Eight Village Sure Start Partnership Board Skills Audit

Matthew Horton
Evaluation Officer

February 2004
Abstract

During a Partnership Board Away-Day, members were asked to rate the strengths and weaknesses of the board. Partnership Board members were in general agreement that a skills audit and training are very important issues that need to be addressed, although very little is being done within these areas. The purpose of this evaluation is to identify any training or developmental needs of Partnership Board members. The Health Development Agency skills audit tool was adopted to identify both skill gaps and under-utilised skills of board members. The tool consists of 54 individual skill sets (see appendicies, pages 10-11) which are divided into seven groups of skills clusters or competencies.

Partnership Board members worked in groups to rate the ‘ideal’ level of skill required for each item to be an effective member of the Partnership board. Following this board members self-rated their ‘actual’ level of skill for each item. Further, board members were required to complete a personal information sheet which gave a history of skills gained from work, qualifications, training, spare time and family life that would be useful to the Partnership Board. In total 13 (52%) of 25 members completed the skills audit and 11 (44%) of members completed the personal information sheet.

Findings indicate that Partnership Board members have skill deficits in 16 (30%) of the 54 skill items covered within the audit tool. In order of priority Partnership Board members may require training and development in the following areas: making direction and purpose clear and managing contracts (69%), regeneration initiatives (62%), health and safety (54%), knowledge management (50%), communication, understanding national Sure Start targets, financial management, political sensitivity and awareness (46%), methods of evaluation and presentation skills (42%), managing self, minute taking, building a shared vision, policy development, influencing policy and development (38%). However, it should not be assumed that an identified skills gap implies a straightforward training need that can be met through professional training. Fewer Board Members had skill deficits within other skill competence groups, such as underpinning principles and management: implementation skills.
Introduction

During a Partnership Board Away-Day, members were asked to rate the strengths and weaknesses of the board. Partnership Board members were in general agreement that a skills audit and training are very important issues that need to be addressed, although very little is being done within these areas. The purpose of this evaluation is to identify any training or developmental needs of Partnership Board members. This shall be done by employing a skills audit tool.

Skills audit is a process for measuring and recording the skills of an individual group. A skills audit is undertaken to help an organisation understand the skills they require for each role and the actual skills each employee has. The outcome is a training needs analysis that identifies the areas in which development is needed. This model works in the following way:

1. Determine skill requirement
2. Audit actual skills
3. Analyse training needs

Skills audits help organisations to improve and have other benefits in:

- Lower training and development costs because efforts are more targeted
- Improving skills and knowledge
- Recruitment

The skills audit tool adopted in the present evaluation was developed and validated by The Health Development Agency across a multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral sample of public health workers. The tool is effective in supporting organisational and partnership training and development, by exploring skill deficits and skill requirements with multi-disciplinary and cross-sectoral groups. The Tool gathers data on self-assessed (not objectively measured) skills requirements to achieve some self-assessment of skills gaps for the individuals involved.

The audit tool uses a competence-based approach, where skills are considered as competencies. The term ‘competence’ is understood to mean ‘what someone needs to be able to do effectively in order to carry out the functions that make up their role on the Partnership Board.'
Methodology

Design:

A triangulation of both quantitative and qualitative research methods were adopted to gather information about the skills of Partnership Board members. A personal information sheet was used to gain an insight into Partnership Board Members skills developed during work, training, qualifications, voluntary work and spare time with or without the family. The format of questions were structured and standardised, but allowing for an open-ended response. Further a skills audit tool was employed that has been developed by the Health Development Agency (HAD) for public health and health improvement practice. The tool consists of 54 individual skill sets see appendices, pages 10-11) which are divided into seven skills clusters/competencies. The tool consists of a scale that ranges from 1-5, from 1 where no expertise is required, to 5 where high expertise is required.

Sample:

In total 13 (52%) of 25 Partnership Board members completed the skills audit and 11 (44%) of members completed the personal information sheet.

Procedure:

Participant’s were sent via e-mail and post a letter briefing them of what would happen during the Partnership Board meeting. A personal information sheet was also sent for members to complete.

During the Partnership Board meeting participant’s were given the skills audit and instructions. Participant’s subjectively rated their own ‘actual’ skill level for each item against the ‘ideal’ level of skill that is required to be a Partnership Board member. This was achieved by using the following procedures.

Group assessment:

Participants were instructed to work in groups of 3-4, to ‘decide what level of expertise/understanding is essential for each skill item to meet the goals of the Partnership Board’. The aim was for each group to reach as close agreement as possible on the skills set for their role. Each person then marked on a 5-point scale the corresponding score.

Self assessment:

This activity was an individual one, and was intended to enable participants to self-assess their own ‘actual’ skill level on a 5-point scale against the agreed ‘ideal’ level of skill required for each item (i.e. group assessment).
Treatment of results

The audit process provides both quantitative and qualitative information (sheet) data for analysis. In the treatment of results data was analysed using descriptive measures in the form of proportions and percentages.

