



**World Health  
Organization**



**engaging**



**investing**



**delivering**

# **Developing Staff through Learning**

**A Global Statement  
January 2006**



## 1 Introduction

The skills required of people at work are increasing. This places more importance on the ability to learn and develop and on the effectiveness of learning at work. Since early 2004, WHO has made a significant investment in the area of staff development. This is a clear signal to all staff across the Organization that learning is important and that this investment is an integral part of improving performance across the Organization. The creation of the Global Learning Committee has also provided a new form of governance for learning in WHO with regard to the identification of learning needs, management of resources and evaluation of learning outcomes. Through targeted investment in learning, WHO's technical excellence can be enhanced, services to Member States can be better focused, plus the use of resources and ways of working can be more effective.

To serve its purpose, staff development and learning in WHO needs to become more:

### **Strategic**

So that the outcomes of the increased investment in learning make a significant and demonstrable contribution to meeting the strategic goals of WHO

### **Systematic**

By ensuring that skills, knowledge and competencies are built in a systematic way, based on careful analysis and feedback to balance the needs of each part of the organization, the different roles and types of work

### **Sustainable**

To recognize that a long-term view is needed if a culture of learning is to be fully integrated into the ways of working

This document sets out a strategic framework for learning in WHO, from key principles to the implementation of programmes. It outlines how learning is defined, how learning priorities and target audiences are identified, and how the policies underpinning learning for all staff in the Organization are agreed. Together, these provide a framework for ensuring that learning in WHO becomes more strategic, systematic and sustainable.

## 2 What is learning?

Provision of learning opportunities is a key part of developing staff. It is important that staff are able to acquire all the necessary skills, knowledge and competencies to perform more efficiently and effectively in their current job. Being able to take advantage of information, knowledge and experience already within the Organization and capturing and leveraging this knowledge in a systematic way is all part of enabling learning to take place effectively on the job. Staff development is an important part of this process, for example when it relates to ensuring staff know their way around the Organization, know where valuable information is stored or know who to go to for assistance.

However, staff development goes beyond structured learning experiences. It is also about creating the environment where knowledge and information are shared openly and where learning from peers is valued and encouraged. Opportunities for learning need to be integrated into our ways of working at WHO.

Learning and staff development at WHO need to be seen as the “normal way of doing business”. It needs to be recognized that:

- effective learning can take place in a variety of different settings, not only in formal workshops
- learning should, and can take place as part of work
- there is an important behavioural side to developing improved performance, which can be captured through generic competencies
- while technical competence is very important, there are other competencies which, if developed, can lead to improved technical performance. For example, improved communication, teamwork or leadership

### Box 1 - Six key principles drive all learning at WHO

- Learning must be strategic. Learning enhances WHO’s ability to meet its strategic goals and objectives. Learning is seen as a strategic and essential investment in staff
- Learning is part of the culture Learning is anchored in the management culture and its support systems
- Learning is a shared responsibility Learning is the shared responsibility of the learner, the supervisor and the Organization. Learning specialists provide support to enable and engage staff and managers in learning activities
- Learning is accessible Methodologies and technologies need to be leveraged to ensure staff have easy access to learning; communication about learning opportunities needs to be clear
- Learning goes beyond training Learning is both a process and an outcome. It includes formal and informal approaches to developing knowledge, skills and behaviours. Learning can be individual, team or project-based/oriented. Learning is not limited to classroom-based training
- Learning must be effective Learning needs are met in an effective way and learning has a positive impact on the quality of the work. To ensure that learning is effective, all learning undertaken must be directly linked to an individual’s or group’s work and should ultimately be reflected in an agreed development plan

## 3 Making learning more strategic

Learning will become more strategic through a two-pronged approach.

Learning throughout WHO must be linked with the strategic objectives and priorities of the Organization. In order to ensure that this happens the **Global Learning Committee** has been established that will be accountable for aligning learning with the strategic directions of WHO. The Committee makes recommendations on the allocation of resources in accordance with these strategic directions and monitors and evaluates results. In all its endeavours, the Committee seeks to create an enabling environment for effective staff learning. Specifically, the Global Learning Committee is responsible for:

- Providing guidance to senior management on corporate learning strategies and priorities and where needed, works to align corporate learning strategies and plans across all levels of WHO

- Recommending to senior management organizational changes for more effective learning delivery including advice on staff learning policies, strategies and priorities
- Providing a quality assurance framework for learning activities across the Organization
- Promoting the building of partnerships to promote learning with relevant internal and external groups

The Committee will be involved in setting global learning priorities which will drive the development and delivery of learning across the Organization. Funds will be allocated against these priority areas to ensure there are strong links between funding, capacity building and the strategic directions of WHO.

