World Food Programme

A Report
by the Office of Evaluation

*Closing the Learning Loop –
Harvesting Lessons from
Evaluations: Report of Phase 1*

Lessons learnt can save lives

(Survey respondent)

Rome, 8 March 2009

Contents

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Executive Summary

WFP's Evaluation Policy (2008) confirms the dual purpose of evaluation for accountability and learning. In follow-up to the Peer Review of the Evaluation Function in WFP (2007), it also commits OEDE to enhancing the 'learning' purpose in three ways. One of these is to "develop a repository of evaluation lessons that is easily accessible and useful" so as to contribute to continuously improving performance and results.

This is the report of Phase 1 of a project to take this forward. It looks at requirements from the user's perspective. The main text gives a conceptual framework, analyses user requirements and sources currently used for finding lessons from experience. It also highlights staff perceptions of key enablers and inhibitors to applying lessons, and makes proposals for the repository and accompanying system. It is based on document review, a survey of WFP professional staff, interviews with key informants from principal user groups, and a scan of peer organisations.

Ideally, the learning element of evaluation should be linked to a larger organisational knowledge management strategy, which does not exist yet in WFP. Knowledge management seems to have been considered important but not urgent and not yet a priority. Nevertheless, there is a strong call from WFP staff to bring some coherence to the wealth of knowledge currently compartmentalised across the Organization among 78 sites on WFPGo and in Docustore. The PGM, policy papers, Library, and (soon) the User Guide are important sources of guidance, but not yet adequate. In the end, the effectiveness of an OEDE initiative to facilitate greater use of lessons from evaluations will be enhanced or limited by developments in that wider corporate context. It is also dependent on the quality of the evaluation process and reports themselves.

Recent policy evaluations have found that the biggest challenge lies in building knowledge that helps staff translate policy into practice. Some of the reasons for gaps between policy and practice are systemic, but there is also scope for building the institutional memory with lessons from evaluations in order to reduce that gap. Research for this Project also found the greatest un-served need for information about lessons from experience is at the level of operations staff. By far the most common purposes for which staff seek lessons from experience is to solve implementation problems and for practical ideas during programme design in order to improve current and future programme quality. Practice is very variable, even where evaluation recommendations are relevant and clear.

Current OEDE products (workshops, evaluation briefs and the Annual Evaluation Report) show fairly low rates of use and low ratings for ease of accessibility, but high usefulness ratings from those who have used them (although the AER is rated lower by management than by others). This suggests that a significant part of the challenge is to make the products known. In line with the body of knowledge about adult learning, workshops are one of the most useful 'products', but least used, largely due to time and resource constraints. However, web technology offers new flexibility to present written information in different lengths to suit the reader's interests and availability. Besides the Programme Review Committee – which comes very late in the decision making process – there are no formal mechanisms for dissemination of lessons from evaluations to internal stakeholders at moments when they might most need the information.

Despite broad diversity between functions and location concerning topics of interest for learning, there is also convergence around a few key ones, such as capacity development, cash and vouchers, local procurement and livelihoods. These are topics on which the new Strategic Plan 2008-2011 also makes new demands. Further, there is a high demand for guidance from experience on monitoring and reporting and emergency needs assessment.

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The first port of call for advice and lessons from experience on any given topic are the Regional Advisers and the technical units. They are key users of new knowledge/lessons from evaluations, key disseminators and also key knowledge gatherers. This opens up possibilities for a deeper collaboration with OEDE in creating "knowledge assets".

Overall, WFP staff tend to use other UN agencies and as external sources of lessons from experience significantly more often than research institutions. However, there are also indications that well-timed, high quality products, even from lesser known sources, pulling together state-of-the-art lessons and Best Practice on given topics within the humanitarian sector may be considered very useful by WFP staff, when distributed proactively by other means. OEDE evaluations can be fed into these wider research processes and OEDE could continue to play a relatively informal role in dissemination. Specialist function-related websites (both internal and external) are also important sources of learning.

In staff perceptions, the single most important factor enabling lessons to be applied is strong leadership. This needs to be backed by management support and (for operational lessons) flexibility in programming. The survey findings suggest a staff perception – predominantly at country level - that lessons requiring change to the way operations are carried out are not always adequately supported. This message is consistent with points made in interviews and evaluation findings about translation of policy into practice mentioned above. For both strategy/policy lessons and operational lessons, lack of clarity over who is responsible to act is also perceived as a common inhibitor in WFP.

WFP has an action-oriented culture. The negative side of this is that there is not a consistent habit of asking "What has been our past experience?" before planning forward and staff have found that expressing a need to know more before taking action can be perceived as a weakness. When coupled with perceived low levels of communication between different parts of the Organization, special attention is needed to enable 'doing things better'.

The 97 OEDE evaluation reports completed since 1995 are a principal source for harvesting lessons and 10 OEDE-managed evaluations added each year. The quality of substance and depth of analysis of early evaluations are variable. But the standards of all evaluations should improve under the new quality assurance system, including of decentralized evaluations and self-evaluations.

