about new behaviour that provides solutions in the way that the public administrations provide their services. So it is that the EAPC proposes a flexible model, one that is based on social research techniques, but with the focus clearly on applicability, such that only those resources that are strictly required are invested in the detection process.

1.2. Orientation and standpoint

The EAPC training needs detection model is based on the interaction of two core analytical axes: the plan's orientation and the analysis standpoint applied.

Within the framework of detecting training needs, 'orientation' can be defined as the position from which the organisation's initial position is assessed: in assessing this initial state, emphasis can be placed on either peoples' and the organisation's weaknesses or, alternatively, on their strengths. In the former case, we speak of a shortcomings-based orientation, and this is, perhaps, the most commonly applied orientation. The latter case is called an 'appreciative orientation' and, although it is less common, it has some potential advantages that make its application highly appealing.

The basic principle of a shortcomings-based orientation is the assumption that people have training shortcomings that must be addressed to reach the knowledge level desired by the organisation. Another version of this orientation is that which suggests obtaining a view of the organisation's know-how by identifying critical problems or incidents. Both ways of looking at an organisation share the fact that they are based on a negative viewpoint, and on identifying that which does not work in order to change it. However, as Hammond (1996) points out, this starting point, although it is the generalised type of orientation in organisations and has its basis, places significant limits on the ability to motivate and to improve, due to the fact of its emphasis on the shortcomings and deficiencies of persons, processes and organisations. In a way, limiting one's viewpoint to looking at the problems means focusing one's attention on negative points and ignoring what actually does work. This orientation reinforces the habit, which is natural in many people and organisations, of appreciating difficulties and not possibilities: in other words, of focusing on concerns rather than on the ability to influence (Covey, 1996).

By way of contrast, an appreciative orientation is a positive focus that promotes an analysis of an organisation's strengths to arrive at an improved situation: the ideal one. If one starts on the basis that everybody does a lot of things right, it is easier to understand the possible roads to improvement, until you arrive at the ideal situation hoped for by the organisation. This positive orientation of the process, which is based on the acknowledgement of strengths, helps create positive anticipation and the involvement of people in the improvement process, factors that should never be undervalued in the public administrations. This appreciative viewpoint bolsters the feeling of self-efficacy and allows for a positive reading of weaknesses, which facilitates a more enthusiastic attitude towards problem solving. Shortcomings and problems are no longer regarded as insurmountable obstacles, but instead become aims and goals to be achieved.

Although each specific training needs detection project is a combination of possible orientations, depending on the culture of the institution for which the training plan is prepared, our experience at the EAPC comes down on the side of the detection process orientation being appreciative, as this analyses information on a positive basis and gives rise to a collaborative mindset amongst staff.

The second cornerstone of the model is the standpoint or point of view from which the discrepancy is dealt with. We talk of a prescriptive standpoint when the interpretation of the gap between the ideal and real skill level is made by an organisation's senior or line management. On the other hand, when those identifying the discrepancy are the carrying out the tasks themselves, i.e. when the same person or group that is the target of the training issues the judgement on the gap between ideal and reality, we talk of a collaborative standpoint.

It is the goals of the training plan and the features of the organisation that influence the standpoints that should be employed. The EAPC training needs detection model, following Imbernon and Font (2002), suggests combining both.

Generally speaking, an organisation's prescriptive standpoint can be found in documents, such as skills dictionaries, job descriptions, process definitions and unit goals. It also appears in the discourse on the ideal function of the units provided by their managers. The main contributions made from this standpoint are:

- to make the training plan consistent with the organisation's strategies and interests;
- to understand senior management's vision and its role in the process;
- to obtain information on significant forecast changes in the medium and short term;
- to analyse organisational documents or management viewpoints that act as a benchmark against which to measure the discrepancy.

To complement the above, the collaborative standpoint should be seen as an opportunity for those who play a leading role in carrying out the task in question to identify their strengths and opportunities for improvement, to create their own definition of the problem and the road to betterment, without necessarily making any comparison with a pre-established external yardstick.

This standpoint allows for the:

- Obtaining of information on specific individual or group needs.
- Involvement of people in the detection process.
- Reimagining by those who have to carry out the task of the

situation as a goal and not a limitation.

The model proposed by the EAPC is flexible and can meet the goals set by the training plan: so, the standpoint it applies can be more or less prescriptive or collaborative, depending on what these goals are. Nevertheless, given the School's experience, our general recommendation is to combine these standpoints to ensure the greatest possible consistency and include the detection information in the resulting training plan. We recommend complementing the needs prescribed by the organisation's senior management with those felt by the persons carrying out its tasks, such that the organisation is more completely covered.

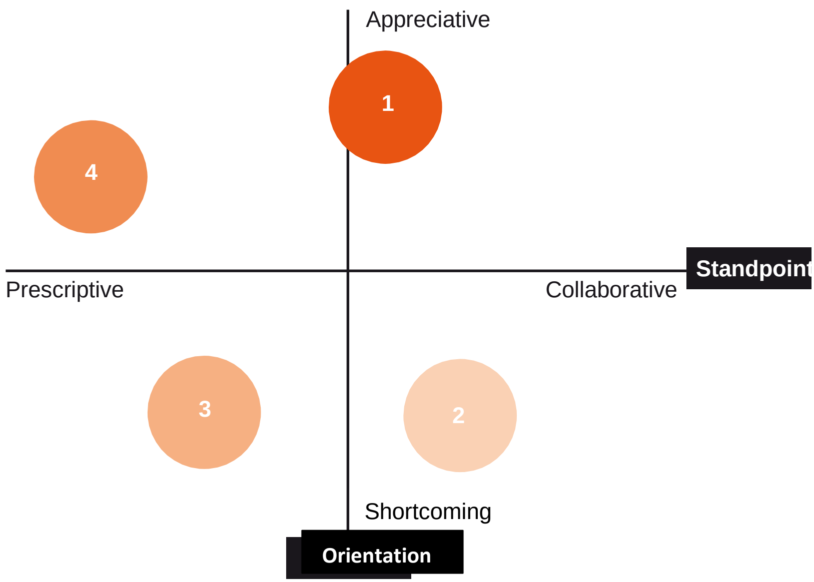

Figure 1. Possible scenarios for the drawing up of a training needs detection plan, based on the orientation and standpoint chosen

Figure 1 shows the four possible scenarios arising from the combination of the two key analysis strands. As we can see, a training needs detection plan can have a more appreciative or a more shortcomings-focused orientation, combined with a more strongly prescriptive or more collaborative standpoint. Orientation and standpoint must both serve to obtain the training plan best suited to a given organisation at a specific moment in time. This adaptability is what gives the proposed model its flexibility.

The number 1 identifies the model that allows you to obtain the best results, according to the EAPC's experience, as it permits in-depth insight into the organisation's structure and the contrasting of a broad range of different points of view. It is an approach that combines both the prescriptive and the collaborative standpoint, albeit with a greater emphasis on the latter, with a complementary appreciative orientation. In other words, it focuses on the strengths of people and the organisation itself.

The second model shares with the first its collaborative standpoint, but is oriented towards shortcomings. The inquiry process incorporates the viewpoint of everyone making up the organisation, but focuses its efforts on identifying what isn't working, the weaknesses, both of the organisation and of the people making it up.

The third model combines the prescriptive standpoint with a shortcomings-based orientation. Its analysis is based almost entirely on the 'official' view of the organisation and is focused on what both the people and the organisation lack but need to achieve to come close to the contemplated ideal.