### Priority areas for 2006-07 are

- Management and Leadership
- Building Core Competencies
- Technical Skills development
- Managerial and Administrative skills
- Induction of new staff
- Improving learning excellence

In addition, learning needs to be discussed more often. All players in the learning process need to be able to engage in dialogue about learning needs, learning priorities and the impact learning has on work. Different forums, particularly at the local level, need to be established to facilitate this.

## 4 Making learning more systematic

To make learning more systematic requires simultaneous effort on several fronts:

- Being systematic in how learning needs are identified across different roles and locations
- Being systematic in how learning opportunities are targeted to meet those needs
- Being systematic in how activities and programmes are developed, delivered and evaluated

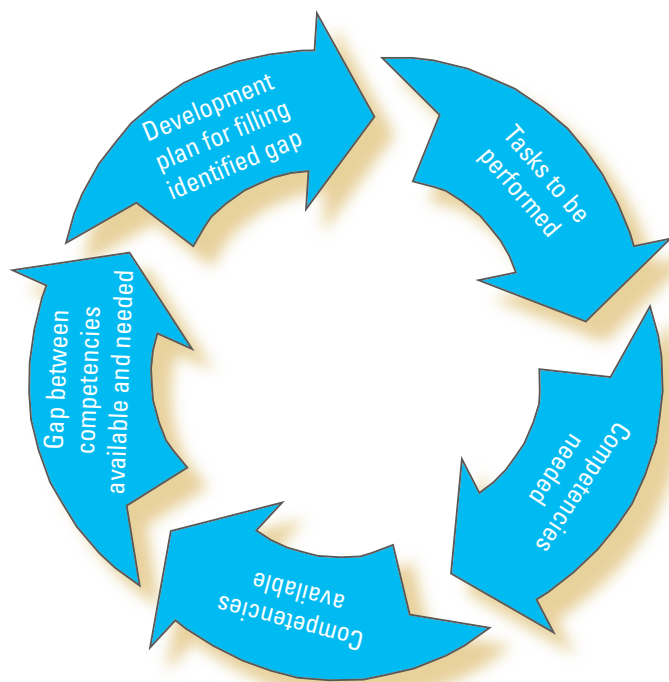
### 4.1 Identifying learning needs

- **At the level of the individual**

Development and learning needs should be identified by the staff member together with their supervisor during discussion about annual workplans. The reflection on the performance for the past year is an integral part of planning development needs for the future. From this process will come the full range of developmental needs related to improved performance: technical, professional, administrative, managerial, individual and team.

The criteria for devoting resources, both time and financial, to filling any development need, are based on the agreed priorities of the staff member and supervisor after taking into account both individual and organizational needs. However, it is essential that there are appropriate checks and balances to ensure organizational, departmental, team and individual needs are considered.

- **Defining needs at the individual and team level includes consideration of the following questions:**
  - What are the specific activities and tasks to be performed?
  - What competencies does the department/team need to be able to fulfil its work programme?
  - What competencies does the department/team have at its disposal currently?
  - What is the gap between existing competencies and needs?
  - Action plan for filling the identified gap



This is illustrated in the following model: The definition of learning requirements for the individual, team and the Organization relies on a partnership approach. The supervisor plays a major role in ensuring staff in their area take advantage of relevant learning opportunities and that development and performance management are integrated activities, with the impact of learning activities being largely evaluated through the performance management and development system.

### Target audiences

While it is desirable to cater for the learning needs of all staff, it is helpful to focus, at least initially, on the needs of specific groups or audiences. It is important to consider if any economies of scale can be achieved when designing and delivering events. Perhaps a greater impact can be achieved because the exchange of learning and experience can be encouraged across groups of staff with similar needs. Similarly, consistency of performance and quality outcomes are easier to monitor and evaluate across similar groups.

