

# Work-Based Continuing Professional Development

A Conceptual Proposal for Competence Development of NSDA Staff



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“There are few more urgent tasks than to design social infrastructures that foster learning.”

Etienne Wenger

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**INDIA-EU DEVELOPMENT PROJECT**

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# Work-Based Continuing Professional Development

## Introduction

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This Handbook presents a model for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in India. The Handbook is based on the experience from implementation of the India-EU Skills Development project. There are huge skills development challenges for India and we are only at the beginning, and therefore new methods for competence enhancement at all levels are an imperative, not least for a dynamic apex organisation like the National Skills Development Agency charged with the function to host the national skills qualification framework (NSQF).

In order to cope with this huge workload and continuous pressures for change, new methods of learning have to be used. The NSDA in India could become a front runner by devising and making use of a continuous competence development strategy that makes staff development go hand-in-hand with organisational development and continuous renewal and refinement of its services.

The idea behind the Handbook is that staff competence development becomes clearly both more efficient and much cheaper if closely related to the actual job requirements within an organisation. It is based on a principle of ‘the small steps’, closely linked to work tasks. The aim of the text is therefore to set the cornerstones for such work and workplace-based initiatives as an integral part of modern collective competence development.

Horizontal learning in work-based networks through a strategy of incremental steps towards staff development represents another way of working than traditional in-service training. International experiences point out that horizontal learning is an effective and promising strategy for competence enhancement but requires organisation and resources at policy and practitioner levels. The Handbook spells out the conceptual framework for a work-based competence development model, outlines new methodologies, discusses some key roles for practitioners, and specifies the necessary resources, incentives and ‘drivers’ to sustain horizontal learning in the NSDA. It presents practical examples of how to organise improved learning activities and a number of new pedagogical practices.

The Handbook will be useful in a variety of ways:

- as a useful tool for human resource work in the NSDA
- as a practical consulting resource for the Ministry of Skills Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE), the NSDA, and other authorities under the MSDE,
- as inspiration for designing and carrying out workplace-based competence development programmes.

# The Competence-Based Approach

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## Presentation of the model and the main principles behind it

This section contains a model for competence development and the main principles behind.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) can be carried out in different ways:

- It can have focus on improving participants' qualifications<sup>1</sup> or on participants' competences<sup>2</sup> - here the focus is on developing participants' competences.
- It can be done by running courses (short or long), where participants often coming from different institutions are gathered together with a trainer in order to be taught, or it can be done workplace-based where colleagues go together in order to learn from each other. This model is based on the workplace-based approach.
- It can be offered by a training provider where participants apply for admission, or it can be organised in cooperation between central authorities, leadership of an organisation and participants with a view to ensure that staff can help enhancing e.g. the organisations' or the country's competitiveness. Here the focus is on how to undertake CPD as part of an organisation's strategy

The model for CPD presented here is therefore subdivided in the following thematic chapters:

- Competence-based
- Workplace-based and
- Concrete learning organisation strategies.

The principles and methods used in the concept are:

- Action Learning
- Horizontal Learning
- Communities of Practice (CoP).

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<sup>1</sup> Formal education for which participants get a certificate or diploma, showing that they have passed a specific exam

<sup>2</sup> What participants are able and willing to do in practice

## Action learning

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This pedagogical strategy targets competence development for staff, and competence is here understood as the ability and the willingness to do things in practice.

Instead of traditional courses and so-called vertical learning processes, it was agreed by the NSDA and the project after the December 2014 NSDA capacity building workshop that the project provided staff competence development should include Action Learning - the idea that people learn from doing things, and by reflecting on the experience gained in the process (Revans, 1982)<sup>3</sup>.

The basic principle discovered by Revans was that groups of people working together to solve problems are highly productive in finding inspiration and directions of approach to solve, difficult problems. He named this process “action learning” which he defined as follows: “*Action learning*” is a means of development, intellectual, emotional or physical that requires its subjects, through responsible involvement in some real, complex and stressful problem, to achieve intended change to improve their observable behaviour henceforth in the problem field.” (Revans, 1982: 626-627). Although he was the first to coin the term action learning, earlier sources had already made reference to the important role of practice in learning, with related quotations dating back to Confucius: “*I hear and I forget; I see and I remember; I do and I understand.*”

*Action learning* is a process whereby people work and learn together by tackling real issues and reflecting on their actions. Learners acquire knowledge through actual actions and practice rather than through traditional instruction.