The fourth model is probably the most infrequent, as it combines an appreciative orientation with a prescriptive standpoint. It occurs when organisations begin their plan based on documents containing regulations or looking to the future, such as strategic plans, and focus potential actions on providing support for the strengths identified in the documentation, but without incorporating into the process the direct viewpoints of those making up the organisation.

1.3. Techniques and sources of information

Given that detecting training needs is regarded as a process of research within an organisation, whose goal is to identify the areas for improvement permitting training solutions, the techniques and sources by means of which this knowledge is acquired are those of applied social research.

The EAPC detection model uses two sources of information: documentary and personal sources. In other words, part of the necessary information is acquired from an analysis of the organisation's more or less formal documentary sources, ranging from annual reports to staff assessments. However, using individual interviews, questionnaires and group dynamics sessions, it asks those making up the organisation about their concerns regarding the opportunities and difficulties at their workplace and on their assessment of which strengths and weaknesses can be addressed via training.

Figure 2 shows the location of sources and techniques in the EAPC detection model. As can be seen, the techniques should be arranged in accordance with the standpoint taken by the analysis. Documentary sources are those that, generally, better represent the prescriptive standpoint. Interviews with directors and other senior management figures are at an intermediary point, closer perhaps to prescription that to collaboration, whilst group dynamics clearly allow for a collaborative standpoint. So, both the information gathered from prescriptive documents and participatory group dynamics, allow for readings focused either on weaknesses or strengths, or put another way, either a shortcomings-based or appreciative orientation. Once again, the importance attached to each within the process will depend on the characteristics of the organisation in question. It should be remembered that the entire process must be aimed at obtaining a carefully designed training plan boasting a high degree of applicability.[1]

The following sections detail the main features of the information sources and their associated analysis techniques.

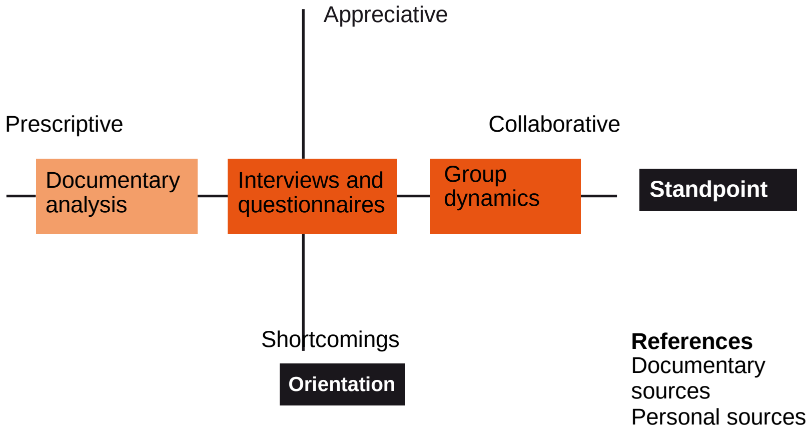

Figure 2. Research sources and techniques within the training needs detection model

1.3.1. *Documentary sources*

Documentary sources can be defined as all recorded information that makes reference to the organisation's mission and goals, their updating and achievement, staff profiles and duties, etc. The degree of formality of such records can be wide-ranging, from written rules and procedures or declarations of strategic institutional objectives, to databases used to manage training activities within the organisation.

1. For a review of the application of basic social research techniques to the field of public administrations, see Mas & Ramió, 1992.

Documentary sources are a key context in any training needs detection intervention. They provide the background of the historical development of training planning and management in the organisation and can often represent the cause or origin of the detection project. Analysis of which aspects have worked properly in previous training plans and which need to improve will provide the basis for the first steps in designing the project. Documents on strategies, new corporate applications or projects for change shed light on changing needs. Skills dictionaries, job descriptions and performance assessments are also vital sources of reference to be able to understand the discrepancies between current and ideal staff skills. On the other hand, probably the greatest difficulty with documentary sources is their scope, since they can be very extensive in certain organisations, not to mention out-dated or uncoordinated. It is therefore vital to choose and structure with great care the sources to be used.

One interesting organisational and documentary sources model is that suggested by Goldstein (1986). According to this author, working with documentary sources must allow for the building of *an analysis of the organisational environment*, *an analysis of the organisation* itself and *an analysis of the job functions and profiles* required.

Building an analysis of the *organisational environment* requires consideration of documents regarding regulations or economic, social and political factors influencing the organisation's strategy, such as departmental restructurings, the creation of agencies or the acquisition of new skills.

The documents forming the basis for the *organisational analysis* are those that permit an understanding of the organisation's strategy, goals and proposed changes, descriptions of processes and procedures, organisation charts and reports on activities and results. It is also worth taking into account documents from the training unit, such as activity assessment reports and previous training plans, educational reports, action reports, etc.

Lastly, from an *analysis of job functions and profiles* they require, one can infer the ideal situation of carrying on a particular job for the person occupying it. Documents consulted in this case include (amongst others) skills dictionaries, job descriptions, competency profiles, organisation manuals for calls for job applications and performance assessment reports. In particular, skills dictionaries and the assignation of competency profiles to jobs permit an analysis of the discrepancy between the competence of the person carrying out a job and the ideals assigned to it. Today, there are computer applications that allow rapid performance of this analysis and mapping of the learning pathway for each person in each job to achieve the required skills.

1.3.2. *Personal sources*

Personal sources enable an understanding of the viewpoints, opinions and interests of the people and groups making up the organisation. The depth of this knowledge will vary with the scope of their position and the standpoint applied to the analysis, but, ideally, it must be able to reconstruct each person's perception of their training needs, directors' and senior management's perception of what teams need to attain the desired situation and also the perception of workers' representatives.

People are also sources of information on the changes to be taken on by an organisation. Technological, procedural, legal, structural and other changes are some of the most frequent reasons leading to a requirement for training support in organisations.

There are three research techniques employed in the training needs detection analysis model for gathering the opinions and perceptions of the people involved: interviews, questionnaires and group dynamics sessions. Set out below are their main features and peculiarities when applied in this context.

1.3.3. *Interviews*

An interview is a formalised conversation aimed at obtaining information relevant to the research, in this case the drawing up of a training plan. In the field of training, two people generally take part, in addition to the interviewee: one is responsible for conducting the interview and the other observes and takes notes. This division of tasks makes it possible for the person carrying out the interview to concentrate on listening attentively to the interviewee and shape the line of questioning in accordance with their responses and reactions. At the same time, the person in charge of the notes can pay full attention to the situation, allowing them to write down not only the responses but also their perception of nuances and details that would otherwise go unnoticed.

There are two main interview types: structured and semi-structured. The difference lies with the degree of internal structuring, the rigidity of formulation and the order of the questions.[2] Whether an interview is more or less rigidly structured will depend upon the nature of the organisation and the context in which the research is carried out. A structured interview facilitates the processing of the responses and guarantees the ability to compare results, as exactly the same questions are asked in the same order of all the persons interviewed. On the other hand, it provides little margin for taking an in-depth look at the answers and for exploring what the interviewee knows and the interviewer does not. Given that, in our model, interviews are used in combination with other information gathering and analysis techniques, such as questionnaires, it is advisable to carry out semi-structured interviews, based on a definition of the themes or topics to be covered, to ensure the establishment of an open dialogue with the interviewee.