In conclusion, the combination of an action-oriented culture, the relatively low level of current corporate attention to knowledge management, rapid and constant change in the external environment and the fact that the evaluation function is still working on building its credibility and reputation in certain quarters, creates an environment of both potential and also challenge to harvesting and making accessible wider lessons from evaluations The challenge is to ensure the right **content** in the right **place** at the right **moment** in the right **form** (including language). The diversity of users demands a range of approaches and products: some proactive, some reactive.

OEDE's approach needs to be based on two principles: first, a client-service orientation, and second, a shift from organising by source (i.e. evaluation) to organising by topic and by user. The report makes 14 recommendations on action that OEDE can already take as a contribution to enhancing knowledge management, to be tested in Phase 2 of the Project:
a) to develop products and dissemination strategies tailored to specific groups of users;
b) to plug into existing corporate processes at an early stage in ways geared to support corporate learning; and
c) to improve access to and search potential in the database of evaluation reports.

It also gives suggestions on further improvements to aspects of the evaluation process that would enhance learning as well as preliminary ideas to increase potential for knowledge sharing in the Organization as a whole.

1. Introduction

1.   As in many UN agencies, evaluation in WFP has the dual purpose of accountability and learning. There are many ways to facilitate various types of learning actively at different stages of the evaluation process: at the design stage, during the evaluation, at the end, and subsequently. The Peer Review of the Evaluation Function in WFP (2007) found that evaluation makes "insufficient contribution to knowledge building within WFP and virtually none among partners". A good contribution is made at Executive Board level through thematic and strategic evaluations and syntheses. Beyond this, harvesting and disseminating lessons [post-evaluation] was found to be insufficiently proactive, not well integrated with other learning initiatives and missing opportunities[1].

2.   In follow up, the new *Evaluation Policy* (approved November 2008) commits OEDE to "closing the learning loop" subsequent to an evaluation in three principal ways:
*   "communicating evaluation findings clearly and in a timely manner to support decision making processes at various levels;
*   **developing a repository of evaluation lessons that is easily accessible and useful;** [so that the lessons can be applied in other contexts too]
*   organizing the informal consultation on evaluation to share evaluation insights".
 This is part of the element of "accessibility" under the principle of utility of evaluation. It is also
 in line with the element in the Evaluation Management Plan 2008-9 on 'Feedback & Reporting'.
 This commits OEDE to providing feedback into decision-making processes … In a timely way …
 to ensure evaluation lessons are learned and applied.

3.   This report concerns Phase 1 of a project to take forward the second of the bulleted points above (in bold).   The project **purpose** is to develop a repository of lessons from evaluation and accompanying system to contribute to continuously improving performance and results. The emphasis on usefulness to stakeholders determined the project approach: an analysis of the nature and extent of user demand, investigation of whether OEDE can meet that demand and how. There are 4 phases: user analysis (Phase 1); prototype development; prototype testing; systems development (see Approach Paper at Annex 1).

4.   Phase 1 aimed at providing an analysis of user requirements (in terms of content, level of specificity, packaging and the extent to which lessons must be personalized); identification of priority users (based on level of interest and the match of requirements to potential OEDE offer); and to propose a framework for the repository and accompanying system. Phase 1 comprised document review[2]; a survey of the perceptions of WFP professional staff (excluding Senior Management) on their requirements for lessons from experience, including evaluations; 40 interviews with a sample of users from principal user groups and with key informants on past experiences aimed at enhancing learning in WFP[3]; scan of the methods used by similar organisations perceived as making headway on harvesting lessons from evaluations[4]. This Phase was greatly supported by an Informal Advisory Group[5] on the survey design and wider input through interviews and correspondence.

5.   There were 340 respondents to the survey and around 200 to 230 respondents to each question[6]. This is not statistically representative, but enabled us to canvass views of more than