With that in mind, learning in WHO is targeted at key audiences where certain synergies can be achieved. They are:

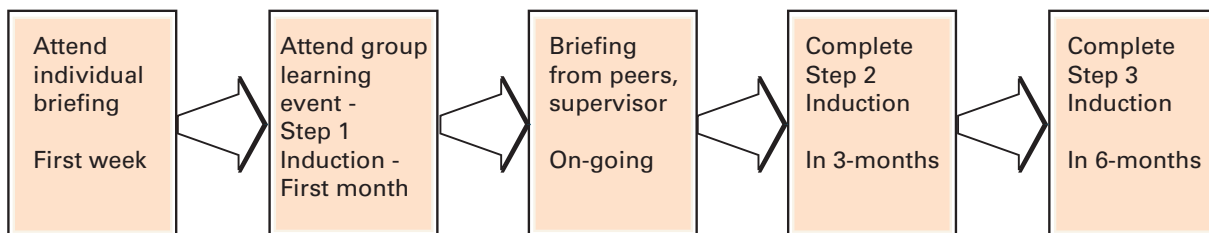
- Management and Leadership group
- Professional and Technical staff
- Administrative and Support staff
- New staff

Learning for all these groups can be structured to meet individual development needs, team development needs or organizational development needs. These groups can also be broken down into sub-categories to further target the learning. For example, within the Professional and Technical staff category, learning and

development is targeted at health-related professionals, technical professionals, administrative professionals and junior professionals.

Once target audiences are set, it then becomes relatively easy to determine **learning pathways** for groups of staff or positions in the Organization. These learning pathways would typically set out sequences of training modules, learning activities and individual programmes which together provide a sequence or path for staff in particular work areas to develop competency over time. They assist staff and supervisors to select the most appropriate learning options to meet development needs.

*Example of a learning pathway for new staff at HQ:*



- **At the level of the Organization**

WHO is a large organization with many needs; some needs are common across the Organization and form elements of what it is to be part of WHO, other needs are quite specific, relating to a particular programme or location. Learning needs follow this pattern as well. As such, one of the key foundations of the learning model is its **decentralized approach** to match the decentralized nature of WHO. While the desired outcomes of learning should be largely common, there is a need for flexibility in how to achieve these common outcomes.

### 4.2 A decentralized approach

The basic principle here is that staff development opportunities should be made available as close as possible to the level of decision-making on staff development needs. Given that the discussion on development planning takes place between the manager and staff member as part of the performance management and development process, this means that resources should be available close to this point of decision-making. At the same time, economies of scale need to be sought, as well as the need for some consistency of practice and some quality control.

A framework to illustrate implementation includes:

- A range of global or generic programmes
- Tailored or specific programmes
- Region-specific programmes
- Country-specific programmes

In cases where appropriate learning cannot be met through global, office-specific or country-specific programmes, individual learning might be needed. This can be provided both internally, through self-study for example or through externally-provided programmes.