2. For a more in-depth look at the different types of interview and their features, see Casado (1999) and Elejabarrieta (2006).

The School's experience confirms the advantages posited by literature for semi-structured interviews. They provide a good opportunity for senior or line managers to provide their opinions on the learning required to implement improvements in their areas. Given that it forces interviewees to set aside time to meet the interviewer, the technique ensures better results than responding to a questionnaire with the pressure of a packed agenda. One good practice is to provide an outline containing the topics to be dealt with in advance. This preliminary step provides formal notice of the encounter and gives the interviewee more chance to think and prepare, whilst reducing any worries or reticence regarding the project.

Interviews create a flexible exchange situation that allows for the obtaining of accurate information and, above all, for in-depth consideration of the interviewee's responses to be able to explore new topics, validate contradictory information and ensure an understanding of what it is that one is attempting to convey. When the interview is carried out in person (not by telephone or other means), those involved coincide in space and time, conditions that allow for the richness of the technique to be fully mined to explore all possible avenues of information.

A key factor in an interview's success is to benefit from the support and time of human resources management. In the field of the public administrations, where hierarchical differences are important, the gap between the proposed interviewer and interviewee may make it difficult for this to come to pass. It is therefore vital to ensure a certain degree of hierarchical equivalence in this interaction.

Note that a significant amount of time is needed to plan and find free time for the interviews (of between 20 to 30 minutes), carry them out, input their data, analyse them and provide feedback to the interviewee. To achieve realistic planning, it is important to calculate the time invested by the senior and line managers being interviewed, and by the

human resources and training management conducting the interviews, since their availability is limited and will depend upon whether the training plan is regarded as being of strategic importance to the organisation.

1.3.4. *Questionnaires*

A questionnaire consists of a series of written questions for the purpose of obtaining information on one or more topics. Just as with interviews, questionnaires can be more or less structured, depending upon the open or closed nature of the possible responses.

Literature stresses the need to test and validate questionnaires before they are used and, indeed, trial and error has provided the EAPC with real schooling in this area. Once this vital exercise has been carried out, the questionnaire can leverage all its advantages and become a resource of great value. Based on the School's experience in using questionnaires to gather information on training needs, a specific tool has been designed, combining a single page of open and closed questions, which encourages the respondent to consider their answers. This document is provided in the second part of the book.

To make a needs detection questionnaire a truly powerful tool, it must have the following features:

- The respondent must be identified by name: in other words, the questionnaire should not be anonymous. Identifying the source of the information not only fosters greater consideration of the responses, but also allows for identification of which people should participate in each particular learning process, making up training groups.
- It must permit the open gathering of information on the needs felt by the respondent and incorporate their thoughts as to whether these needs will be of use in their career or will be applicable to their current job.
- It must allow for the validation and prioritisation of a respondent's opinion by their direct superior. Once the questionnaires have been answered, managers have the change to revise and prioritise the responses provided by their team members.
- It must permit the gathering and processing of the information (preferably in a database), both to detect needs and to create a record for monitoring each person's training, and a record of individual needs.

Efforts made to design a good questionnaire will be richly rewarded. Properly documenting a training requirement, with a description of the people involved and with examples of what they really need, and where the learning will be applied, gives a greater guarantee that it is detected and improves the fit between the need detected and the implementation of the training plan. A questionnaire drawn up with the input of unit managers helps build a database with specific information on every individual and every group. One of the greatest difficulties for those carrying out training is the gap between detecting the need and the actual possibility of meeting it. The variability of people and their statuses within the organisational structure is so great that it is no surprise that there is such a great gap between prior detection and the people actually taking part in specific training action. The expertise of the person responsible for the training is truly seen when he or she is able to match a training need with a specific activity capable of addressing it. Adding up requests for courses is simply administering training. A questionnaire and a database with personal identification help ensure proper monitoring and a fit between expectations, requirements and results.

It is worth bearing in mind that the efforts involved in designing, gathering, inputting and processing the information from a questionnaire will be wasted when the result is no more than a generic listing of course titles providing little detailed information. The School's experience in Catalan public administration shows that choosing from course listings creates a feeling of repetition amongst questionnaire recipients and demotivates them with regard to the training plan that should be its outcome. This is especially the case because, when people find themselves restricted to choosing from a range of answers (the listing of course titles), they have to pick from what is available and are unable to provide the information necessary for designing more useful products. For example, if the only option provided in a questionnaire or list to a person who wishes to go into detail about accounting closure issues is a standard seventy-five hour accounting course, we lose the opportunity of understanding that we could, with a simple but focused action, help this person to learn for themselves.

1.3.5. *Group dynamics sessions*

In training, group dynamics can be defined as structured meetings of a group of persons who, under the explicit guidance of the person organising them, have a discussion to produce information on training requirements, following a previously designed working outline.[3]

3. Some authors in the field of social sciences (e.g. Elejabarrieta, 2006) regard it as better to call these 'group interviews', since their purpose is to obtain information rather than focus on group dynamics. Nevertheless, this book will use the term 'group dynamics', given its wide scale use and familiarity in the field of education.

Group dynamics is the technique that best represents the participatory forum offered by the collaborative standpoint to the organisation as a whole. It is also provides a showcase for demonstrating the resources the organisation employs in detection, as carrying it out can involve a significant investment of time and money.

The group dynamics sessions are moderated. Normally, the technique is based on a group of twenty-five to thirty people, organised into working sub-groups of five or six. The working outline for guiding them is a flexible tool that uses techniques to promote group interaction and production (such as nominal group and focus group techniques).

Group dynamics call for the person managing them to have experience of group moderation. Those responsible for training can practise group moderation, or another option would be for the organisation to make use of professionals not directly linked to the human resources area and who boast experience in the field. It is important, however, for those responsible for the training plans to attend the group dynamics sessions to be able to obtain first-hand information and represent the areas promoting detection and the training plan.

The planning stage of group dynamics is of key importance, as it is here that their scope is established. It must analyse the needs of the organisation for which detection is carried out and identify the groups that can provide quality information, define subgroups of people and the level of uniformity or divergence in the makeup of the groups.

By bringing together groups of people carrying out the same tasks (groups are normally organised based on the similarity of the tasks performed) and with a period of free time allows them to put their day-to-day duties aside to discuss their strengths and weaknesses, group dynamics tend to result in more than just useful information: they create a sense of illusion with regard to the improvement and the training strategies for achieving it. This outcome is bolstered when the dynamics are focused in an appreciative way: in other words, when the first question in the working outline is an invitation to discuss strengths (both individual and collective) in carrying out the tasks. Normally, this request, and the subsequent discussion stemming from it, create surprise in the group, who are accustomed to viewing their professional surroundings as a source of problems and not of skills. The second question invites them to imagine and describe an ideal situation for carrying out the tasks, and it is here that all the difficulties are expressed and the gap between reality and the desire to improve shown. The remaining questions lead to an analysis of who is responsible for improving the situation detected—whether the responsibility lies with other levels of the organisation or is in the hands of group participants. This forms the basis for working on ideas for training strategies to achieve personal improvements.

Group dynamics allow for the concentration of a significant volume of information, as work is carried out with many people at once. It also aims to work with different groups simultaneously, since sub-groups interact independently until sharing is carried out with all participants. From the viewpoint of the information produced, an appreciative-type dynamic and the more traditional one are the same, but the level of satisfaction produced is much greater in the former.