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[1] Baker et al, 2007, *Peer Review: Evaluation Function at the World Food Programme (WFP)*
[2] List of Documents & Websites Consulted is at Annex 2
[3] List of People Consulted is at Annex 3.
[4] In particular, Asian Development Bank, IFAD, ALNAP, Global Environment Facility, CARE and with lesser reference to World Bank.
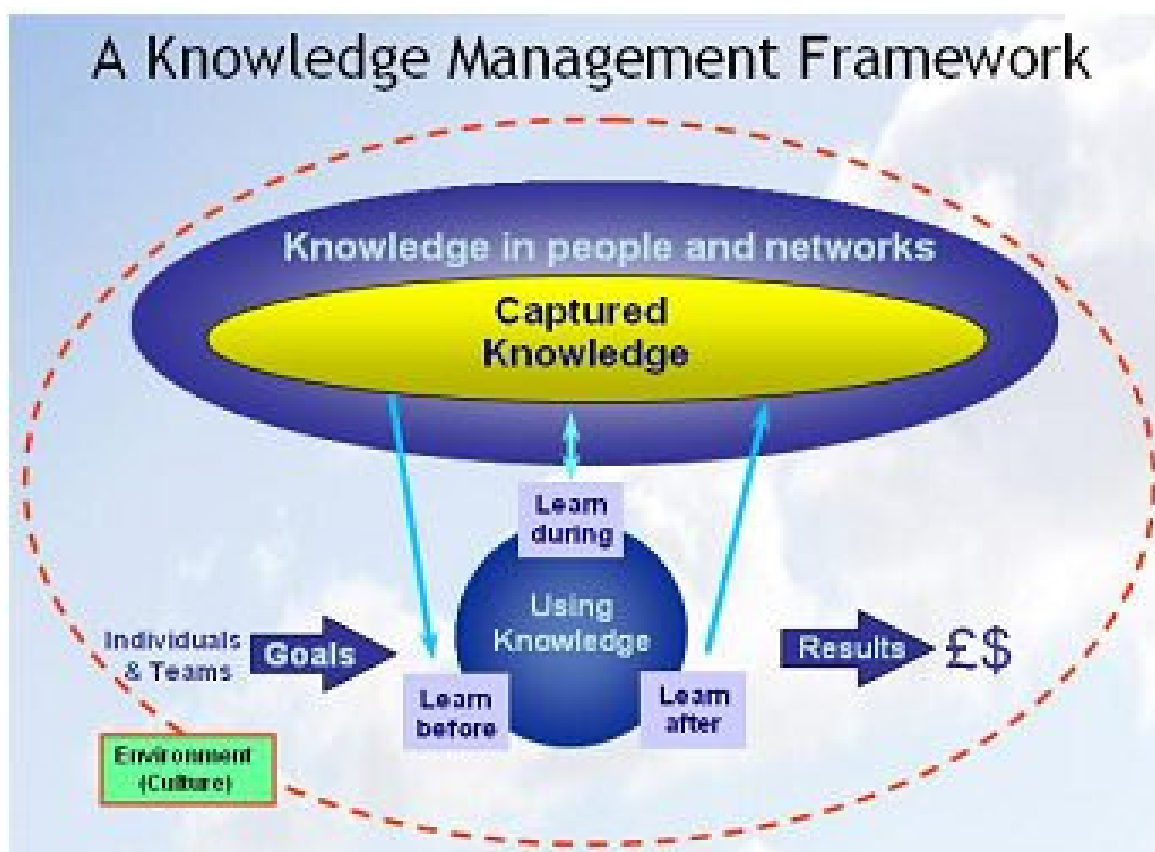[5] See Acknowledgements
[6] Analysis of responses is at Annex 4.

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possible by any other method available to us. When triangulated with interviews and literature it offers sufficient basis to move forward on this Project, but wider conclusions should not be drawn from it. Because twice as many people responded from certain functions (programme and management) than others, used a weighted index to analyse the top choices. Responses were analysed by function[7], location, and gender. Only significant differences are mentioned below.

2. The Role of Evaluation in Knowledge Management in WFP

2.1 Conceptual Framework

Fig.1 A Knowledge Management Framework
Source: Collison & Parcell, 2001

6.   The Peer Review found that "Ideally, the learning element [of evaluation] should be linked to a larger organisational knowledge management strategy (p.82)." However, WFP does not yet have a corporate knowledge management strategy and no unit has been formally assigned responsibility for developing one, although it has a natural place in the vision of the new Performance and Accountability Division (OEDAM). Although both Senior Management and the Executive Board appear to consider 'knowledge management' and learning important, they do not seem to be perceived as urgent and have not yet received priority.

7.   A major challenge for this Project is to reconcile the tension inherent in approaching this from the user's perspective (on the one hand) and taking initiative in the absence of a corporate strategy for knowledge management and learning on the other. Evaluations are just one means of

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[7] The main functions used for analysis were programme, programme design, logistics, corporate services and management. Divergences on the part of policy and 'other' (e.g. fundraising and security) were noted, where significant. Responses were received from staff located at Country Offices (including sub-offices), Regional Bureaux, Liaison Offices or Headquarters.

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generating, identifying and capturing knowledge from the Organization's experience. Others include: policy reviews, specialist studies and research, workshops, conferences etc and a myriad of informal exchanges between staff. While evaluations are a significant means of capturing WFP-specific knowledge, some of the most useful activities or strategies to enhance learning urged from the 'user's perspective' are beyond OEDE's mandate and sphere of direct influence.

8.   At its most basic level, a strong call is made by WFP staff for help in bringing some coherence to the wealth of knowledge and information currently fragmented and compartmentalised across the Organization[8]. In the survey and interviews, this was often expressed as a call for one central repository for lessons. But the plea is not about controlling information flows. Rather, it is a plea to develop ways to help staff find their way quickly and easily (and so efficiently) to existing answers to their questions, so they do not re-invent the wheel and risk repeating common mistakes. Answers to questions like: "What do we know about how to prepare a good EMOP in flooding?" "What are the top 20 points I need to know about local procurement for school feeding or home-grown school feeding without making a full-scale programme? Who has done this before and can give me some pointers?"

