

Sida's approach to learning

Sida's Learning





Foreword

There is an enormous amount of knowledge accumulated within the Sida organisation. This forms a well of information that the people working at Sida draw from every day. Continuous efforts must be made to keep this knowledge up-to-date, to learn from each other and to bring in new knowledge from sources outside the organisation. In this folder, Sida presents its approach to organisational learning including practical tips for co-workers and managers on how to work more efficiently and how to develop individual competence.

March 2005

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Maria Norrfalk'. The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name 'Maria' and last name 'Norrfalk' clearly distinguishable.

Maria Norrfalk

Sida's Learning

Describes Sida's approach to learning and means...

...for you as a co-worker¹

that you are responsible for acquiring the core competence required by Sida and for developing your competence in the other areas necessary to do your job well. Discuss your own learning strategy with your manager during annual planning dialogues.

...for you as manager

that you organise the work of the group so time can be set aside for learning, and that you encourage co-workers to actively participate in learning processes and activities. At least once every year, discuss this with your co-workers and prepare a plan for learning at both group and individual levels.

...at your workplace

that you discuss and plan the group's learning together. Learning is mostly a question of reflecting over experiences together with colleagues, and then applying the conclusions to your work. Group reflection plays a vital role in the learning process and it is essential to take the time to do it properly.

¹ Co-workers as a group includes everyone working with Sida activities, irrespective of who they are formally employed by.



About learning

The learning process

Learning is a continuous development process in which individuals, by interpreting and processing impressions, form their approach to the world around them. Knowledge is constructed by individuals within learning processes, through reflection and interaction with others.²

Reflection, dialogue and context

Reflection, in the form of processing of practical experience, is a precondition for individuals and groups to be able to build new knowledge and develop their competence. This takes time so space must be made for breaks, conversations and exchange of experience. Groups and their ability to carry on a dialogue play a vital role in this reflection.

It is not enough for the members of the group to just chat generally. Mutual, reflective discussions must be carried out in which participants question and probe each others' experiences, and consequently contribute to each others' methods of understanding. There is a major risk that information taken out of context is never processed properly by the recipient and consequently never transformed into useful knowledge.

² Read more in Sida's Policy for Capacity Development.

Formal and informal learning

Courses and other training inputs must be designed to support the learning process. The aim of a course may be to create interest and start up thought processes within a certain area; however these must be complemented with other activities if deeper learning is to be achieved.

Most learning does not take part in the context of formal education but instead it occurs during daily activities where learning is not the main objective.

The most efficient learning occurs when placed in a clear, meaningful context for both the individual and the group, when reflection and dialogue occur and when the individual/group is aware that this is a learning situation. Consequently it is vital that managers and co-workers identify such situations together.

Formal learning

Informal learning

Formal learning		Informal learning		
Training inputs	Workshops	Project committees	Business travel	Newspapers
Courses	Meetings	Contribution preparations	Informal discussions with colleagues	Walks in the forest
	Study circles	Projects		
	Network meetings	Country strategy processes		
	Evaluation processes		Studying documents	

Organisational learning

Learning within the organisation is not the same as learning at individual level. If the members of a group learn to carry on a dialogue, their thought processes expand and individual members then also expand their level of understanding. Collective learning becomes collective knowledge building in which the people in the group develop their understanding of different phenomena together.

About learning at Sida

Sida is a knowledge organisation. Consequently the sum of co-workers' knowledge and expertise is Sida's most important resource. It is therefore decisive for operations that each individual employee builds up the competence needed to deal with the changes that continuously affect development cooperation.

However it is just as important that each workplace – and Sida as a whole – manages to create forms for verification, cooperation and feedback of experience in order for their group competence to be utilized and developed efficiently.

Sida is working to become a learning organisation that:

- ❖ is flexible and possesses the motivation and ability necessary to encourage and manage change;
- ❖ promotes free exchange of thought irrespective of the status of the individuals concerned;
- ❖ utilizes the knowledge, experience and competence of its employees and creates preconditions for individual and organisational development;
- ❖ consciously uses learning processes at individual, group and organisational levels in order to move the organisation towards the achievement of its development objectives.

Core competence

There are certain types of knowledge within the areas of policy, methods, management and administration that staff in various functions at Sida must possess. This knowledge is defined as Sida's core competence.