Action learning is usually done in conjunction with others, in small groups. It is perceived as particularly suitable for adults, as it enables each person to reflect on and review the action they have taken and the learning points arising. This should then guide future action and improve performance (Revans, 1982).

The main principle in action learning - to do something that is important, to improve it by working with it and to learn from it at the same time – has attracted the attention of skills development policymakers, human resource managers, and leaders of organisations. Through action learning organisations get value for money, and at the same time staff find it more exciting to change ways and improve own practice while reflecting on it and learning from it. The action learning (learning from doing in practice) approach to CPD implies that competence development and improvement of NSDA consultants’ practice must take place in the workplace, i.e. to be work-based.

In a following chapter there are more concrete guidelines about how to run Action Learning projects, but first something about horizontal learning.

## Horizontal learning

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In the traditional sense, ‘learning’ is seen as the transfer of knowledge from ‘expert’ to learner. This top-down knowledge exchange is commonly known as vertical learning. Horizontal learning practices, on the

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<sup>3</sup> Revans, R. W. (1982) *The Origins and Growth of Action Learning*. Studentlitteratur: Lund.

other hand, are exchanges of knowledge and experience between peers (or groups) who are interested in the same field and who both have experience and varying expertise in the area (all are considered experts).

Horizontal learning in this conception is an organised learning environment in which people learn together, and from each other. In order to be useful, a horizontal learning approach must focus very much on the learning environment. Smylie (1995)<sup>4</sup> refers to John Dewey when he points out that “...*learning begins with ambiguous situations that present a dilemma, problem, or felt difficulty for the individual*”, and that this is a good starting point for the establishment of a learning environment.

Thus horizontal learning is about 1) getting impulses from the outside world (from experts or colleagues), 2) acquiring experience by doing something, and/or 3) learning from each other – and together. When participants are e.g. NSDA staff members themselves, they have a lot of knowledge to share, and it is much more productive and cheaper to do it in this way than to put all participants into a classroom with an external trainer to teach them.

Horizontal learning can be organised as a learning network – or a Community of Practice (CoP).

## Communities of Practice

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Professionals do not necessarily learn very much from vertical learning processes anymore. In many cases they get new knowledge from the outside through personalized learning activities, share knowledge with others, (probably) improve knowledge together with others – and in most cases also make use of this new knowledge in practice.

To a large extent this is what Wenger & al. (2002)<sup>5</sup> call a Community of Practice (CoP), consisting of:

- People sharing a specific practice
- With the motivation and interest to work together in order to learn from one another, and
- Organised in such a way that ideas, papers, models, tools etc. are actually improved and results shared.

The new aspect of CoPs is not that they exist but the fact that organisations have identified their existence and started considering the value (for the organisation) of such Communities of Practice. This is also the case in public institutions.

Communities of Practice will in most cases be considered part of a Knowledge Management approach, where organisations get information from the outside, make knowledge from that information, share the knowledge among people involved, and also enable the creation of new knowledge, based on participants’

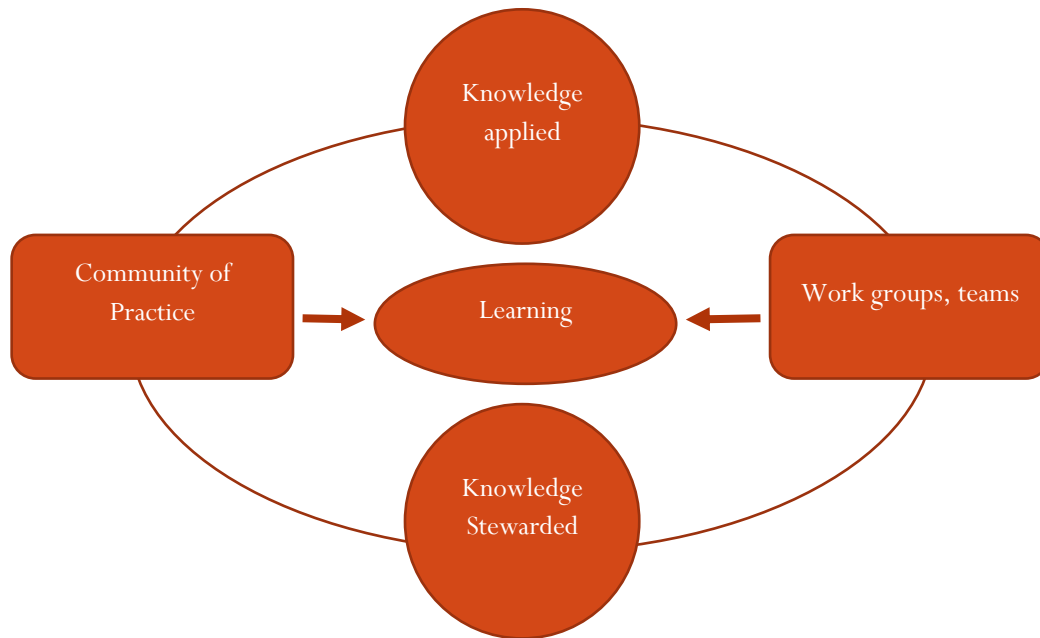
<sup>4</sup> Smylie, M. A. (1995) “Teacher learning in the workplace”. In: Guskey, T. R. & M. Huberman (Eds) *Professional Development in Education. New paradigms and Practices*, Teachers College Press, New York.