It should be noted that many group dynamics sessions allow for participants to received feedback on the information *in situ*, at the end of the session, either in sharing the groups' work or because it is a common practice to take a snapshot of the results, which saves time and resources. Also, outsourcing the jobs of inputting and analysing the information from the session, reserving for oneself the stages of prioritising and proposing training strategies, is a good way of cutting the time spent on detection.

From model to practice

2

2.1. The starting point

When and where to begin a diagnosis of training needs? The answers to these questions may well depend upon the type and size of the organisation and its stage of development. The initiative may arise from a specific need, such as the acquisition of new institutional competence, or a change in management information systems, or from a particular human resources policy based on an assessment of the current training plan. It could also be the initiative of a particular group in the organisation that has detected the need for a more in-depth approach to some aspect of its work. Whilst the origins may be different, what is worth pointing out is that, at some point in time, some part of the organisation becomes aware of the need to go beyond the obligatory training courses and focus efforts on ascertaining the training needs of the people making it up. This initial insight is the seed of a potentially good training plan, but there is a need to guarantee the basic conditions for it to grow and bear fruit. Basic project management states that a project should never be carried out unless it is in line with an organisation's goals and has significant senior management support. This maxim is particularly applicable to new public administration projects, as is the case here. To continue with the same metaphor, it should be said that rooting the project diagnosing training needs in the very highest level of the human resources area is the key to the process. If the initiative comes from this level, this stage of the battle is already won, but if, on the other hand, the idea has come from another area, or even from the training unit itself, it will be necessary to ensure that human resources senior management make the project theirs before being able to continue.

Every training needs detection project requires time and money, two resources normally in short supply in the public sector. The process calls for many people to spend time on discussing their knowledge and

skills, on completing questionnaires, going to interviews, attending meetings or taking part in group dynamics sessions. In many cases, there will be a need to hire outside professionals for some of the research duties or to provide support for information management, inputting interview data or summarising group dynamics sessions, for example. One also needs to bear in mind that the project will, to a greater or lesser extent, shake up the organisation. Carrying out all these actions will raise expectations and concerns in the people working there, something that will have to be channelled properly to prevent or minimise any possible resistance or disappointment.

The plan runs the risk of being regarded as an expense of doubtful usefulness. The challenge is to ensure that both the diagnosis process and the training itself are considered a fruitful investment. Things need to be done correctly from the start, setting goals linked with those of the organisation, with the needs detection process design taking into account the point the organisation is at and, lastly, with the drawing up of an applicable training plan that transfers what has been learnt to the workplace.

None of this will be possible without the involvement and explicit support of the organisation's senior and line management. This is one of the key bases of the EAPC model. The organisation's senior management has to be aware of and approve of the project before transferring it to other levels. They have to be shown the goals, methodology, expected outcomes, timetable and estimated cost. The plan must incorporate their comments and suggestions, so that it benefits from their approval and leadership when it comes to getting down to work. Designing approaches to achieve this support is often one of the first steps of the tailor-made projects in which the School is involved, and it is at this first stage that the most important part of their success lies.

The EAPC's practical experience suggests starting the training plan as a project, whose first stage is diagnosing training needs. As a project, there is a need to provide a written definition of the goals, work stages, timetable and estimated resources, all of which must be covered in a preliminary document. This document forms the embryo of the future training plan, as it provides a summary of the most important information and a glimpse of the expected results. The existence of a document that must be shared with senior management to secure its approval also facilitates the approval process and the resulting involvement of management bodies, as it acts as an anchor point for the plan's possibilities that facilitates the negotiation process between human resources and the organisation's senior management.[4]

Document 1 provides a template for the kind of document that must be obtained during this first stage. As can be seen, it is an easy-to-read guide, despite the fact that it is the result of a great deal of prior in-depth discussion and summarisation. It is not worth trying to save time at this stage. Planning means investing the right amount of time to avoid future errors or contingencies that will waste a great deal more time in future stages. Carrying out a project does not necessarily imply a slow or complex task, but rather reflecting upon the actions required and on the order in which they must be carried out, whilst estimating and calibrating resources and costs.

With this guide, the first step can be taken: submitting the plan before the organisation's senior management and negotiating its scope.

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4. The term 'anchor' comes from the field of negotiation and defines the process by which, when one party (in this case, human resources) possesses more knowledge about something that it wishes to do and has to negotiate with another party (e.g. senior management) the scope of a certain measure, if a closed document is submitted, even though it might be subject to discussion, it can to have greater control over the possible outcomes, since it keeps expectations within thresholds close to the goal to be achieved. See Font (2008). For an interesting application of negotiation techniques to processes of change and organisational

improvement in the public administrations, see Mas and Ramió (1992).

Document 1. Guide document for training needs detection plan template

Background

[This section provides an introduction to the project, which should contain a brief explanation of the causes and the point in time of occurrence of the need for a training plan or a specific plan or programme with in the body's general training plan.]
E.g.:
The rollout of the new XX1 computer application means that its users need appropriate training. Therefore, [Ministry, body, etc.] management has started up the … training plan.
Having received the commission, the training unit carries out a brief analysis of the information available on the group to be trained, the job positions affected, and the knowledge and skills to be developed.
This initial project document is drawn up, which will evolve in line with successive future agreements between senior management and the human resources/training unit, and summarises the plan's development.

Goals

The goals of the Training Plan are…
[Ministry or body name] management shall lead the process of drawing up and implementation of the Plan from the start.

Training Plan scope

The training actions proposed as part of this Plan are aimed at [number of persons, groups, etc.]
The Training Plan affects both central services and those in the [Ministry or body]'s regional and local offices.
The duration of the Training Plan's is estimated at [years, months].

The process of drawing up the Plan

1. Training needs diagnosis stage

The [Ministry or body name] training needs detection model aims to integrate senior management's prescriptive needs with the needs perceived by the training recipients. Combining these viewpoints provides a more comprehensive, shared insight into the skills areas to be improved.

During the detection process, work will be carried out with different sources of information, both documentary and personal. The documentary sources to be included are: the general regulations providing the framework for the department's/body's actions, etc.; documentation on strategy, new project implementation, organisational restructuring, etc., and assessment reports on training activities: educational and other reports, analysis of previous training requests, etc.

With regard to personal sources, to benefit from the opinion of [body] management and the persons and different groups it comprises, use of the following techniques is planned:

- Interviews with senior management.
- Group dynamics sessions (one for each group from which information on common needs is required).
- Should [body] senior management wish to secure a more in-depth detection of training needs: individual questionnaires with subsequent validation by hierarchical superiors.

Based on the information gathered, the training unit will analyse common needs (and individual ones, if this level of detection has been performed). The training unit will draw up a training needs diagnosis report, which will provide the basis for designing the [body] Training Plan.

2. Training Plan preparation and communication stage

The Training Plan will contain:
- The Plan's general and specific goals.
- Criteria for participating in the Plan's activities.
- Description of the training programmes (a set of activities aimed at a specific group).
- A description of the contemplated Plan assessment mechanisms.

The person(s) responsible for training: [names] will monitor assessments by activity, draw up a weekly report and provide annual data for [body]'s general report.

They shall inform all those members of staff affected and their supervisors so that the Plan may work properly and achieve the planned results. To this end, the requirement for Plan-related communication actions shall be taken into account [specify, if necessary, the planned basic actions].