9.   Currently, the PGM provides some helpful guidance, organised by topic. But its purpose is normative guidance and therefore often procedural. The Library provides a tailor-made, on-request service, mostly used by managers. It has the crucial advantage of incorporating both external and internal knowledge. The 'PASS[9]-it-on' briefly provided a unique forum for connecting staff and exchange of non-official learning experiences, which can be especially important for new topics (e.g. climate change; cash transfers/pilots). It provided short, practical bites of information, searchable by topic. These characteristics were specifically mentioned as positive by several interviewees. But it had other limitations and has been inactive for 2 years. The Policy Division (where it was housed) is reportedly considering developing another knowledge management initiative.

10. Finally, the 'User Guide' – an intranet website being developed by the Performance and Accountability Division (OEDAM) – aims to become an easily accessible 'First Stop Shop' on implementing the new Strategic Framework. It aims to provide programme tools on key topics, minimum standards and (access to) the wider body of knowledge - e.g. through hyperlinks and syntheses of clusters of issues with content provided by technical divisions.   For the rest, the user is left to dive into Docustore and search through the 78 sites on WFPGo (the intranet).

11. In the end, the effectiveness of any initiative from OEDE on harvesting and sharing lessons from evaluations will be enhanced or limited by the wider corporate context. OEDE's role is necessary but very far from sufficient to enhance corporate learning. The good news is that there are new opportunities and some clearly expressed interest in managing knowledge better to aid learning and improve performance. The revival of Results-Based Management presupposes a cycle of planning, doing, monitoring, reflecting, adjusting and re-planning.

12. In the meantime, in the absence of a corporate knowledge management and learning strategy, this Project has sought to focus on whatever constructive steps OEDE can already take to contribute its part, while also taking opportunities for collaboration with other knowledge management and learning-related processes (inside and outside WFP): a "start with what you can and work outwards" approach.

13. The second major challenge for this Project was to focus on the potential for harvesting lessons from individual evaluations for wider learning beyond the programmes or operations that

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[8] Also noted by the Peer Review (2007). p.70
[9] Practical Advice Sharing System

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were directly evaluated (largely double-loop learning[10]). Many respondents consider there is still a great deal of work to do to improve the extent to which lessons from individual evaluations are used in the immediate programmes evaluated (single loop learning). Why talk about the former before you have mastered the latter?

14. A third and underlying challenge is that clearly the quality of the knowledge captured through evaluation depends on the quality of the **evaluation product** and the **evaluation process**. This was raised repeatedly during interviews. A good quality evaluation product is essential to generate useful information, which enhances the likelihood that it will be used. The quality of the product depends in turn partly on the quality of the **evaluation process** itself. Moreover, a good evaluation process can enable 'learn during'[11] and can generate 'learn after'.

15. In the last two years, the WFP Evaluation Office has done much work to improve the quality of both evaluation process and product for OEDE-managed evaluations through the establishment and application of the Evaluation Quality Assurance System (EQAS). Continuing and extending this to decentralized evaluations and self-evaluation are essential pre-requisites in order to generate information that is worth harvesting and sharing, although outside the scope of this Project.

2.2 What are "Lessons"?

Table 1 – Definitions[12]

Lesson	**A lesson is an instructive advice that imparts new knowledge (or captures previously tacit knowledge), based on experience, to enable a better respons to a similar situation in the future. Strategic lessons are drawn from repeated experiences in separate cases and capable of application in others.**
Recommendation	An advice telling someone what is the best thing to do. It may be applicable to broad class of situations (as in thematic evaluations) or specific to one.
Conclusion	A logical inference or judgment drawn after consideration of related findings.
Finding	A piece of information that is discovered/observed during an examination of a programme or operation (or several).

16. The definitions in Table 1 have been developed as part of this Project. 'Lessons' will usually be distilled from evaluation findings and conclusions, rather than recommendations. Every person has his/her own levels of existing knowledge. What is a 'lesson' for one person – in the sense of new knowledge - is already well known to another and accepted as part of the existing 'body of knowledge' on that topic. However, WFP staff (especially in the field) are dealing with a wide range of issues. Most members of staff will have certain gaps in their previous experience and specific areas of expertise.

17. Lessons drawn from evaluation reports can broadly be drawn into one of the categories shown in Table 2. For wider learning, lessons will usually be identified by or distilled from strategic evaluations or synthesis from clusters of evaluations of single operations (and possibly, decentralized evaluations or self-evaluations). These correspond only partially to the various types of knowledge that can be identified - see para.18 below and Table 3.

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[10] Argyris & Schon, 1978, *Organizational Learning: A Theory of Action* Perspective. "Double-loop learning" asks the question "Are we doing the right thing?" and not only "Are we doing the thing right?" (single-loop learning).

[11] Especially through mid-term and real-time evaluations.