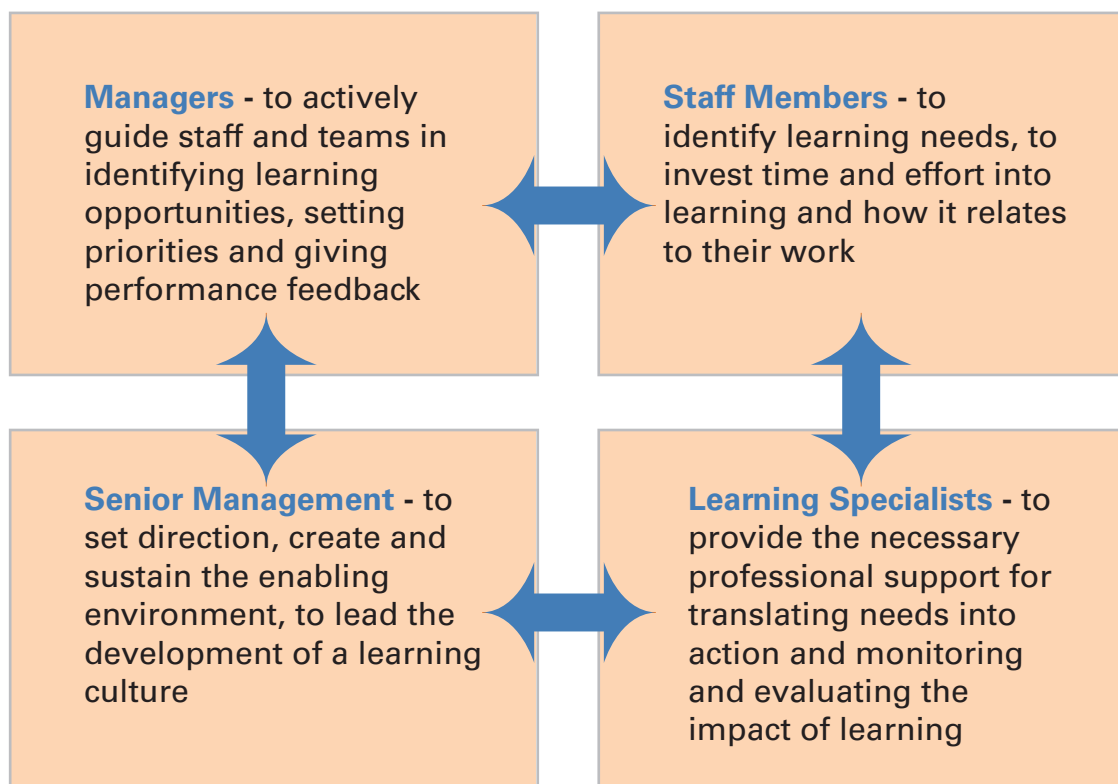
### 5 Making learning more sustainable

There is a two-pronged approach to making learning more sustainable:

- By devoting time to learning - encouraging the notion that learning is part of one's job and not an "add on" to work, it has been agreed across the Organization to adopt a benchmark of devoting **5% of individual staff time** to learning. This benchmark will address the appeal from many staff that they do not "have time" for learning, or that they are "too busy working".
- By setting aside dedicated financial resources - establishing the **Global Staff Development Fund**, to capture **2 % of staff costs** dedicated to learning development and delivery.

### 6 A Teamwork Approach

Having a vision of a learning culture is important; however it must be translated into clear roles and responsibilities, with identifiable actors. Achieving a more strategic, systematic and sustainable approach to staff development requires strong teamwork between four key players: senior managers, staff members, managers and learning specialists. Staff and managers need to take a clear message from the overall organizational commitment to learning provided by senior management. Learning specialists need to work with staff and managers to supply quality learning in line with their strategic demands and be accountable to senior management for the return on investment in learning.



## 7 How will we know we have been successful?

The Global Learning Committee (GLC) has a key role to play in the monitoring and evaluation of staff development activities. The Committee oversees a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system to ensure that the investment in learning is aligned with the agreed learning principles (refer to BOX1). The following are examples of indicators which will be used by the GLC as part of their accountability framework.

### How will we know when learning is strategic?

- When there is a clear link between the objectives of WHO, the objectives of the team and the objectives of each individual;
- When performance management discussions between all staff and managers identify learning activities which relate to both organizational and individual needs.

### How will we know when learning is part of the culture?

- When managers show their support for learning by being open to learning from all, including staff and peers;
- When learning is fully integrated into PMDS, reflected in objectives which demonstrate how managers and staff are measured against their support for learning in WHO;
- When managers are held accountable for promoting learning.

### How will we know when learning is a shared responsibility?

- When managers and staff jointly drive the demand for learning and are proactive in identifying suitable opportunities;
- When supervisors and senior managers respect the 5% of staff time and 2% of staff costs allocated to learning, even in the event of conflicting organizational priorities and budgetary constraints;
- When learning and development at WHO become the "normal way of doing business".

### How will we know when learning is accessible?

- When learning takes place in using many different technologies, methodologies and media;
- When access to just-in-time learning is increased, so that learning can take place when needed;
- When communication about available learning opportunities is effective.

### How will we know when learning is more than training?

- When continuous learning is the normal way of doing business and all staff recognize that learning can take place in a variety of settings;
- When staff and managers throughout WHO are familiar with different learning methodologies and are able to apply them appropriately.

### How will we know that learning is effective?

- When learning activities are measured in terms of their impact on the organizational performance of WHO;
- When learning at the organizational level is measured.

## 8 In conclusion

Targeted investment in learning, a partnership approach and clear measures for evaluating success will ensure that learning in WHO becomes more strategic, systematic and sustainable.