<sup>5</sup> Wenger, Etienne; Richard McDermott & William M. Snyder (2002) *Cultivating Communities of Practice*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

both explicit and tacit knowledge<sup>6</sup>. In systems like these knowledge is defined as “justified true belief”<sup>7</sup>, referring to the fact that “knowledge is a construction of reality rather than something that is true in any abstract and universal way”.

Communities of Practice give benefit to both individuals and to the organisation itself. As mentioned in Wenger et al. (2002), the so-called “multi-membership learning cycle” makes it possible for the organisation to utilize what is learned in the CoP.

Figure 1: Multi-membership cycle



Originally, CoPs were thought of as voluntary, self-organised (and self-governing) units – both fragile and robust. They may fall apart if somebody tries to control them or if members no longer find them attractive. On the other hand they are difficult to control because members shift over time and so do relevant issues.

In essence, Communities of Practice are groups of people who are bonded by their exposure to common problems, common pursuit of solutions, and thereby themselves embodying a store of knowledge. They share similar goals and interests, in pursuit of which they employ common practices, work with the same tools and express themselves in a common language. Through common activities they come to hold similar beliefs and value systems.

Wenger (1997)<sup>8</sup> asserts that it is learning that gives rise to Communities of Practice: “... communities of practice... come together, they develop, they evolve, they disperse, according to the timing, the logic, the rhythms, and

<sup>6</sup> Tacit knowledge is the knowledge, people are not aware of but nevertheless use in their own practice, whereas explicit knowledge is what can be exchanged, and transferred from a technological instrument to people, from one person to another etc.

<sup>7</sup> Krogh, G. von, K. Ichijo & I. Nonaka (2000) *Enabling knowledge creation. How to unlock the mystery of tacit knowledge and release the power of innovation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>8</sup> Wenger, E. (1997) *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity*. Cambridge University Press.

*the social energy of their learning.*” Pór (2001)<sup>9</sup> also emphasises the commitment to learning, demonstrated by CoPs: “More than a “community of learners”, a community of practice is also a “community that learns”. Not merely peers exchanging ideas around the water cooler, sharing and benefitting from each other’s expertise, but colleagues committed to jointly develop better practices.”

The above exposition of the key terms suggests that the organisation of continued professional development of the staff of an organisation as work-based competence development through horizontal learning in structures like Communities of Practice brings a number of advantages:

- it implies *learning from doing* (rather than formal training or instruction) which is more appealing to adults, more exciting for employees and cost-effective for organisations
- it implies *peer learning* or learning from each other’s practice through valuing of each other’s experience and in-depth reflection on it
- it implies *systematic reflection and learning* through the setting up of a Community of Practice, i.e. a group with permanent membership bound by common problem(s) to solve
- the Community of Practice mode of learning allows for *exchange of and learning from both the explicit and tacit aspects of colleagues’ practice* (while traditional instruction focuses mainly on its explicit dimensions)
- the Community of Practice is a “community that learns” (Pór, 2001), i.e. it stimulates learning not only at the level of the individual learners, but also at the level of the whole entity, being able as a result to *generate new knowledge and improve practice*.

Thus learning, practice and change look like the three (!) sides of a coin. As Wenger (1997) puts it: “. . . *learning is the engine of practice, and practice is the history of that learning...*” The Handbook tries to shed light on how practice and learning can be put closely together to enhance NSDA consultants’ competences and professional development. The main building blocks and success factors of this process are presented and further elaborated below.



# The Workplace-Based Concept and Its Basic Principles

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It is obvious that workplace-based competence development is founded on cooperation between colleagues, who are doing things together – and learning from it at the same time (Action Learning, and Horizontal learning as already mentioned in the chapter above).

