Information Management Resource Kit

Module on Building Electronic Communities and Networks

UNIT 2. UNDERSTANDING NEEDS AND ASSESSING OPPORTUNITIES

LESSON 1. INTRODUCTION TO NEEDS ANALYSIS

NOTE

Please note that this PDF version does not have the interactive features offered through the IMARK courseware such as exercises with feedback, pop-ups, animations etc.

We recommend that you take the lesson using the interactive courseware environment, and use the PDF version for printing the lesson and to use as a reference after you have completed the course.

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Objectives

At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

• understand the role of needs analysis in building an online community.

A scenario

Keper is an international non-profit organization aiming to support and serve community radio broadcasters in Africa.
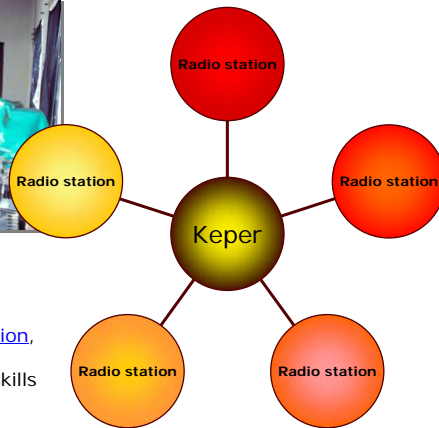
The Keper office in Kampala

Keper

Some of the organizational goals are to support radio broadcasting through local action, and offer various services to its members.

A scenario

Keper helps local radios with managing, financing, training and technical problems, by building and coordinating a regional network of radio broadcasters.

The network is conceived as a means of distributing information, bringing together various experiences and transferring skills within the network.

A scenario

INFORMATION PROVIDED BY KEPER

Keper provides affiliates with information on:

• Lobbying for favorable legislative environments through consultative workshops with stakeholders and awareness building seminars.

• Training and capacity building programmes, research and surveys to establish training support needs, dissemination of existing training modules and information for support and capacity building.

• Activities that will enhance sustainability of the initiatives.

• New technology and equipment, telephone and Internet connection, content development, networking and information sharing.

A scenario

Amina works at Keper as a communication specialist. She is in charge of promoting the communication strategy with members to allow information exchange and knowledge sharing within the network.

Amina, communication specialist at Keper

The Keper team mainly use telephone and fax to provide information and answer members' requests.

Amina notices that many of the incoming requests are very similar. This results in repetitions and, considering the high costs of telephone communications, in poor use of time and money.

A different approach and a multidirectional communication channel is needed to improve the communication among radio broadcasters.

A scenario

Amina has participated in an interesting workshop about Internet communication tools.

She has been very impressed by this experience, and she is thinking about the possibility of using the Internet to improve the communication strategy in the community.
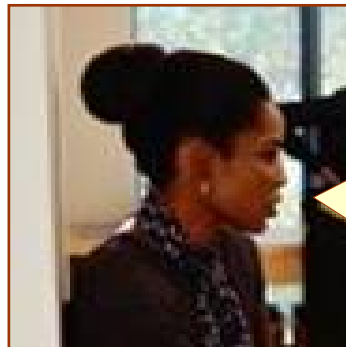
Using Internet-based tools it is possible to share information faster, with lower costs and a higher level of sharing among members than with telephone or fax.

It allows the sharing of solutions to many members' common problems.

A scenario

Amina writes down all the benefits that the Internet could offer to the radio broadcasters, by:

- reducing the isolation of radio broadcasters;

- facilitating dialogue and encouraging participation in decision making;

- providing information, knowledge and skills training in a flexible manner;

- helping overcome the barriers that prevent information sharing.

A scenario

After the initial enthusiasm, a series of doubts come to her mind…

I have plenty of ideas, but… how to start?

Who could support me during the project?

How do I get our staff to support the concept?

And, finally, the most substantial question arises…

Is this really the best answer to meet the needs of the radio broadcasters?

The role of the needs analysis

Idea

An innovative idea is often the starting point for a new project.

Needs Analysis

Then, you will go through the different stages of the process, such as developing a plan, starting the online community activities and evaluating the results.

Planning, implementation, evaluation

Before all this, you need to understand the **users' needs**, in order to closely connect them with the ultimate plan you will develop.

You may find it useful to use a logical model to organize the different stages of the process.

See Annex 2.1.1 for a mini-lesson on using a logical model.

The role of the needs analysis

Understanding user's needs is crucial in defining what you are trying **to achieve** and what will happen as a **result** of the project.

Consider for example the following problems: What has been forgotten in the needs analysis?

a

Most members don't access the online community, as they have problems with Internet connectivity…

Communication context analysis.   1

The plan is ready but we can't find enough money to implement it!

Analysis of the financial barriers to electronic networking.

Everything is implemented but nobody participates… It seems that community members don't understand the web interface…

Analysis of the technical barriers to electronic networking.

Click on each option and drag it in the corresponding box.

When you have finished, click on the Confirm button.

The role of the needs analysis

Needs analysis can be organized around the following activities:

Defining your idea: building up your team and identifying goals

Needs assessment: assessing the needs of the potential online community members

Capacity building assessment

Analysing technical, financial, institutional and social barriers

We will discuss each of these activities in the following lessons.
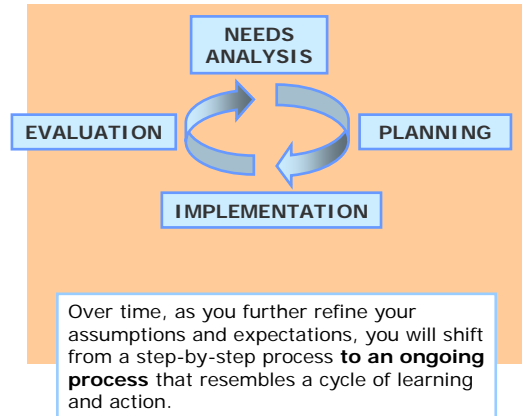

Summary

The **needs analysis** stage is carried out to ensure that you are planning an online community project that:

• is consistent with the **interests and needs** of the potential online community members; and

• has **all the requirements** to be successfully implemented.

Annex 2.1.1
Mini-lesson: Using a Logical Model

The process

When you start the online community building process, you may refer to a **step by step** needs analysis, planning, implementation and evaluation effort that results in a clear path to follow as you move forward.

NEEDS ANALYSIS

EVALUATION

PLANNING

IMPLEMENTATION

Over time, as you further refine your assumptions and expectations, you will shift from a step-by-step process **to an ongoing process** that resembles a cycle of learning and action.

The logical model

A single tool that can help you organize your thinking over time is to use a logic model to organize your thoughts and what you learn during the process.

The logic model helps you keep track of the following information:

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	RESULTS	ACTIVITIES
The longer-term benefits to final beneficiaries and the wider benefits to other groups.	The accomplishment to be achieved by implementing the project and which is likely to outlive the project.	The tangible consequences of implementing a set of Activities.	The tasks that have to be completed to produce the results.

The logical model

Think of the logical model as a living and ever changing **summary document** that sits above more specific documents like:

• timelines,
• technical specifications,
• evaluation tools and
• many other planning and implementation documents.

At the initial stage, the logical model will start out with more **broadly framed statements**, and later will **become more defined**.

See the Keper's logical model

Download the logical model form