[12] All definitions adapted from www.dictionary.cambridge.org and www.merriam-webster.com with additional reference to definitions used in other agencies.

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Table 2 – Examples of Lessons from Evaluations		
Type		**Example**
Strategic (that can inform policy)		Taking a gender rather than women-focused approach will ensure that male family members take responsibility for food security along with women[13] **AND** In highly insecure conflict settings, remote management may be the most appropriate way for international agencies to engage, develop and maintain their operations.[14]
Operational	Management	[In a situation where transport infrastructure has been destroyed] a strong and well-equipped national military force can bring important benefits to the logistical aspects of humanitarian response…[15] **AND** Coordination of humanitarian response is usually more effective at a local rather than national level and participation works better through decentralized structures. But in a highly centralised institutional system, one useful approach may be to facilitate secondment of experienced staff from other governments and trusted sources into the government authorities (which proved effective in the Tsunami response)[16]
	Technical	The respective value of cash and food wage determines community preferences. Where the monthly wage offered can buy more than the current monthly food basket, beneficiaries prefer cash. And where not, they prefer payment in food. Since invariably this relative value also reflects the food availability in local markets, the issue of access to food need not be seen as a separate issue. However relative value (and thus preference) does depend on the timing of distribution over the course of the year …. food becomes more valuable over the course of the dry season.[17]
Systemic[18]		[WFP's] main funding mechanisms' dependence on food delivery is not conducive to a systematic approach to capacity development.[19]

18. Collison & Parcell[20] point out that people sometimes interchange the terms "know-how " and "knowledge". They argue that in fact knowledge has many facets, as outlined in Table 3 (below). To truly extract the value, an organization needs to look beyond "know-how" alone and understand what other aspects of knowledge are most valuable and valued in the organization.

Table 3 – Types of Knowledge	
Know-how	The processes, procedures, techniques and tools you use to get something done. It cannot always be written down completely – e.g. riding a bicycle
Know-what	The facts required to complete a task, the materials needed to make something, the information needed in order to take a decision – e.g. ingredients for high energy biscuits. Can be written down, 'codified'.
Know-why	Strategic insight: understanding the context of your role and value of your actions - information on the "big picture". Why are we doing this? Where are we trying to get to? What would happen if we didn't do it? Where do I fit in all this?
Know-when	Understanding of the best time to do something or to stop doing something. Sense of timing.
Know-who	Knowledge about relationships, contacts and networks – who to go to for help
Know-where	Sources of information, often linked to know-who

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[13] *Evaluation of WFP's Gender Policy (2003-2007): Enhanced Commitments to Women to ensure food security*, 2008

[14] From ALNAP, 2007, *Cyclone Nargis: Lessons for Operational Agencies*

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid

[17] WFP, 2007 *Mid-Term Evaluation of PRRO Enabling Livelihood Promotion & Protection in Ethiopia*

[18] Underlying factors common to the organization as a whole, affecting its performance in many areas.

[19] *Evaluation of WFP's Capacity Development Policy and Operations*, 2008

[20] Source: Collison, C., & G. Parcell, 2001, *Learning to Fly*

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2.3 Extent to which Lessons are Currently Drawn from Evaluations

19. As mentioned above, the Peer Review (2007) found that a good contribution to knowledge building is made at Executive Board level through thematic and strategic evaluations. The Executive Board has traditionally been the "primary user" of evaluation and primarily for accountability purposes.

20. The Peer Review also found that evaluation was barely used in policy making[21]. However, recent policy evaluations[22] found that WFP thematic policies were nevertheless on top of the latest issues at the time they were written and generally realistic and relevant.[23] The bigger challenge appears to lie in building knowledge that helps the Organization translate policy into practice. The same evaluations found a significant gap here for a number of reasons. Some of these reasons are systemic (and beyond the scope of this Project). But interviews for this Project confirmed other findings of the Peer Review that there is scope for evaluation to contribute to capturing and building the institutional memory with lessons from experience gained in implementation in order to reduce that gap and improve the quality of performance. Almost all of the additional comments received in the survey stressed improvement of the quality of future programmes for better effectiveness and efficiency as a purpose for seeking lessons from experience, including evaluations.

21. A second consistent and related message from interviews was that, overall within WFP, there is not a consistent habit of asking "What is our past experience? What can evaluations tell us on this subject?" at moments of review and planning forward. OEDE needs to take a proactive role to prompt and encourage this habit in ways that are consistent with maintaining its independence. Survey responses also indicated that colleagues and best practice are currently considered more important sources of lessons than evaluations.

22. On the other hand, around half of the user survey respondents considered that lessons from evaluations are drawn very well or sufficiently in WFP for all three of the following purposes: to improve the programme or operation evaluated; to improve WFP's performance on a particular topic in many programmes and operations; and to improve a new or follow-up programme. 15-20% of these considered that they are drawn very well, with the best rating going to the first of these purposes. Nevertheless, around a third of respondents considered that lessons are not drawn sufficiently or very inadequately[24]. This implies divergent views within the organization with the majority of WFP staff holding a more positive perception of the efforts that are made to draw lessons from evaluations than is apparent to the significant minority.