3. Activity execution stage

Every effort shall be made to ensure that activities and their sessions are sufficiently spaced out so as not to interfere too much with attendees' work responsibilities.

The primordial goal of training and development activities is learning by doing and the transfer of the lessons learned to the workplace. This entails highly active methodologies, and the possibility of work between sessions and an action plan or end-of-activity project on the part of participants.

Required resources

1. Work team
[Name and position of those making up the basic Plan coordination team: human resources management, head of training, etc.]

2. Budget
Contemplated budget: [estimated].
Cost per person: [ratio of total budget / people receiving training].

3. Venues
The Plan's activities shall be carried out at the [body's] or other venues deemed appropriate.

Timeline

[Detail by month the activities to be carried out and the planned duration of all the actions.]

2.2. The choice of model

Before going any further, we should discuss one of the most delicate aspects of the planning stage: choosing the model to be applied to the detection process. The first part of the book highlighted the flexibility of the approach proposed by the EAPC as one of the keys to achieving a successful intervention. This flexibility relates to its ability to provide a fit with each organisation's actual conditions, to take the organisation's vital signs. The School's experience shows the advantages of using a mixed standpoint with an appreciative orientation (represented by Figure 1's Model 1), but this same experience indicates that not every organisation is capable of using it. As noted in Section 2 of the first part of this book, some organisations, at least at times, are more open than others to the application of a collaborative-type model. And time spent on organising should not be rushed in any model.

Being flexible means being willing to understand organisations and people and adjusting to their culture and organisational structure and the priorities they impose. The challenge for those responsible for creating the plan is to calibrate reality and expectations, with the design of an approach that does not overwhelm the organisation's rhythms whilst, at the same time, giving a boost to already-existing improvement and advancement movements. In short, it means creating the best possible plan with what is available.

However, there are arguments that help strengthen a position in favour of using the model recommended by the EAPC. With regard to orientation, it should be noted that when it comes to looking at the gap between the current carrying out of tasks and the willingness to improve in the future, it is better to start with an orientation that is appreciative of current strengths rather than on one that focuses on shortcomings or problems. Organisations tend to focus on what is not working to predict how it should

work. Despite that fact that this is a common and rational orientation, focusing the discussion on concerns about what people don't know how to do can create despondency and inaction. On the other hand, if we encourage people with regard to what they know how to do well, the natural desire to improve, always present in organisations and human beings, flows on the basis of current strengths to sketch out lines of progress. By asking what people do well, we can reach an understanding of what they would like to do better.

As far as the standpoint is concerned, the field that usually creates most doubts, it should be said that, when there is a cross-fertilisation of the perceptions of people with different levels of responsibility, we obtain a more integrated vision that is more appropriate to the needs. This mixed standpoint combines the views of senior and line management on what the organisation is and what it should be with the viewpoints of those carrying out the day-to-day tasks that give sense to the organisation, and who may have a different perspective on what needs to improve or change. The mixed standpoint broadens the scope and depth of the inquiry, making it more accurate and more sensitive to the diversity inherent in any organisation.

It is clear that the collaborative standpoint opens up a new space that can create very specific expectations that should be dealt with prudently. This is something that should never be forgotten. Implementing a collaborative venture implies both stimulating free debate and the production of information and knowing how to place the venture in the strict context of detecting training needs. So, when problems affecting the general workings of the institution appear, they should be noted, whilst making it clear that this is not the appropriate forum for doing so. This is one good reason why the person moderating the more general participatory actions, such as group dynamics sessions, should be someone outside of the human resources function, who can more easily guide the discussion back to the topic at hand.

It should also be noted that, when a training needs detection project includes the participation of people and groups, it becomes a relationship network creation process. During the carrying out of detection activities, the unit promoting the training plan will have the chance to create relationships with those responsible for the organisation's other functions. Additionally, having participated in groups that have asked questions about training needs creates a bond between those carrying on similar tasks in different parts of the organisation, who often have few forums for interaction.

Taking account of all these factors, those responsible for the Plan must choose the model best suited to their organisation and reach agreement on it with senior management, introducing any changes necessary to secure their authorisation and explicit support. The following points will follow the roadmap of a plan involving the mixed model, not only because this constitutes, in the EAPC's judgement, the best approach, but also because it includes the necessary techniques for other possible models.

2.3. Obtaining inputs (1): the prescriptive standpoint

The prescriptive standpoint—i.e., the official view of what is expected of the organisation and of the results it must achieve—must be built up by combining both documentary and personal sources of information, using the techniques of documentary analysis and interviews with line and senior managers.

Depending on the organisation's size and age, there may be a great deal of written information. Reading and processing all this information can take a great deal of time, so it is important to carefully choose which material should be reviewed. The first part of this book provides an outline for the analysis of documentary information that recommends understanding the organisational

environment, the organisation itself and the job profiles and positions. The EAPC's experience also suggests taking into account three complementary criteria, one for each level.

The first criterion, applicable to building a picture of the organisational environment, is that of reviewing top-level regulations affecting the organisation, starting with the most recent. There is no need to carry out an exhaustive search of legislation, but it is important to bear in mind any special circumstances, such as the acquisition of new skills, large-scale structural changes, the creation of agencies, etc. To a degree, this involves understanding the spirit underlying the creation of the organisation and appreciating its main goals, which, although they may not be visible on a daily basis, are what gives the organisation its social sense.

The second criterion, in the field of analysing the organisation, is to include the newest strategic documents. These, in addition to providing a current view of the organisation, tend to include references to other documentation, such as past assessments or results. The key documents here are the current strategic or action plan and the organisation's most recent annual report.

The third criterion, applied to the most specific field, is that of reviewing documentation making specific reference to job profiles and positions, such as skills dictionaries or function and job descriptions. Special consideration should be given to more recent training plan assessments, as they may contain useful information on both what has worked and what is to be avoided. This information is normally available within the human resources area itself, and its analysis should not entail any additional workload, as the area's professionals are usually very familiar with such documents.

Document 2 provides a template for processing information from documentary sources. As can be seen, the document to be procured at this stage is simple. It need not include information from more than

ten sources and ought to incorporate the necessary references, should it prove necessary to expand upon some of the data later on in the process. The goal at this stage is not to build a history of the organisation's regulatory framework, but rather to establish what is expected of it, its mission and its goals, the key values driving it (or that should drive it) and what is expected of its staff.

Document 2. Template for analysing documentary sources, with examples

Level	Sources	Notes
Organisational environment	Decree …/…, on the reorganisation of the Ministry of X	[Include references to key points that may be related to staff training]
Organisational	2008-2012 strategic plan	[Include references to key points that may be related to staff training]
	2010 organisation chart	[Include references to key points that may be related to staff training]
Job profiles and positions	2008 Training Plan assessment	[…]
	Skills dictionary	[…]
	200… job descriptions	[…]

The other source of information for building the prescriptive standpoint is interviews with senior and line management. Two key aspects need to be borne in mind: one is the drawing up of interview outlines and the other establishing the number of people to be interviewed. Document 3 provides a template for a management interview outline, asking questions about staff in their unit and on how they manage them. As can be seen, it is a simple outline that focuses inquiry on the strengths of unit staff and management alike, but which provides space for further insight and a more in-depth understanding of each case's distinctive features.