In the NSDA it can be done by:

- using joint problem-solving
- exchanging examples of good practice
- using the principles of action learning
- joining learning networks (CoPs).

## SWOT analysis as a starting point for organisational competence development

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The starting point for an identification of learning needs in an organisation has to be the objectives and tasks defined for a public institution or its "business plan". The NSDA as a registered Society has a stated set of Aims and Objects. Besides, it has a action plan which enables the NSDA to respond to broader national policy guidelines. The point of departure must build on the most accurate and relevant information available about the organisation's present performance and problems as well as future plans. One should always remember that the quality of staff competence development activities can be no better than the baseline analysis permits. Data collection can also take the form of questionnaires, interviews, discussions, brainstorming groups and observation.

An easily applied tool is the SWOT analysis, which asks the NSDA staff and management to consider strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats relating to a specific situation. What are the training/learning implications for NSDA of this analysis? And how and in which form can competence development measures best be applied to increase performance? Such a SWOT analysis can "tease out" useful information. One great value of a SWOT analysis is that it is more than just a snapshot. It is both forward-looking as well as considering the present situation, and it examines both positive and negative aspects of a situation.

The tool can be used in the following way:

To carry out a SWOT analysis in NSDA, write down answers to the following questions:

#### STRENGTHS

- What are your advantages?
- What are the advantages in the situation?
- What do you do well?
- What is going well in the situation?
- What do other people see as your strengths?
- What do you see as the strong points of the situation?

Consider this from your own point of view and from the point of view of the people you are working with. Be realistic. Write down a list of your characteristics or the characteristic issues of the situation you are dealing with. Some of these will, one hope, be strengths.

#### WEAKNESSES

- What should be improved?
- What could you improve?
- What needs to change?
- What do you do badly?
- What should you avoid?
- What real problems exist in the current situation?
- What is failing or being overly stretched?

Again, consider it from an internal and external perspective. Do other people seem to perceive weakness that you do not see? Are they doing any better than you? It is best to be realistic now, and face any unpleasant unpleasant truths as soon as possible.

#### OPPORTUNITIES

- Where are the good opportunities facing you?
- What are the interesting trends you are aware of?
- What new opportunities are you aware of?

Useful opportunities can come from such things as:

- Changes in new technologies and partnerships with NSQF institutions abroad
- Changes in government policies related to your field
- New people in the office
- Gaining new skills.

#### THREATS

- What obstacles do you face?
- Will people react positively or negatively?
- What are your competitors doing?
- Are the required specifications for your job or services changing?
- Is changing technology threatening your position?
- Do you have problems with mastering some issues concerning NSQF, either in terms of content or in ensuring compliance with rules of your negotiating partners?

A SWOT analysis is therefore a good framework for analysing an organisation's challenges and will be useful for taking both strategic decisions in the NSDA as well as for identifying competence development needs. It makes it possible for leaders and staff to focus on key strengths, minimize weaknesses and on this foundation take the greatest possible advantage of opportunities available to the organisation. This is a good way to identify competence gaps and how to tackle them.

## **Learning from each other through joint problem-solving in Communities of Practice**

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There are many ways to carry out competence building and development activities. For the NSDA having a highly specialized role and a function as the anchor of the national skills qualification framework there seems to be hardly any external providers, which can offer targeted domain specific training. Therefore NSDA should try to "tease out" and upgrade the inherent learning potentials of its professional work tasks.

The most promising learning organisation strategy in this context would be a work-based as well as a workplace-based methodology. This is a learning/training approach, which builds on the assumption that a form of applied pedagogy is missing in the landscape of learning in India (and in many other countries), where the starting point is to be taken in the daily work of staff. Centralised provision of continuing training courses is the traditional form in many countries. This is organised in programmes designed by external training delivery providers, university, other external experts, and maybe by international technical assistance experts, and it is typically offered as short courses. This model only makes it possible for very few to participate, it individualises competence development, its impact is normally small as it often does not give answers to pressing challenges in daily work practice (often unknown to the trainer), and last but not least, it is also comparatively very costly.

NSDA should therefore focus on other types of continuous competence development. And experience shows that professionals can learn a lot together and from each other. Own production of new knowledge has the impact that the Agency's staff members will acquire personal experiences with development work. Much know-how, often unknown, is hidden in individual consultants and in teams of staff in NSDA. Development projects in a supported network designed as a 'learning-by-doing' process appear to be a promising method by creating arrangements, which tap into the existing staff member competences. The NSDA leadership and staff articulated this interest at the December 2014 project workshop, are still motivated and now probably just need a stimulus to get started. Almost all institutions want (i) to develop staff performance, (ii) to capture and develop relevant knowledge in skills development, (iii) to have local development work as an integral part of work and become learning organisations, and (iv) to enhance and get added value out of network relations.