23. A higher proportion of headquarters and regional staff tended to think there was room for improvement in the extent to which lessons are drawn from evaluations, compared to country staff. There is also an inverse perspective between programme and management staff on the one hand and staff dealing only with programme design and support on the other. Over 60% of the former consider lessons are drawn sufficiently or very well, while the same proportion of programme design and support staff considered they are not drawn sufficiently or very inadequately. One reason for this difference may be the need for staff dealing solely with programme design and support to push the potential forward, while those responsible for implementation struggle with the realities of how difficult it often is to make change on the ground.

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[21] Peer review (2007) p.74

[22] Capacity development, HIV/AIDS, Gender and Mother & Child Health and Nutrition.

[23] The reasons why evaluations are not used in policy decision making appear to relate largely to the needs of policy makers for a more rigorous and quantitative evidence base of outcomes and impact than OEDE-managed evaluation has provided to date. Addressing this goes beyond the scope of this particular Project.

[24] 12% to 15% 'don't know'.

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24. The widely divergent responses, even from people of the same function, and supporting comments in the survey, also suggest that practice is very variable. This is so, even where the evaluation recommendations are considered relevant and clear, which is not always the case. At country level, the Country Director has responsibility for implementing recommendations. There is no direct procedural link between evaluation and subsequent planning, so the extent to which Country Offices follow up in practice is perceived as variable. Other factors affecting the extent to which lessons are drawn from evaluations include staff turnover and other stakeholders' interests.

3. User Interest and Requirements

3.1 Types of User

25. There are many actual and potential users of lessons and knowledge harvested from WFP evaluations. Each has a different motivation for seeking lessons from experience, which determines the nature and extent of their 'demand'. Many are also a source of lessons.

26. To date, users from the innermost circle in Fig.2 have been the primary clients of evaluation. **Executive Board** members are the primary clients for accountability purposes. This purpose is reasonably well served and the Peer Review found that strategic evaluations are used in Executive Board decision making. The informal consultation with Members on evaluation seems to be appreciated. While there are relatively minor ways that OEDE could further improve products to serve this level further, the Executive Board's main interest now seems to be in seeing the knowledge and learning generated by evaluations made available and used to the optimum throughout the Organization in order to improve effectiveness.
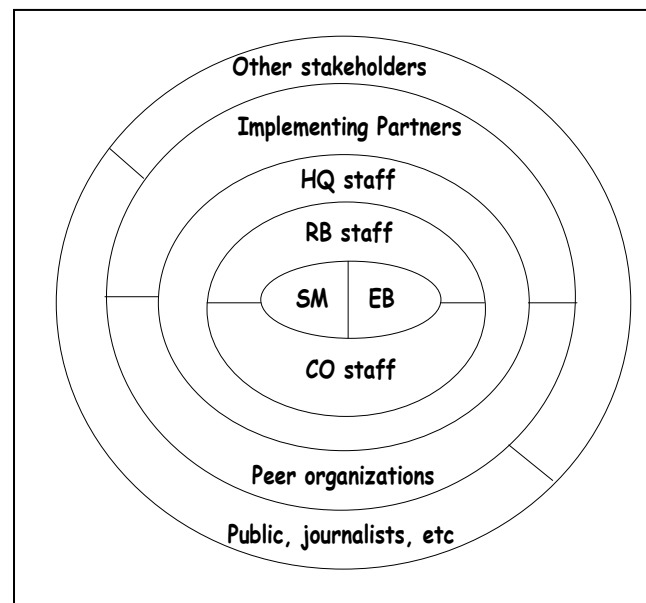

Fig. 2 Users of WFP Evaluations

27. **Senior Management** is primarily interested in the strategic and systemic lessons. Recent short, concise informal communications from OEDE alerting Senior Management to the main messages from strategic evaluations and key systemic issues in a balanced way are appreciated. These need to remain at a maximum of two pages and with no attachments. For the future, similar syntheses would be useful on country evaluations and/or be made on key topics that are under discussion at any given moment either externally or internally. This would be a useful complement to the background briefings the ED regularly seeks (for example) from divisions and the library.

28. From the Peer Review and preliminary interviews, it is clear that there is a great deal of work to do to meet information needs of the second and third circles in Fig.2 – that is, WFP professional staff. For this and the other reasons given above, this group was identified as the priority for deeper analysis of user requirements for lessons from experience, including evaluations. This Project seeks to help OEDE understand better the perspective on the most useful ways that lessons from evaluations might be made available, especially to staff at country and regional level (the second circle), where the greatest un-served internal need appears to exist.