Document 3. Model outline for management interviews

Note:
The questions listed in this outline are by way of example. We recommend having the first question clearly defined and moving on to tackling the other topics of interest, formulating the questions in accordance with the interview's dynamics. Before carrying out the interview, it is vital to have accurate information on the role of the interviewee's unit and team.

Introduction of the interviewer.
Forecast interview duration.
Brief explanation of goals.
Opening thanks.

Questions on carrying out of management duties:

1. If you had to define the strengths of how you carry out your management role, what would they be?
2. Based on these strengths, and given your unit's goals, do you have any thoughts on whether there is any aspect that could be enhanced by training?
3. With specific regard to management skills, is there any aspect you would like to improve or go into in greater depth?

Questions on the unit:

1. We are now looking at the unit as a whole. The first question is the same: if you had to define the current strengths of the way the unit carries out its assigned duties, what would they be?
2. Based on these strengths, and given your unit's goals, do you have any thoughts on whether there is any aspect that could be enhanced by training? [If there are no specific examples, rephrase the question seeking clarification, e.g., which areas or examples could benefit from specific training as an improvement strategy? Which members of staff would you suggest this training for?]
3. Do you think your team would benefit from any specific improvement project within the unit?
4. Now, thinking of partnerships with other teams from the organisation, is there any aspect that your team could offer them in terms of a common improvement project?

Conclusion and information on how the detection process will progress.
Closing thanks.

How many interviews need to be held to gain a broad-based vision of the organisation? The answer to this depends on many things, including the time available for this stage, not to mention the organisation's size and complexity. It must be remembered that needs diagnosis research is qualitative in nature: so, the criterion is not to take a statistical sample but rather to gather the majority of feelings to be found in the organisation. Time permitting, the ideal is to interview everyone at Sub-Director level. In small organisations, this recommendation should be carefully adhered to, because a differentiated choice of interviewees could create unnecessary resentment amongst those not chosen. If a selection has to be made, it is important to include people from both general and specialist services, with more or less experience, men and women. It is vital to secure representation of all types of staff, in terms of both their employment link with the public administration in question (civil servants of different types and scales, other staff types, temporary workers, etc.) and their professional specialisation (directorate secretariat, inspection staff, occupational risk prevention staff, organisational functions, human resources, etc.). In the case of decentralised bodies, representatives of different local/regional offices must be included. The goal is to seek all possible points of view of those representing the organisation. If, during the process, a new group is detected that can contribute a different viewpoint, it must be included in the selected sample. Redundancy—i.e. when interviews begin to repeat information without providing new data—provides an indication that this variability has been covered and that the stage can be concluded.

When planning interviews, account must be taken of the time the interviewer must spend on feedback, after the information on the interviews has been input, processed and analysed. Although it might seem that feedback takes up too much of the project's time, it is time very well spent. It not only shows respect for interviewees, but also permits the boosting of ties with the

interviewer (normally a member of human resources management), strengthening collaboration in future projects.

This feedback can simply consist of a summary of the key aspects of the interview, leaving an open space for the interviewee to make comments.

2.4. Obtaining inputs (2): the participatory standpoint

Building the participatory standpoint allows us to obtain an initial snapshot of the organisation. Once this image has been defined, it can be given a deeper, wider focus, incorporating the views of those who are to receive the training.

The EAPC model uses two main techniques for this—questionnaires and group dynamics—and occasionally adds a third, individual interviews. The three techniques are complementary and are used at different times or in different contexts in the research. A questionnaire allows you to reach out everyone making up the organisation, combining individualised data with global information on particular groups. Group dynamics provide global information and enable the shaping of consensus and the exchange of ideas between the members of the organisation. Individual interviews have two main functions: in larger organisations, they allow for the exploration of unique groups and the tackling of partial detection processes, whilst in smaller ones, they can replace group dynamics.

The first part of this book developed the foundations for these research tools. With regard to the questionnaire, Document 4 provides the template used by the EAPC. Every respondent has to consider their perception of training needs, placing on record the degree to which they perceive the need for training, thinking specifically of the areas of their work that could benefit from it. This questionnaire, tried and tested throughout years of experience, is relatively simple to answer,

but requires a serious assessment of current and potential know-how and skills. During a second stage, each head of area must validate the replies given, marking indicatively on the questionnaire itself (colours, circling, outlining, prioritising with a 1 or 2, etc.) only those needs deemed key or, if not key, worth covering. Choice of the code will depend on the application into which the data is input and how it permits searches and lists, as shown in Document 5. This provides the opportunity for revising suggestions and, as head of the area, he or she can decide whether they fit with the general goals. The degree of fit between the perceived needs set forth in the questionnaire and the vision of the heads of area provides a yardstick for measuring the extent to which function staff and managers are in step. This is also valuable information when it comes to dealing with strategic changes in the organisation.

Document 4. Training needs detection questionnaire template

The purpose of training is to promote the professional and personal development of administration employees and provide a means of attaining the organisation's goals (Point 10 of the 3rd Agreement on Working Conditions).

You can find more information on the Ministry's goals on [the intranet, website, Decree …, etc.]

Questionnaire respondent details

Full name:	Group:	Position:
Management unit:		

Indicate what knowledge and/or skills you think you should be trained in	**Prioritise the degree of necessity**	**Why do you need this training? (Choose just one of the three options)**	**In which specific job function would you apply what you have learned?**
Express your needs, don't list courses. Examples of how to express yourself: 'know how to correctly calculate deadlines in administrative proceedings', 'know how to make budgetary modifications', 'know how to structure well-reasoned reports', 'use Web 2.0', 'draw up projects', etc.	1= Vital 2= Very necessary 3= Necessary	A= to possess the general knowledge required to carry out my duties B= to have a deeper understanding in areas of knowledge I already have and/or clear up doubts C= for my civil service career or personal interest, with no link to my job	(If you have answered A or B in the previous column, specify duty, function or process that could be improved with the training)
Draw up technical projects	1	A	Providing grounds for resolutions
Updating on procurement	1	B	For purchasing procedures

Public speaking skills	1	A	For procurement

Notes:

Document 5. Management-validated training needs detection questionnaire template

The purpose of training is to promote the professional and personal development of administration employees and provide a means of attaining the organisation's goals (Point 10 of the 3rd Agreement on Working Conditions).

You can find more information on the Ministry's goals on [the intranet, website, Decree …, etc.]

Questionnaire respondent details

Full name:		Group:	Position:
Management unit:			

Indicate what knowledge and/or skills you think you should be trained in	**Prioritise the degree of necessity**	**Why do you need this training? (Choose just one of the three options)**	**In which specific job function would you apply what you have learned?**
Express your needs, don't list courses. Examples of how to express yourself: 'know how to correctly calculate deadlines in administrative proceedings', 'know how to make budgetary modifications', 'know how to structure well-reasoned reports', 'use Web 2.0', 'draw up projects', etc.	1= Vital 2= Very necessary 3= Necessary	A= to possess the general knowledge required to carry out my duties B= to have a deeper understanding in areas of knowledge I already have and/or clear up doubts C= for my civil service career or personal interest, with no link to my	(If you have answered A or B in the previous column, specify duty, function or process that could be improved with the training)
Draw up technical reports	1	A	Providing grounds for
Updating on procurement	1	B	For purchasing procedures

Public speaking skills	1	A	For procurement

Notes: management marks with a darker colour the suggestions they deem necessary and with a lighter one those they will allow as useful. This colour coding could be replaced by circles/squares or with a 1/2 (prioritising).

