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Tips for trainers: matrix ranking of PRA tools

John Rowley

Introduction

The use of a PRA tool to assess PRA tools within the context of a training course provides an opportunity to look at the effects of a tool on an insider and to assess the learning of the trainees during the training course. It also emphasises that PRA tools can be used in almost any situation and need not be confined to appraisal interviews in rural situations. The exercise should be done when the trainees have some experience of using a range of tools in a number of different situations. This may normally fall at the end of the training course, but ideally, it would occur when there was still some time to use the tools again.

Objectives

- To share ideas on the usefulness of different PRA tools
- To obtain feedback on a training course
- To explore ideas on being an insider asked to carry out a PRA exercise

Preparation

There is no particular preparation required for this exercise, other than reminding yourself of the tools that have been covered in the training course. Ask one or two trainees to act as facilitators if the group is large.

Time

Allow about 2 hours, as for matrix ranking exercises.

Procedure

1. Start as if facilitating a matrix ranking exercise with the entire group. Brainstorm a list of all the PRA tools that have been used in the training course and during practice sessions. Arrange these in a vertical column.
2. Get the group to start to produce a list of criteria. Use questions such as: 'How do you choose between the different tools?' 'What are the differences between the tools that you consider when deciding what to do next?'. Set out the criteria in a horizontal line above the list of tools.
3. Some trainees will recognise that you are setting up a matrix ranking exercise and, at some point, you will be able to stop running the exercise and either hand it over to a group to complete or hand it over to one of the chosen facilitators to continue.
4. Allow the group or groups to carry out the matrix ranking. Observe the process and the quality of discussion that goes into deciding on the rankings. Ask the group (directly or via the facilitator) which tool they would use if they could have only one. Call a halt to the process when things have gone as far as they usefully can.
5. Take feedback from the facilitator(s) on the process. Was the participation good? Was the discussion good? Did the participants explore their ideas on the tools or were there times that they just assigned ranks to the tools without much exchange of views?

Figure 1. Example of a completed matrix from a training course in Nigeria [Photo: John Rowley]

	elicit responses	easy to apply	easy to interpret	good for identifying local capital	promote active participation
Prisoners Dilemma	6	6	6	3	1
Pie + Groups	4	4	5	2	3
Network - Products	1	1	2	7	4
Network - Social	2	2	1	1	2
Network - facilities	3	3	3	6	7
Proximity institutions mapping	5	5	4	5	5
Fish hunt story	7	7	7	4	6

6. Ask participants if they learned about what others in the group felt about the tools. Ask if they learned something about what they themselves think about the tools. Take general comments from participants.
7. Then ask the participants if they would have given the same rankings as the group finally decided on if they had worked on their own. Ask those who say that they would not have given the same rankings whether or not they agree with the group's final rankings. Ask those who now agree with the group's rankings how they changed their opinion.

The precise reasoning is not important. What is important is the realisation that people can share ideas and change their opinion whilst doing a PRA exercise.

Comments

The final bit of feedback from people who admit to changing their minds is a crucial element of any participatory exercise. The interviewees are not simply a source of information but are people with differing ideas that can change; just like us!

The feedback on ranking tools should also give the trainer some idea of how well they have done in the training. Where a tool is ranked very poorly against other tools for a range of criteria, it may be that some more work is required. One would expect mapping tools to be ranked highly as being easy to use and tools like Venn Diagrams as more difficult to use. Where a tool is ranked badly, due to some quality that strikes the trainer as unusual, some more explanation may be required. For example, a mapping tool that is ranked as providing very little information might raise your suspicions.

- **John Rowley**, 76 Fairacres Road, Oxford, OX4 1TG, UK. Email: jqr@compuserve.com