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29. As far as the fourth circle is concerned, there is a need for a wider discussion between WFP and counterparts about mutual accountability and the role of counterparts in evaluation[25]. This goes beyond the scope of this Project and also concerns the EQAS system (above). Once a system has been established for harvesting lessons for internal purposes, this can be extended and adapted to respond to external requests for sharing knowledge. In the meantime, external users may benefit from improved accessibility of existing evaluations and from those products developed for internal needs, but which are also appropriate for counterparts and other external stakeholders (e.g. research institutions, journalists).

3.2 Purposes

30. Lessons from past experience of others are more likely to be heard and understood when they are relevant, applicable, clear and timed to arrive (or are easily found) at a moment when you need that information or knowledge. Therefore, the first step is to explore for what purpose WFP staff seek lessons from experience most often.

31. In the user survey, by far the most frequently selected purposes were "To solve implementation problems" and "For practical ideas during programme design" (70%+ of respondents). The former purpose was more frequently selected by respondents at country and regional level and the latter at Headquarters. "To generate new ideas" was selected almost as frequently. [26]

32. Overall, there was fairly high consistency in choices across the different functions, although there were some nuances. For programme staff (taken alone) "To inform stakeholders about what has worked well and what not" ranked third (selected by 64%). For 45% of respondents from corporate services this was narrowed further to "To account to donors"[27]. The fairly high consistency in choices between functions, coupled with the similarity between the three most commonly selected purposes offers a focus for OEDE.

33. **Timing**: "Orientation early in programme design" was also selected by just over half of respondents and is very similar to "For practical ideas during programme design" (above). This confirms the message from interviews that **proactive** dissemination of lessons on relevant topics to design teams of new programmes, operations and/or country strategies would be useful.

34. Interviewees consistently stated that, while OEDE's participation in the Project Review Committee is essential, it comes too late in the design process to serve as useful design input[28]. In order to contribute greater input to design, lessons from evaluations need to be made available earlier.

35. Survey responses indicated that there is no trigger to ensure that relevant evaluations are considered in Country Office and Regional Bureau planning. Timing input of lessons that may help to solve implementation problems as and when they arise is more problematic. The seeker has to take the initiative and OEDE's role is reactive. The solutions lie in making generalized lessons (by topic) easily accessible to someone searching. This may be complemented by offering help-desk guidance at least in the early stages.

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[25] Peer Review, 2007

[26] All the following purposes were also selected by 30%-50% of respondents. They may be considered relevant but not primary in designing OEDE outreach. They are: to stimulate reflection at the end of the programme/operation; to inform stakeholders about what has worked well and what not; to generate donor support for future funding; to account to donors; to convince stakeholders to make changes in programme design and/or implementation arrangements; for policy development.

[27] A smaller number of management staff (38%) also selected this purpose.

[28] The Peer Review (2007) found additional points for improvement of the PRC (p.61)

36. The repeated request for one central repository of lessons from experience is not within OEDE's mandate alone and may not be fully realisable yet, but some improvement on the current situation must be possible. WFPGo (the intranet) brings together 78 different sites, including the M&E Knowledge Base[29].   This vital intranet site is not listed anywhere. It can only be found by searching for it by name on WFPGo or by having the luck and dexterity to click on it as it comes up in the rolling banner advertising those sites which are not considered important enough to have their own permanent entry point on WFPGo homepage (in contrast to PGMWiki and EPWeb). All evaluation reports can be found by year in the M&E Knowledge Base site or by any keyword (full text search) in M&E Knowledge Base search, WFPgo search and in Docustore search page.

3.3 Types of Knowledge[30]

37. There is a strikingly consistent picture of the type of knowledge sought most frequently by survey respondents. Know-how is the type sought most often by all functions. Know-why is the type sought next most frequently for all functions, except for programme design, which seeks know-who equally frequently with know-how - See Figure 2 below.

Fig.2 Types of knowledge sought most frequently (% of respondents)
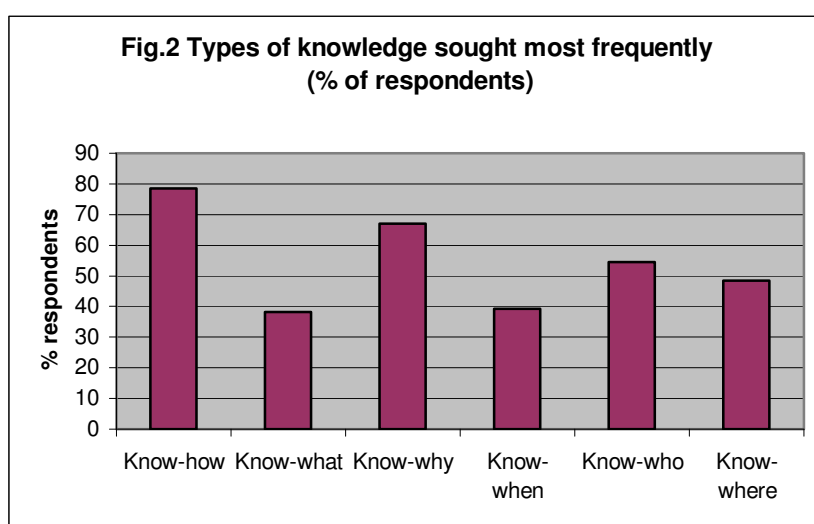
38. This pattern underpins the view stated in interviews that practical (not too abstract) lessons would be of greatest value, especially ones that could contribute to operational guidelines. At the same time, it also suggests a healthy desire to keep the larger purpose for action in mind. This is also suggested by the fact that more than two-thirds of survey respondents stated they had read a strategic evaluation and fully 75% an evaluation of a programme not directly related to their own work.[31] The self-selected survey respondents probably over-represent the views of those interested in evaluation. But even allowing for this, the combination shown above is consistent with the Peer Review finding that "OEDE could bring the needs of different users together through raising attention to the broader implications of findings from different evaluations. This could serve both those looking for wider trends and those concerned more with how to improve a specific programme."[32]