By comparing board members self-assessed (‘actual’) skill level scores for each item against mean group assessment (‘ideal’) skill level scores for each item, will help to give an overall picture of the skill levels, gaps and surpluses of Board members. This was done by using the following procedure.

Skill gaps and under-utilised skills were identified by a 1+ point difference between the group mean ‘ideal’ skill levels and individual ‘actual’ skill levels of Partnership Board members. Therefore, an ‘actual’ skill level score that is 1+ point(s) below the mean ‘ideal’ skill level score would identify a skill gap for a given competency. On the other hand, a ‘actual’ skill level score that is 1+ point(s) above the ‘ideal’ mean skill level score would identify an under-utilised skill for a given competency. A difference of less than 1 point between ‘ideal’ and ‘actual’ score mean’t that there was neither a skill gap or non-utilised skill.

Results

Results from the skills audit tool identify that the Partnership Board members have skill deficits in a number of areas. The most prominent skill gaps were found in the following competency groupings:

- **Personal skills** - communication, managing self, presentation skills and minute taking
- **Leadership skills** - Making direction and purpose clear, building a shared vision, political sensitivity and awareness
- **Policy and strategy skills** - understanding national Sure Start targets, policy development, regeneration initiatives, influencing policy and strategy
- **Workplace management** - financial management, managing contracts, health and safety
- **Professional technical skills** - methods of evaluation and knowledge management

Fewer Board Members had skill deficits within other skill competence groups, such as underpinning principles and management: implementation skills. Table 1 (see page 6) summarises these skill gaps in order of prominence.
Table 1.

Summary table showing the most prominent skill gaps of Partnership Board members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Number with skill gap</th>
<th>Percentage with skill gap</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Making direction and purpose clear</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing contracts</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regeneration initiatives</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and safety</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge management</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political sensitivity and awareness</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding national Sure Start targets</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial management</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods of evaluation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation skills</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing self</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minute taking</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building a shared vision</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy development</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influencing policy and strategy</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results also showed that Partnership Board members have a few non-utilised skills in the following areas: creating a learning culture (2 people), understanding weaknesses and strengths of research (2 people), preparation of reports (2 people), minute taking (1 person), managing contracts (1 person), commission research (1 person).

Data was also gathered using a personal information sheet. This was used to gain an insight into Partnership Board Members skills developed during work, training, qualifications, voluntary work and spare time with or
without the family. In total 11 personal information sheets were completed. The findings are summarised below.

**Figure 1.**

**Type of previous/current employment and voluntary work of Board members**

Figure 1 shows that the majority of board members who took part in the skills audit have currently or previously worked for the local community sector, local education providers and the PCT/Health authority. In total 64% of Board members have worked within these sectors.

**Figure 2.**

**Qualifications held by Board Members**
The personal information sheet also identified what skills board members have gained from their qualifications/training that would be useful for the role of the Partnership Board. These qualifications are listed in the pie chart (i.e. figure 2). Further, other training that board members have received, has mainly focused on developing workplace management skills. However, board members have developed many skills through training that were not included within the skills audit. These included behaviour management, time management, mental health awareness, working with challenging behaviours, disability awareness, inter cultural awareness, drug awareness, child protection, child development, nutrition, sociology, psychology and physiology of health.

Conclusions

Partnership Board members may require training and development within a number of areas which will help the board to perform more effectively in the future. However, It should not be assumed that an identified skills gap implies a straightforward training need that can be met through professional training. There may be a need for innovative individual, organisational and cross-organisational training and developmental opportunities. There may be many other factors at play, including organisational and structural barriers.
References


Appendices

Personal Skills
Communication
Working in a multidisciplinary (mixed) team
Interpersonal skills/relating to others
Managing self
Innovation and creativity (new ideas)
Presentation skills
Minute taking

Leadership
Making direction and purpose clear
Building a shared vision
Building commitment
Empowering and enabling others
Creating a learning culture
Influencing others
Political sensitivity and awareness

Policy and Strategy
Understanding national Sure Start targets
Understanding local Sure Start targets
Understanding other organisations
Policy development
Influencing policy and strategy
Regeneration initiatives

Management: implementation skills
Prioritising
Planning
Initiating programmes of work
Coordination of work
Sharing skills
Working with communities
Sharing information
Consultation and discussions with others
Enabling others
Encouraging community participation

Workplace management
Managing change
Managing quality
Project management
Financial management
Managing contracts
Staff appraisal
Staff development
Recruitment and selection
Managing performance
Motivating and building teams
Delegation
Health and safety

**Underpinning principles**
Understanding inequality issues
Understanding cultural diversity
Understanding ground rules and boundaries

**Professional/Technical**
Monitoring
Understanding the weaknesses and strengths of research
Commission research
Evidence-based decision making
Methods of evaluation
Knowledge management
Preparation of reports
Building partnerships
Partnership working