As far as group dynamics are concerned, as noted in the first part of the book, the technique has great potential and allows not only for gathering information on assessments and perceptions, but is also a tool that helps motivate those taking part. However, it is also a technique that calls for experienced moderation, as it is essential to prevent the discussion from wandering into fields that are not germane to the topic at hand. Document 6 provides a model outline for an appreciative group dynamics session. This is used by the EAPC in the tailor-made project it carries out: in other words, it is a tried and tested tool.

As can be seen, the session is based on individual consideration of the each participant's strengths, to be followed by working in small groups on individual strengths and those of the unit or department. Next, a new discussion is sought, on the ideal conditions required to make it even better, and small groups again work on sharing individual ideas. The third phase of inquiry focuses upon identifying improvements that could be introduced by means of changes depending on other decision-making levels, and those that could depend on the participants themselves, particularly those that might be improved by training. It is at this point that an appreciative orientation makes a difference: the emphasis on strengths, on that which people and the organisation do well, creates a relaxed atmosphere that facilitates calm and honest debate. Since it is not about thinking of limitations or mistakes, the need to justify why one has not done something well disappears. Also disappearing, or at least limited, is the tendency to assert that every avenue of improvement lies outside one's own personal possibilities, that all changes involve decisions by higher levels and that nothing can be done by those outside of management, except for obeying orders. The EAPC's experience here shows that the appreciative orientation is a very effective tool for breaking with the perception of the lack of opportunities for action and choice. Appreciation bolsters the idea of personal responsibility and adds value to everyday tasks, two concepts

that are particularly valuable in the public administrations, where the possibilities for incentivising proactive and creative behaviour are limited.

However, it must be noted that an appreciative dynamic of this type has to be carefully prepared. The outline has to be drawn up to fit the organisation, participants have to be informed in advance of the features of the work session, the topic dealt with and the goals it hopes to achieve. The moderators have to be aware of the nature of the groups with whom they will be working and also (particularly if they do not themselves belong to the institution in question) their key features.

Lastly, when it comes to programming the work timetable, time has to be found for work on informing participants of the results of participatory sessions. Sometimes, when carrying out a project, there is a tendency to speed up some stages, leaving out or postponing more than you should information feedback activities. As with interviews, it should be borne in mind that any activity promoted by an area as organisationally important as human resources creates expectations that, if not properly managed, could be disappointed. An HR manager's most valuable asset is trust, so advantage should be taken of any situation in which this asset can be reaffirmed, as is the case of informing those who have been asked for information and opinions of the analysis of the results. The next section focuses particularly on ideas for the management of information on the progress of the project.

Document 6. Outline for moderating appreciative group dynamics sessions

General information		
Planned duration 2h 20m		
Participants: A minimum of six and a maximum of thirty. These will be arranged into subgroups based on the sub-populations defined.		
Material: Yellow and orange cards. Normal markers for each participant and thicker ones for the moderator. Blu-Tack. Brown paper for hanging on walls. Adhesive tape. Green Post-Its. **Methodology:** The session moderator must introduce each question and work stage, both individual and group. In the full group sessions, the general contributions must be gathered and the necessary conclusions reached.		
10 minutes		**Session introduction**
		[Explanation of goals and methodology by the moderator and organisation representatives. Stress that it is based on an appreciative standpoint and explain why.]
10 minutes	0.20	**Individual consideration: question one**
		Question asked: We would ask you to describe on the attached sheet, from your own viewpoint, which are the main strengths, the STRONG POINTS, that you have NOW in the unit in which you work, when it comes to providing the service you are charged with. **[To be borne in mind]** The question does not explicitly ask if they need to think on a personal or group (unit) basis, as people tend to mix the two focuses. To encourage the production of ideas, it is best to leave this as open as possible, so that they give ideas on both personal and unit development, with no need to specify which is which, thereby reducing the perception of the threat of giving information of a personal nature.

30 minutes	0.50	**Work in small groups**
		Create a single, ‘snowballing’-type list of ideas
		Instructions for participants: The idea is to create a single list with the contributions—or views—of each person. The goal is not to discuss the different ideas, or reach agreement on them. What we want is to add them all together, to gather them all so that everyone can consider them. To do this, one person, who will act as ‘secretary’, will begin by reading out their ideas, their list. The others will cross out those that coincide with theirs, so as not to repeat them in the joint list. Taking turns, everyone will explain their new ideas to add them to the list. **[To be borne in mind]** We are not asking for consensus at this time, which is in fact an option that must be decided upon by the session’s organiser. Nevertheless, some groups tend to reach a consensus. You should only intervene if the work dynamic comes to a standstill if no consensus is reached.
		Create a map
		Next, the idea is to write the different ideas down on a yellow card and then affix it to the mural you have been assigned. If it helps, similar ones can be grouped together.
10 minutes	1.00	**Individual consideration: question two**
		Question asked: You have described the current strengths of your organisation/ unit when it comes to doing its job. Now you should image what the ideal conditions would be so that you can work to give an ideal result. **[To be borne in mind]** The question gives no explicit instructions as to whether the ideal conditions relate to the individual person, the unit or the organisation as a whole. Once again, the idea is to open up a wide scope for consideration, as information will arise in all areas.
30 minutes	1.30	**Work in small groups**

		Instructions for participants: Like before, the idea is to put down all non-repeated ideas, one by one, on an orange card and stick them on to the mural, alongside the previous ones.
		Analysis: working on the ideas created
		Example: **Instructions for participants:** At this point, we have a mural reflecting your vision of the current strengths and, alongside them, you have also built a vision of an ideal operation. Obviously, in some cases, it will be your responsibility to put some of the suggestions into practice, whilst in others it will be that of a higher level. Now, the idea is to mark the ideas according to who has the responsibility for implementing them: Put an **S** alongside those ideas/improvements of a **structural** nature (the responsibility of your superiors). Put a **P** alongside those ideas/improvements of a **personal** nature (your own responsibility).
		Identifying personal training strategies
		A range of different strategies are probably necessary to achieve these improvements. Nevertheless, in this context of **training needs detection**, what we are interested in is focusing on those you can tackle personally. In other words, those that lie within your own power of action and which require **training** for their development. Write the letters **TRN** on a green Post-It note and identify them on the map. **[To be borne in mind]** It is important that the moderator accompanies each subgroup and makes any contributions of a general nature required. At this stage of the work, a lot of information on ideal conditions tends to be generated that is structural and the responsibility of the organisation. Initially, the tendency is to think that everything is in the hands of superiors or other players. If necessary, you should ask for more in-depth consideration to find ideas for improvement that are the direct responsibility of those taking part in the group dynamics, as this is the way to take best advantage of the detection session. The goal of these group dynamics is those improvements that can be undertaken by and the training need for the target group, not improvements to general organisation processes or other aspects.

30 minutes	2.00	**Full group sessions (sub-groups disband)**
		Instructions for participants: One person from each group explains the conclusions they have reached. **[To be borne in mind]** The working groups must disband and return to the full, big groups to create a broader-based dynamic and finish with the sub-group one. At this stage, the group maps are shared, and a general one can be grouped together and built, if helpful.
10 minutes	2.10	**Prioritisation (optional)**
		Instructions for participants: Each person votes for those training strategies they consider to be a priority (e.g. three stickers = three votes). **[To be borne in mind]** You need to assess whether you wish to obtain prioritised information or leave it open. If you ask the group to prioritise, management room for manoeuvre will be more limited. Obviously, if the groups are of management members, you need to ask for prioritisation to be able to progress.
10 minutes	2.20	**Conclusions and thanks**
		You should ask the large group for a quick assessment of the strengths of the session and the points that could be improved. [**To be borne in mind**] Normally, participants express surprise at the positive orientation and thanks for the chance offered them to consider the issues. From the viewpoint of the information produced, the appreciative or traditional dynamic are the same, but we believe the degree of satisfaction created is higher with the former.