Own production of knowledge and skills has the impact that staff members achieve personal experiences with professional development. A lot of 'tacit' knowledge can be 'teased out' of NSDA staff's practical know-how, which can be called forward through more systematic approaches to project work. This is practice-based competence development, and it seems to be more adequate than traditional training courses, which often concentrate on reproduction of the mostly academic theories and methodologies

produced by outsiders or on new 'fads' in management theory. What is needed is less talk and more action, less instruction and more reflection-on-action. The NSDA, on the other hand, needs and is committed to produce 'home-grown' knowledge, which makes a difference in practice. The process builds on a foundation where knowledge is not 'dropped' from above but grows from the bottom up. However, an interesting outcome of this approach to learning is that an institution's own experiences from developing knowledge may often enhance the interest to become familiar with, make use of and disseminate knowledge created by others.

In order to be beneficial to the NSDA organisational performance, learning from each other in CoPs needs careful planning and managing. Researchers outline a couple of key challenges in how to start and support communities that are capable of sharing tacit knowledge and thinking together (see McDermoth, 2001)<sup>10</sup>: the *management challenge* is to communicate that the organisation truly values sharing knowledge; the *community challenge* is to create real value for community members and to ensure that the community shares cutting edge thinking, rather than sophisticated copying; the *technical challenge* is to design human and information systems that not only make information available but help community members think together; and the *personal challenge* is to be open to the ideas of others, avoid internal competition, and maintain a thirst for developing the community's practice.

### Learning by using the principles of action learning in the NSDA

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The principles of action learning are basically that learning is tied in with a concrete and real project. Such training will often be organised as a development project for a number of participants. They then work closely together in certain work situations. In other situations they work on their own in their normal job assignments.

The central learning unit will in most cases be the work group (4 - 5 persons). Every single participant will turn up with a problem (a project) from a certain unit. The work group will meet regularly. The purpose is to give support or critical inputs and to form the basis for exchange of experiences. The members are eventually given guidance by an expert/trainer who is being attached to the group.

The learning process will be organised based on the following assumptions:

- The handling of everyday tasks is the starting point. They must be approached in such a way that the solution to the problem will in itself become a learning process.
- The handling of the problem requires that the participant must also take a personal risk (it must mean something to the person that the problem will be solved).
- You learn best by working with real and specific problems. Through this you realize your own progress and the factors influencing it.
- Change in behaviour more often takes place as a result of re-interpretation of previous experience

than acquisition of new knowledge.

- Re-interpretation best takes place through exchange of ideas and opinions with other participants (who are in the same situation).
- Every time the group meets there must be an evaluation of the results achieved.
- Every participant must be given an assignment being deeply rooted in reality, but the assignment must be relatively complex and unstructured (there must be no definite approach to solving the problem beforehand).

Learning is in this conceptualisation a social process supported by mutual encouragement. The project is the central activity in such a training activity.

### **Project requirements in an action learning project**

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Not all actions promote development or learning. Some of the things we do are done simply because we have to and are capable of doing it. It might be a question of purely routine work, which we do not have to think much about and which we hardly relate to at all. We do not learn anything from such actions. Thus they are not suitable for learning.

Therefore demands must be made on a good project:

1. The project must be rooted in reality and the NSDA must be interested in getting the problem solved.
2. There must be a reasonable responsibility and risk-willingness which entails that the participants really feel obliged to work seriously with the project.
3. There must be possibilities for action - from this follows that there must be resources for action.
4. The problem must be complex and appear to the participants as being real and relevant:
  - the task must be open and with no set answer
  - the task must be relevant for the future
  - the task must be action oriented
  - the task must be able to be solved by several persons.
  - the task must entail a realistic responsibility
  - the task must be beneficial to others.

Organisations working with action learning have good experiences with such learning programmes. However, not all activities are equally good. Development in Action Learning projects takes place by carrying out specific activities. These activities can be work tasks, participation in conferences, courses, formal education programmes, self-tuition, study-visits, talks with others, visits to other countries, etc.

Activities must entail the potential for development. We thus learn something and expand our capacity. Training and development can be a purely personal matter or they can be in the interest of the organisation. In work-based competence development we are solely dealing with work tasks, which are in the interest of the NSDA and the individual at the same time. The most important challenge in this connection will be to identify the activities having the necessary potential for development. Involving participants in such a way that they find the training activities appropriate, exciting, and relevant to exactly their future development are basic prerequisites for obtaining an efficient learning process.

