Case Study 10

HR/OD Intervention Focus: Strengthening Monitoring and Evaluation

Accurate Assessment for Better Educational Programs

As clearly stated in the 2001 Governance of Basic Education Act (RA 9155), the mandate of the Department of Education (DepEd) is the delivery of quality basic education in the whole country. The Department has had to deal with the different economic, social and cultural scenarios in each region as it tries to fulfil this directive, which is why it becomes all the more important to establish an accurate monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and performance management system for DepEd's programs and projects.

Dexter Pante, senior education program specialist from DepEd's Project Development and Evaluation Division, points out that there is very little data on the performance of the Department's programs. "Our understanding about monitoring, evaluation, and research was quite limited," he says. DepEd used to have very little information on the impact of their educational programs, and this was a glaring gap that needed to be addressed. Fortunately, Pante learned from DepEd management about the Australia Awards Scholarships (AAS) and proceeded to make a go for it.

Opportunity to improve craft

"I immediately applied for the scholarship program because I realised that this would be an opportunity to enhance my qualifications as well as learn and improve on my craft," Mr. Pante explains. To be able to successfully handle the responsibility and challenges before him, he needed to strengthen and advance his know-how on evaluation with new learning, new tools and techniques. He recognises the big role of M&E in his line of work because it is crucial to the performance management of programs and projects, which is one of the key result areas of DepEd. "It is a policy of the Department of Budget and Management that no program will be funded unless they are able to provide a sound and credible evidence about the performance of their own program," he explains.

Driven by this new policy, Pante strove to get the scholarship grant so he could take up Masters in Evaluation at the University of Melbourne (UniMelb) in 2013. Pante found graduate studies at UniMelb rigorous, but credits the PAHRODF for providing him and other scholars with mentors who helped them prepare for their respective academic programs. He also remembered being accommodated well by the Australian Embassy and the Australia Awards Office, but he is especially grateful to the support from DepEd and his immediate supervisor, a previous AAS scholar who gave him tips on how to prepare for examinations and step up to the challenges of academic life in Australia.

Assessing educational programs in two weeks

Pante recalls the timely direction given by the Undersecretary of Programs and Projects, who formed a team to conduct a rapid assessment of DepEd's educational programs. With the undersecretary's guidance, a REAP entitled "A Rapid Assessment of the Department of Education Programs and Projects" became a harmonised project of eight AAS recipients from DepEd. Pante worked with other scholars whose degree programs were on project management, research methodology, school leadership, public administration, and public policy. Together, they came up with the terms of reference or evaluation and research design for the rapid assessment. Pante notes the importance of this step in "determining what kind of research question we are trying to answer." He also stressed that they made sure to adhere to the guidelines of ethical research as they were conducting interviews.

Pante and his team were given only two weeks to assess the performance of their educational programs, however, and this raises some questions on the credibility of their research report. To address this, they engaged external evaluators from the World Bank and the Australian Aid to examine the validity of their report. Pante adds that the new knowledge, tools and techniques they gained from their studies in Australia helped the team deliver. "We were able to apply what we learned in Australia when we started developing and implementing Rapid Assessment," he shares. Whereas they utilised only the logical framework as tool before, they applied other mixed-method approaches such as theory of change and program logic model this time around.

Findings from the rapid assessment revealed that it is imperative for DepEd to have an effective M&E system because their area of responsibility covers the entire country, with each region characterized by different social, economic and cultural situations. Problems, challenges, gaps and even opportunities were identified. The team also found out that M&E was being done differently throughout the country, so they highlighted the need to harmonise these different frameworks and have a unified and functional M&E system set up, especially now that the K to 12 program is being implemented in phases. They also recommended that parallel mechanisms, programs and systems be put in place at different levels – from the school level up to the division and regional levels.

Gains from REAP and AAS

Pante happily reports that his entire AAS journey have been very positive – from applying for the scholarship to developing and implementing the REAP with his colleagues and even reporting on their conclusions.

His team's REAP also turned out to be a good opportunity for the whole organisation to finally review its M&E system, assess its monitoring and evaluation capabilities and most importantly, evaluate the performance of their education programs. Rapid Assessment had a genuine and positive impact on DepEd, as the undersecretary used it to redesign and repackage several of the Department's programs and projects to eliminate duplication and overlap. For example, those with similar objectives, target clients and almost identical strategies were harmonised into one program. Education programs and projects were then rationalised to address specific needs of the curriculum and ensure the efficient delivery of quality education in the country.

To increase DepEd's limited capacity to conduct program and project evaluation, Pante and his team also took steps to share their learnings on M&E and performance management with their colleagues in the Department. They came up with mentoring programs and brown bag sessions in order to share and impart their technical expertise. Services of other M&E experts from both within and outside the Department were also engaged for this professional development initiative.

Pante's time in Australia as well as his experiences in relation to his REAP has also boosted his confidence not only in his presentation skills but also in the credibility of the conclusions of their research. He has also come to understand the importance of taking a utilisation-focused approach towards research and evaluation, as the likelihood that findings will be utilised increases if the needs of end-users such as policy makers are also taken into consideration.

In the future, Pante hopes to "build a critical mass of evaluation specialists and research specialists who will provide good, sound and credible information to management so that they could decide on what the best-performing programs are." Fortunately, this may happen sooner than he thinks, as many of DepEd's personnel now appreciate the role of M&E in enhancing or improving the performance of their own programs.

Dexter Pante finished his Masters in Evaluation at the University of Melbourne (UniMelb) in 2013. His REAP was all about a rapid assessment of the Department of Education programs and projects.