2.5. Results and information

Throughout the preceding sections, reference has been made (directly or indirectly) to the importance of proper management of the information on the training needs diagnosis project, with regard to both its goals and expected results and its execution. The purpose of this section is to systematise and take an in-depth look at the use of information in facilitating management of the process.

Before we continue, though, it must be noted that, in the entire information management process in organisations, three basic questions need to be answered: what is made public, who has access, and how information is disseminated. These three questions can be read in two ways: either technical or in light of the organisation's culture and peculiarities. We cannot take the latter into account here, but is should be borne in mind when you plan activities. This has to be one of the points agreed with senior management when the project is approved, and this must be put in writing in the project document (in Document 1, communication actions must be included in Point 2 of the training plan drawing up and communications stage).

As when choosing the diagnosis model to be applied, the scope and depth of the communications actions must be consistent with the type of organisation and its stage of development. However, the EAPC's experience has revealed at least three basic points must be achieved. The first is that senior management, or the human resources area, must inform everyone affected of the start of the training needs diagnosis actions, via the usual internal means of communication. This preliminary information must include the name and other details of the contact person who can clear up any doubts regarding or provide more insight into the plan. Secondly, anyone taking part in providing information at any stage of the plan must get some feedback, which can come in different forms, from a summary of their participation to a précis of the conclusions from the entire stage in which they took part. Lastly, we strongly recommend, when concluding the diagnosis process, that senior management or the

human resources area, summarises its most significant features, and indicates how to access the full version of the diagnosis document.

For the team coordinating the plan, having up-to-date information on the exact state of progress of the process is a key management and control tool, which also helps in the task of drawing up the final project document and information and account rendering actions. Document 7 provides the template for a project control form. As can be seen, it is a table whose rows detail the process steps (following the stages model introduced in Document 1), whilst the columns contain everyone's specific actions, including their planned dates of execution, the human and financial resources involved, and all the ancillary information deemed important or necessary. The degree of desegregation of the tasks included in this document may vary according to the project's specific needs and the model applied. Indeed, it is possible to create a specific control sheet for each type of task, with a greater level of detail on planned actions, or, on the other hand, work only with the larger categories. Similarly, tasks can be rearranged by action type (drawing up of documents, negotiation, communication, research, etc.). This model follows a checklist-type presentation that includes the minimum steps required to achieve a plan featuring a collaborative orientation model.

The degree of dissemination of and information provided on the specific plan actions will depend upon the level of openness and internal communications policy of each particular organisation. One possible option is to publish this control document (or a summarised version thereof) on the intranet, to be consulted by all those interested, as this would avoid having to prepare specific documentation for dissemination. This control sheet is a good tool for keeping senior management informed, as it is quickly read, allowing them to keep abreast of the key information without having to read (or have drawn up) additional explanations. It is also a good opportunity for drawing attention to all those tasks involved in preparing the plan, thereby showing the value of the work of the

training unit and the human resources area.

Document 7. General control sheet for the training needs detection process

Stage: drawing up and approval of project								
Task	Done	Planned date	Actual date	Responsible	Documentation	Est. budget	Actual budget	Notes
Approval for detection plan project	✓	April 2011	April 2011	[name]	[link to document project]	[figure]	[figure]	
Definition of plan goals	✓	December 2010	December 2010	[name]				
Selection of analysis model	✓	December 2010	December 2010	…				
Estimation of required resources Estimation of timetable	✓ ✓	January 2011	January 2011	… …				
Drawing up of Version 1 of project document	✓	January 2011	January 2011	…				
Drawing up of Version 2 of project	✓	March 2011	March 2011	…				
Submission/negotiation of Version 2 with senior	✓							
Submission/negotiation of Version 3 with senior management (if there have been changes to Version 2)	✓							
[…]	✓			…				
Drawing up of final version of document	✓	April 2011	April 2011					
Submission/negotiation of final version with senior management	✓	April 2011	April 2011					

Stage: diagnosing training need

Task	Done	Planned date	Actual date	Responsible	Documentation	Est. budget	Actual budget	Notes
Documentary analysis	✓	June 2011	July 2011	[name]	[link to document project]	[figure]	[figure]	
Organisat. environ. sources selection	✓	May 2011	May 2011	[name]				
Organisat. environ. sources analysis	✓	June 2011	June 2011	…				
Organisat. sources selection	✓	May 2011	May 2011	…				
Organisat. sources analysis	✓	May 2011	May 2011	…				
Job profile/positions sources selection	✓	May 2011	May 2011	…				
Job profile/positions sources analysis	✓	June 2011	July 2011	…				
Senior/line management interviews					[link to document project]			
Interview selection and confirmation								
Outline preparation								
Holding of Interview 1								
Inputting Interview 1								
Holding of Interview 2								
Inputting Interview 2								
[…]								
Drawing up of interview summary								

Task	Done	Planned date	Actual date	Responsible	Documentation	Est. budget	Actual budget	Notes
Interview feedback								
Individual questionnaire					[link to summary document]			
Drawing up of questionnaire doc.								
Drawing up of instructions on how to complete questionnaire								
Distribution of questionnaires								
Collection of questionnaires								
Drawing up of instructions on how to validate questionnaires (management)								
Distribution of questionnaires for validation (management 1)								
Collection of validated questionnaires (management 1)								
Distribution of questionnaires for validation (management 2)								
Collection of validated questionnaires (management 2)								
[…]								
Database preparation								
Inputting questionnaires in database								
Drawing up of summary document								

Task	Done	Planned date	Actual date	Responsible	Documentation	Est. budget	Actual budget	Notes
Group dynamics sessions					[link to summary document]			
Establishment of groups and subgroups								
Selection participants Session 1								
Invitation and confirmation of attendance by participants								
Logistics preparation, Session 1								
Holding of Session 1								
Drawing up results report Session 1								
Results feedback for Session 1 participants								
Selection participants Session 2								
Invitation and confirmation of attendance by participants								
Logistics preparation, Session 2								
Holding of Session 2								
Drawing up results report Session 2								
Results feedback for Session 2 participants								
[…]								
Drawing up of summary document								

Stage: drawing up of training plan and communications

Task	Done	Planned date	Actual date	Responsible	Documentation	Est. budget	Actual budget	Notes
Internal communication of carrying out and results								
Establish timetable for general communications								
General communication action 1								
General communication action 2								
[…]								
Establish timetable for specific communications								
Specific communication action 1								
Specific communication action 2								
[…]								
Drawing up of training plan								
Drawing up of Version 1 of training plan								
Submission/negotiation of Version 1 with senior management								
Drawing up of Version 2 of training plan				…				
Submission/negotiation of Version 2 with senior management				…				

Task	Done	Planned date	Actual date	Responsible	Documentation	Est. budge	Actual budget	Notes
[…]				…				
Drawing up of final version of training plan				…				
Approval of training plan by senior management								

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