### Learning by using learning networks

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A number of practical steps must be undertaken to set up a NSDA-based CoP as a means for continuing competence development of staff, and the key actors in this process need to be highlighted.

The approach of the Handbook builds on competence, learning, action learning and horizontal learning with the aim to promote a sustainable professional development of employees. The prerequisites for launching the process are:

- There are no legal or administrative barriers for professional development of staff to take place at workplace level
- NSDA-based competence development is supported by the relevant national authorities, as well as by the NSDA leadership
- There are staff members who are motivated and willing to take part in work-based CoPs
- Interesting and appealing topics/problems/practices have been identified as common challenges that deserve cooperative thinking and joint action
- Competence development activities in NSDA may be facilitated by an external trainer.

The key actors in NSDA-based competence development are the NSDA consultants, trainers, and the NSDA Director General. In this model, participants (consultants) get information from the outside (face-to-face, or virtually) from experts, from peers and from individual studies. Results are gathered in a portfolio containing participants' proved competence and improved practice. The results could then be assessed by the DG of NSDA, the external trainer and/or the central authorities (e.g. Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship) and, finally, a national certificate could be issued.

It is worth noticing that work-and workplace-based competence development is most effective when it comes as a response to a particular need or change. An organisation like the NSDA will be in some kind of balance until a (planned or unplanned) change arises and something new needs to be implemented. In most cases novelties will disturb the existing balance between the different organisational elements. Disturbing the existing balance is always the initial condition for workplace-based competence development and could arise from:

- Policy and politics (not least governmental decisions, new legislation, etc.)
- Structure (reform processes, etc.)

- Context (expectations from different stakeholders)
- NSDA leadership (visions, management styles, power relationships, etc.)
- Organisational culture within NSDA (shared beliefs and values)
- Staffs' learning (environment set up for consultants' competence development)
- Teachers (experience, private lives, etc.).

Each of those elements, and the relationship between them, might be challenged with the implementation of a new concept for competence development. After implementation the organisation will find a new (and changed) balance. Major changes may generate more resistance and more conflicts and they may not even be the best solution either. That is why it is best to 'think big' but 'start small' – change is neither a linear nor a logically graduated process. In any case, however, it is important to clearly formulate the thematic field for competence development to be covered by the CoP. In the case of India, national authorities are committed to a national skills agenda, which includes promotion of life-long learning and in particular the “the learning to learn” key competence<sup>11</sup> as a major platform for achieving the skills goals, so this workplace-based model is centred on this.

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<sup>11</sup> As defined by the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning (Official Journal of the European Union L 394/10, 30.12.2006).

# The Work-Based Concept and Its Key Actors

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The efficacy of the “ingredients” for local learning in NSDA in order to achieve improvements of the organisation, its services and the competence development of its consultants depends on new and important roles for key actors in such processes.

## The trainer

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One of the main actors in the workplace-based CPD model is the trainer. The trainer is a qualified expert who has taken part in projects and training in the past, and has been certified by the national authorities as a trainer.

In some cases, when the topic of the competence development is new or not familiar to staff, the trainer will need to organise – in cooperation with the NSDA DG – a traditional formal training for the future participants in the CoP. The trainer will conduct training – first and foremost to bridge some knowledge gaps and prepare employers for horizontal learning. This initial training could cover questions like:

- Why are key competences, in a lifelong learning perspective, so important?
- What should staff do in order to improve NSDA performance? Tools, methods and exercises presented and further discussed with colleagues (participants of the training)
- How can participants learn from each other (horizontal learning) and how can experience and knowledge be shared among participants?
- How is it possible to improve one’s own practice (in relation to a specific competence), and learn from it at the same time?
- How can examples of good practice from the NSDA be documented and shared with other public institutions in India?

## The NSDA consultant

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The most important professional and stakeholder in the workplace-based strategy is the staff member. Consultants are assumed to formulate their own practice projects, they are supposed to get experience from that and to share their experience with colleagues and with the trainer. They are stimulated to work as a horizontal learning group (a local Community of Practice), teaching each other and learning from each other at the same time, and using the trainer and other facilities as tools of learning. They are also expected to systematically share the knowledge and skills acquired (supported by the trainer) with colleagues and to describe good examples.

