**Techniques for Sharing Technical Expertise to Improve Program Quality**

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| **Peer Assist** Peer Assist is a meeting of a project team with colleagues the team has invited to assist them with a significant issue the asking team is facing. The request is initiated by the project lead when he or she thinks peers could be of help to the team. Usually four to five colleagues, from other sites, meet together at the site of the asking team, or the assist may be held virtually if it is not possible to meet face-to-face. An assist may last from an hour to two days, during which time the asking team and those who have come to be assisters, are in dialogue about the project. The asking team gains the insight of colleagues. The assisters gain as well, learning both from the project and from each other. Teams who call for an assist are not required to use the suggestions that others make, although most find the insights of their peers of considerable value to their on-going work. Typically Peer Assists are called early in a project but it is also possible to call a Peer Assist when a team runs into an unusual problem part way through a project.  |
| **Speed Consulting**Speed Consulting is a technique for engaging colleagues in providing ideas to solve a problem. At round tables, one person is designated as the issue or question “owner”. Everybody else at the table plays the role of a high-priced expert consultant. The consultants have a tremendous amount to offer collectively – from their experience and knowledge – but they need to do it very quickly because they are paid by the minute! They have 15 minutes with their client. The issue owner records the ideas. The time pressure is designed to prevent any one person monopolizing the time with detailed explanation of a particular technique. Instead, they should refer the issue owner to somewhere (or someone) where they can get further information. Short inputs make it easier for less confident contributors to participate.  |
| **Communities of Practice (COPs)** COPs are a group of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise by interacting on an ongoing basis. Communities are often best launched with a meeting or workshop to enable face-to-face contact and the initiation of relationships within the context of the new community. COPs require an active facilitator who arranges in-person and on-line events, seeks out knowledge to post that the community needs, facilitates getting members’ questions answered by the right people, sets a welcoming and appreciative tone for the on-line conversation. |
| **After Action Reviews (AARs)** An After Action Review (AAR) is a meeting of team members to reflect on an event or task they have just accomplished. The purpose of the AAR is to learn from the team’s experience in order to take the lessons learned into the next phase of the project or to accomplish the team’s task more effectively the next time it is done. In order to be brief, the meetings have to have a recognized format - clarity about what is on the table and what should be left to other kinds of meetings. Many organizations focus on four questions:* **What Did We Set Out to Do?**
* What was our intent? What should have happened? Did leader & team intents differ? What was on your mind?
* **What Did We Actually Do?**
* What would a video camera have shown? No blame. Look at Key Events, Chronological Order or Functions/Roles.
* **What Have We Learned?** Focus on what we have learned, not what we will do next. What do we know now that we didn’t know before? What strengths and weaknesses have we discovered? What advice would we give to someone starting out now?
* **What Are We Going to Do?** Exactly who will do what and when? Use SMART descriptions (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-based). Sustain strengths and improve weaknesses.
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| **Expertise Locators** Expertise locators or yellow pages provide the information that allows seekers of knowledge to connect with experts. Each member of the organization has a profile that provides their expertise, projects, languages spoken, and often links to their articles and reports. |
| **Knowledge Fairs**Knowledge fairs are face-to-face events in which participants set up displays to share their undertakings. Knowledge Fairs can be internal to an organization or open to partners and the public. They are "free-flowing, open, flexible, and non-hierarchical. People can see what is happening, can interact with each other, and can see what others are doing. It has the same characteristics as a medieval fair, mixing up all different levels and types of people in a variety of interaction." |
| **Storytelling**Storytelling is a way to share knowledge that incorporates context, emotion and tacit knowledge. The story conveys much more than a series of steps or events. It can contain the rationale, the strategy and the cultural values implicit within the actions taken by the story teller and put messages in a context that learners can better understand through key details. |
| **Regular Reflection Meetings** Convening regular reflection meetings is a method of facilitating the use of tacit knowledge from field staff. These meetings engage all or most of a project’s team, including front-line staff, and often partners. Meetings can involve the review of any new formal monitoring information about for instance, how value chain actors are responding to the project actions. Results are reviewed against time-bound targets. Based on the monitoring information, there can be a discussion about whether results match up to the expectations in design and planning, and when they don’t, why not.  |
| **Visual Tools** Many projects use simple analytic frameworks in reflection meetings as a starting point for discussion to establish a common understanding and provide a basis for sharing experiences between team members. |
| **Recon Teams**‘Recon teams’ can be formed when specific programmatic challenges emerge. These teams are tasked to research potential solutions from their respective disciplinary perspectives and share them with the entire team. At weekly reflection meetings, the broader team considers the solutions from each sub-team, how they could fit together, and what steps to take next. This process engages all front-line staff in organized, team-based learning activities where they can hone their skills at working together to pool their respective knowledge and diffuses the effort across a broad set of team members.  |

Adapted from work by Nancy M. Dixon, Common Knowledge Associates, 2011 and *Tacit Knowledge in Value Chain Monitoring: Good Practice Principles and Learning Areas for the Future*, GROOVE Network, 2011