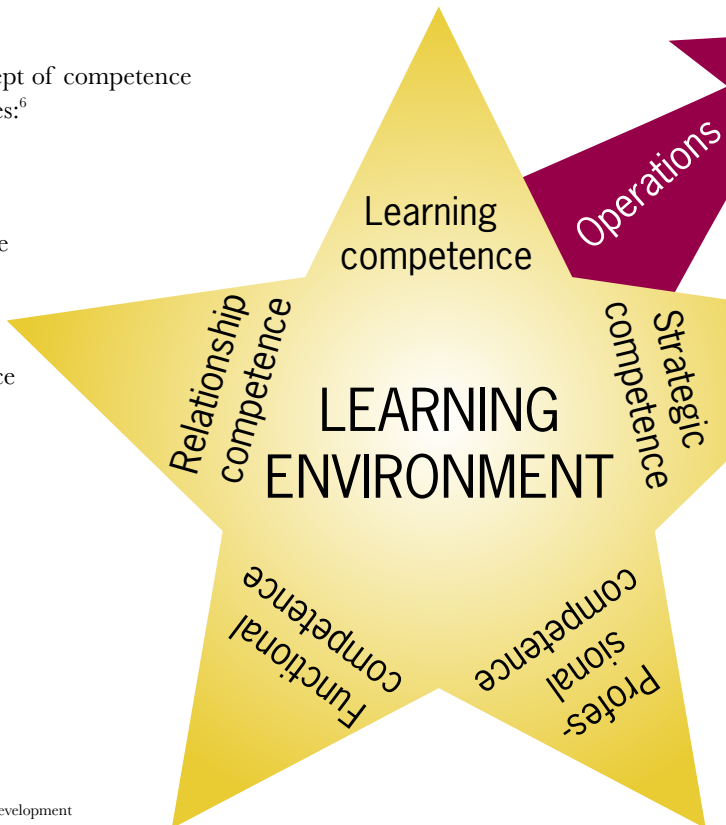
Core competence is to be regarded as obligatory knowledge. It is the responsibility of each co-worker to use the relevant knowledge in these areas and the responsibility of each manager to provide the preconditions for employees to be able to do this.

The definition of core competence is described and continuously updated by the POM³ and EVU⁴ departments of Sida in cooperation with PEO.⁵

Competence Star

Sida has divided the concept of competence into five different categories:⁶

- ❖ Strategic competence
- ❖ Professional competence
- ❖ Learning competence
- ❖ Relationship competence
- ❖ Functional competence



³ Department for Policy and Methods

⁴ Department for Finance and Corporate Development

⁵ The Human Resources Department

⁶ More about this can be found in Sida's Staff Policy and Sida's Management Policy



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The obligatory knowledge areas generally belong to the professional competence category. However, all the points of the competence star are important and must be stimulated and developed in different ways. Strategic skills and relationship skills are becoming increasingly important. Skills have to be acquired and trained, preferably within the correct context and in dialogue with others. This is best achieved in working situations which can be identified as especially developmental and conducive to learning.

Competence analysis

As operations change, departments, divisions and embassies must review their competence needs. Applying a competence analysis will increase the level of knowledge on, and understanding of, the competence necessary to move operations towards stated goals. A competence analysis forms a foundation on which to base human resources development and an essential point of departure when recruiting new staff. Individuals are provided with the opportunity of examining their own functions and competence in relationship to the collective competence of the group and the organisation as a whole. This analysis also creates the preconditions for the planning process which is aimed at adding the missing competence.

Courses and seminars

For co-workers, especially those recently employed, to be able to gain Sida core competence PEO, in cooperation with area specialists, offers a system of courses and seminars.

Learning together at work

Individual competence is merely the foundation. The decisive issue is how each working group utilizes joint competence to manage operational tasks.

Knowledge development is, to a considerable degree, a social process. Creating space for learning through contacts with other people is a way to develop the individual's own thought processes. This can be achieved by, for example:

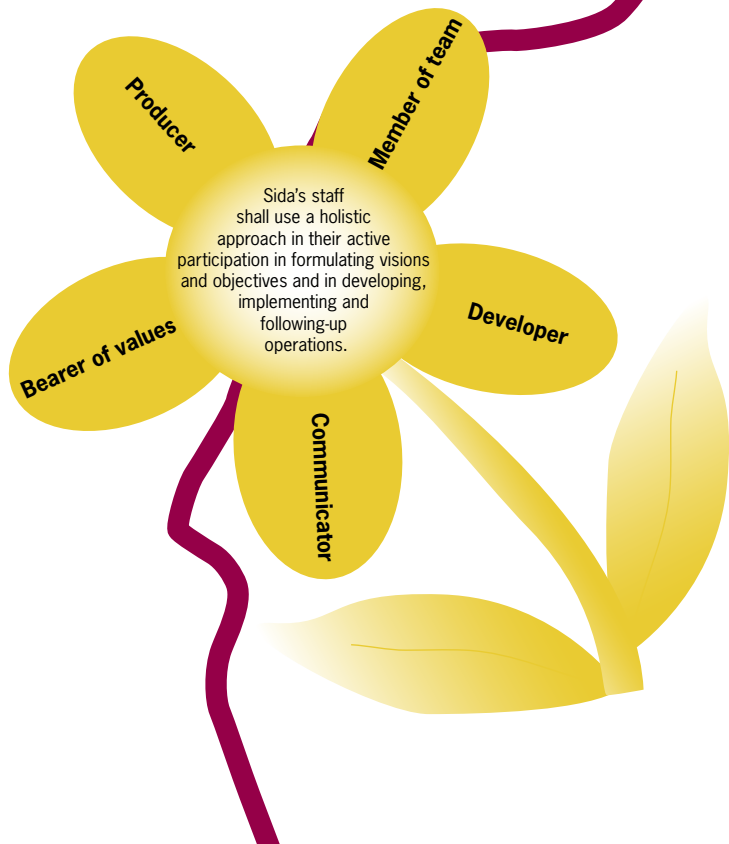
- ❖ inviting cooperating partners to joint training inputs or workshops;
- ❖ inviting another department/embassy to a meeting of the local project committee;
- ❖ reserving time for joint discussions with other groups;
- ❖ designing evaluations as learning processes;
- ❖ creating networks and other meeting places;
- ❖ developing cooperation forms between Sida Stockholm and the field.