Practice and the improvement of practice is a cornerstone of consultants’ professional development at the NSDA level. One of the best tools for engaging in new forms of practice, while making them transparent and accessible for observation/discussion/feedback from the CoP members, is the project-organised work and, respectively, project-organised learning. The consultant, of course, must formulate his/her project



and carry it out in accordance with the common regulations and make an agreement with the NSDA DG about it, as well as with the trainer and with the other CoP members.

### **The NSDA Director General (DG)**

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It is necessary for the DG to be actively involved in the professional development of his/her staff. The DG may have ideas as to what should be improved and how much money and other resources should be spent on it. The DG will have relations to ministerial authorities and therefore know about new reforms and new expectations before the staff will acquire this knowledge, and the DG will always have contact with external stakeholders (State Skill Development Missions, Sector Skill Councils, companies, politicians etc.), who may all have an important role to play in terms of requesting services from the NSDA. The DG must also agree with the trainer about the training programme (content and form) and who among staff should participate under which conditions. All this makes the DG a very important player – not directly involved in the training and in the CoP as such but being a key protagonist by developing a supportive NSDA culture and deciding on the framework for work-based development in a more indirect way. Capacity for collective human resource leadership thus acquires a new importance.

### **Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE)**

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Indispensable actors, though in a supportive back-up position, are the MSDE and probably other relevant institutions. They can provide financial support, approve and certify trainers; they have experience and staff to further support professional development projects and they may be able to attract funding from different sources. It is important that the NSDA-based competence development strategy is anchored up within a broader national policy on making public institutions function as learning organisations.

Let's sum up on the work-based learning model:

Practice is where the whole competence development takes place, and the actual and on-going practice is what should be improved and from where participants can learn. That is why the context is such an important factor. The improvement of practice is a common project for all participants and examples of good practice should be shared among participants and ultimately be made available for all.

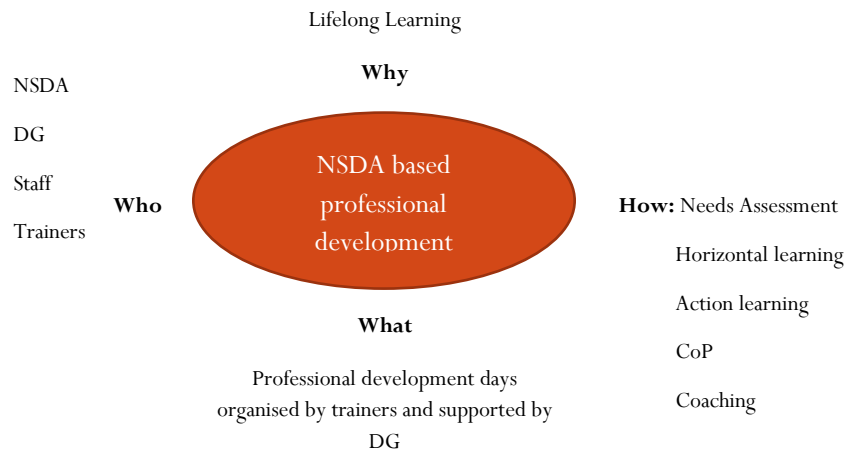
Knowledge sharing, on the other hand, is not easy:

- Those with the knowledge can only share what they know that they know
- They share only what they think others would like to hear about and not already know
- Those with a need of more knowledge must ask questions in order to get information about what they need and want to know, and
- They must visit colleagues in order to have the opportunity to guess and interpret why the good practice takes place – and to get an idea about the tacit know-how that in many cases is the real reason behind good practice – although practitioners don't always know what they do.

Trainers must take care of organising systematic knowledge sharing activities, and it must be arranged in co-operation with the DG and with all NSDA consultants involved. Examples of good practice could later be shared with external professionals in the country.

A visual overview of the proposed model for school-based professional development of teachers is given in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Workplace-based professional development**



# Designing of the NSDA-Based Model: Getting Organized

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A successful model implementation requires active facilitation by the NSDA leadership on the one hand, and a targeted competence development methodology on the other.

## Facilitation by national and local authorities in India

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In the India-EU Skills Development Project an agreement was reached<sup>12</sup> that for the NSDA consultants, competence development should take place as part of their work tasks; that they should learn in teams and in wider networks, and that new approaches to organise learning for personal and collective competence development of staff should go hand-in-hand. The main message is that NSDA consultants should take more responsibility for their own competence development, acquire a broader repertoire of learning methods and become empowered to exercising the choices available to them in their daily work. The EU project ensured that the necessary consultancy support and advice - through targeted but short presentations on content, mentoring and coaching - has been made available to NSDA during the last two years of the project.

One serious challenge must be faced. The internal organisational planning process often becomes a barrier to projects. Experience shows that there are specific conditions around the planning of project activities that NSDA needs to be aware of. Projects must be designed in accordance with the overall planning process. Participants must be given the necessary time, space and resources for project work. Experience also documents that many hours of unpaid work is often neither recognised nor registered in pilot projects. This easily becomes an obstacle and administrative support in the NSDA is therefore needed.

Visible NSDA leadership was agreed with the (then) DG from the start as a condition for launching of the competence development strategy. Often development work in organisations is based on individual staff members' wish to carry out such innovative work. However, this NSDA competence development design insists that projects must be properly anchored up in the NSDA organisation and with active leadership support. The then DG therefore committed the NSDA to take responsibility, enact the necessary decisions, find flexible pathways when needed, and accepting that the work-based learning initiative is 'owned' by the NSDA.

## The method of the “small steps” in work-based staff competence development in the NSDA

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The specific method for organising workplace-based training of consultants is designed as a change strategy based on a gradual approach - or the process of “the small steps” – which starts from the belief that we achieve our results through continuously taking small steps in the right direction. The gradual approach ensures that changes all the time are adapted to the actual conditions in daily work.

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<sup>12</sup> Report on Project Component Activity 1.1.2, 12 December 2014

This change process is a cost-effective way to enhance NSDA consultant competences. However the method requires a high level of commitment and continuity and is therefore not so easy to ‘just’ employ. It is a process demanding time resources particularly in the introduction phase and not least an engaged, change oriented and creative leadership. External consultancy support based on relevant experiences is probably necessary during the process.

The method is based on a principle where, based on the goal of improvement of work process performance, project participants should continuously define often quite small goals, which can be achieved within a couple of weeks. The core principle of the change process model is relatively simple. The model for systematic improvement asks the fundamental questions which can be addressed in any order:

**What are we trying to accomplish?**Setting Aims

Improvements require setting aims. The aim should be time-specific and measurable; it should also define the specific task areas, and the involvement of other colleagues or other system that will be affected.

**How will we know that a change is an improvement?**Establishing Measures

Project participants use quantitative or qualitative measures to determine if a specific change actually leads to an improvement.

**What changes can we make that will result in improvement?**Selecting Changes

Ideas for change may come from the insights of those who work in the NSDA, from change concepts or other creative thinking, or by borrowing from the experience of others who have successfully improved their work practices.

Including the right people on a process improvement team is a critical factor for a successful improvement effort. Teams may vary in size and composition. NSDA will build teams to suit its own needs.

All participants will start by asking the question: What are we actually trying to accomplish in our work in NSDA? The teams then first:

- (i) formulate the plan for the coming period: What do we want to do? Who is doing what and when? Then they
- (ii) implement the planned change element in work performance: Documenting what we did? What happened? After each pilot experience they must make
- (iii) a comparison: Did we accomplish what we wanted? Why/or Why not? What can we learn from this? Finally, the groups
- (iv) act on what was learned by adapting the next element of the local project: What do we think will be good to introduce next?

The circle of change for improvements will then be repeated again and again to stimulate a continuous, structured process of setting aims, establish measures/activities, selecting concrete change elements, implementing improvements and spreading changes in the NSDA.

This particular method of change is very useful because it emphasises the concrete and practical carrying out of intended but small changes, and it also highlights the continuing learning about possibilities and limitations for achieving goals. It becomes easier to describe a change process and its internal dynamics when experiences are captured in a systematic way.

The experience from the NSDA-based learning experiment in India shows that colleague-to-colleague dissemination is possible; it is effective and at the same time also inspiring and in terms of learning has proved very relevant. It functions best when the right conditions are established, and it does not come by itself. An organised and well-planned project strategy is necessary. The method of “the small steps” adds value to another and richer organisation of learning. Through gradual changes, from which the potential learning impact is captured, it is possible to capitalise on the creativity of consultants and at the same time achieve work satisfaction of the NSDA employees. It has also been confirmed that ideas and examples of good practice are more effectively spread via worker-to-worker shared activities in real world work contexts (horizontal learning) than through top-down dissemination.

### **Recommendation on sustainable competence development in NSDA**

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- *Do it yourself*
- *Do it workplace-based*
- *Involve the DG of NSDA*
- *Use also own advisors/trainers*
- *Improve collective competence and work practice at the same time*
- *Use participants resources*
- *Use new media*
- *Lifelong learning*