Net-based learning

Sida needs to reach all co-workers, all over the world. Support is needed at embassies so that co-workers can develop their competence as concerns vital Sida policies and strategic issues. One important instrument to achieve this is Sida's e-learning platform. Here, training inputs can be created in the form of courses similar to distance education. Courses can also be designed as a combination of face-to-face meetings and net-based learning. The e-learning platform can also function as support when building up networks between the various parts of the organisation, creating preconditions for dialogue and development.

As a co-worker you are...

*... responsible for continuously updating
your own knowledge within the core areas
and developing your competence in line
with the demands of your job...*



How can employees continuously develop their competence? What practical methods are available?

There are numerous ways, here are some of them:

- ❖ find a dialogue partner to discuss problems and opportunities with;
- ❖ participate in networks and working groups as this is a good way to gather information, exchange experience and create contacts for the future;
- ❖ try to make time for individual reflection;
- ❖ participate actively in learning discussions in your working group;
- ❖ participate in courses, seminars and other training inputs;
- ❖ prioritise participation in Sida Stockholm/field seminars and workshops.

You are entitled to support from your manager and colleagues:

- ❖ your manager must provide you with a clear picture of what is required for your job;
- ❖ your manager must also explain the professional development and career paths available within Sida;
- ❖ activities at divisions/embassies must be organized so that there is space for reflection, dialogue and learning.

Analyse and plan your competence development together with your manager during annual planning dialogues. This is also an opportunity to evaluate the year that has passed and establish a plan for your learning during the year to come.

As a manager you play...

... a decisive role as concerns learning in your working group.



Managers are provided with support through the current management development programme. Development of managers is to be regarded as a continuous, essential element of Sida operations. The programme will give opportunities to discuss with, and learn from, colleagues and provide support for the development of the leadership role.

At the same time the contents of the management programme are linked to Sida's overall operations. There will be support and ideas available on leading the work in groups in accordance with new requirements.

Managers are also charged with creating learning opportunities.⁷ This means:

- ❖ organising the work of the group so that there is enough room for development within daily operations. This concerns developing a culture that supports and encourages learning and provides opportunities for joint reflection and analysis;
- ❖ organising opportunities for meetings and learning between staff at Sida Stockholm and in the field;
- ❖ implementing annual, individual planning dialogues with everyone in the group as well as following up that decisions taken during these meetings are implemented;
- ❖ distributing developmental working tasks (participation in project groups, networks etc.) so that all co-workers are afforded the opportunity to learn.

As manager in the field this implies special responsibilities as support for learning is not always as developed or easily accessible in this situation.

⁷ Read more in Sida's Management Policy

At your work- place...

*...efforts must be made to create joint development
and learning activities.*

Final responsibility for this lies with the relevant manager. However everyone concerned plays a part.

What does this mean in practical terms?

Some examples of what can be done:

- ❖ establish a learning plan based on a competence analysis that describes the areas the group wishes to study more closely;
- ❖ reserve time for joint reflection and dialogue concerning operations;
- ❖ document and systematise your own learning;
- ❖ find ways to tell other people about your work and create opportunities for dialogue and exchange of experience.



PEO

Supports learning at Sida

PEO's task is to provide support through training inputs and by acting as a sounding board on learning issues connected to:

- ❖ Processes
- ❖ Methods
- ❖ Organisation
- ❖ Vision and objectives
- ❖ Competence analyses

PEO establishes an annual plan aimed at strengthening learning at Sida.

PEO also works with the continuous development of forms for Sida's learning and consequently welcomes views on the subject from everyone at Sida.



Halving poverty by 2015 is one of the greatest challenges of our time, requiring cooperation and sustainability. The partner countries are responsible for their own development. Sida provides resources and develops knowledge and expertise, making the world a richer place.



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