39. Respondents from all functions seek know-who and know-where more frequently than know-what and know-when.   Several interviewees stressed that WFP's organizational culture and the

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[29] The intranet site established when evaluation and monitoring were more closely institutionally linked. Now jointly 'owned' by OEDE and OMDX.

[30] See definitions in para.20 and Table 3 above.

[31] Both percentages were slightly lower for respondents from sub-offices at 57% and 67% respectively.

[32] Peer Review, 2007, p.64

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practice of rotation mean that it is particularly important to find a way of channelling and supporting 'know-who'. In a culture where it is considered as a sign of weakness to ask for help or advice, informal personal contacts are very important. WFP learns by people talking to each other. Linking people to share knowledge in a relatively informal yet structured way is the core of PASS-it-on and is no longer available. On the other hand, it is hard to see what role OEDE can properly play in this, other than to encourage corporate efforts on this front and to use the principle in its dealings with M&E Focal Points concerning evaluation methodologies.

40. Around one quarter of survey respondents would be most interested in learning within their own region or between regions. However, for approximately half the survey respondents, interest is not limited in this way. For them, the **geographic breadth of interest** in learning depends on the topic or would apply globally.

3.4 Ways of Learning & Current OEDE Information Products

41. The literature on adult learning is clear that active participation in generating knowledge enhances learning and increases the likelihood of changing behaviour. This is also echoed in the survey responses ranking workshops and seminars on thematic evaluations as among the most useful 'products' of OEDE[33], although least used.[34]

> Tell me; I forget
> Show me; I remember
> Involve me; I understand
> *Chinese proverb*

42. Just over 50% of survey respondents like to use a mix of methods for learning (by doing, by reading, exchanging views with others, seeing, and by hearing/listening). The choice is likely to depend on the topic concerned. Perhaps more surprisingly in the light of the comment above, learning **by reading** is as popular as learning by seeing (e.g. video) or by hearing/listening (e.g. radio). Respondents from management showed a slight preference for exchanging views with others and learning by doing. Programme staff also showed a slight preference for learning by doing. The written word enables both mass dissemination and maximum individual flexibility. The reader can access the information or knowledge at a moment convenient to him/her and as often as s/he requires. Web-based platforms also open up potential for more interactive exchange and/or presentation of OEDE products.

43. Approximately one third and one half of respondents in different functions have never used **evaluation briefs**, which summarise individual evaluation reports. Programme staff and management used them the most and logistics and corporate service staff the least. However, 90% (and more) of those who have used them (across all functions) found them useful or very useful (with 57% of programme staff finding them 'very useful'). [**Note**: the self-selection of survey respondents is likely to give a more favourable picture on this and the other products mentioned below than might have been obtained from a statistically representative sample.]

44. The **Annual Evaluation Report**[35] had slightly higher levels of use, except amongst corporate service staff and policy staff, of whom just over half had never used it. 86% to 100% of users

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[33] Equal with evaluation briefs

[34] Related to this, interviewees also repeatedly emphasised the power and potential for enhancing learning during an evaluation by use of techniques like 'appreciative enquiry' and by the behaviour and attitudes of the evaluators. They also emphasised the importance of self-evaluation as a means of generating knowledge and learning, stimulating a habit of reflection. Several (from different levels and functions) called for more guidance on self-evaluation in order to improve the rigour and quality of the product. Both these points go beyond the scope of this Project alone, but are important underlying factors to be taken into account in this Project too.

[35] The AER draws generalized lessons from the totality of each year's evaluations.

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from all functions found it useful or very useful, except management, where 26% found it hardly useful. This is striking, since it aims to pull out more generalized lessons that might be expected to be useful to management staff.

45. These proactive products of OEDE received higher usefulness ratings than the evaluation reports database. This suggests that a proactive approach can improve usefulness.

46. The combination of low rates of use but high usefulness ratings also suggests that a significant part of the challenge is to make the products known. This was explicitly stated in several comments. The ratings for ease of accessibility also confirm this. Only a third to half of respondents found these products 'easy' or 'about average' to access and less than 20% found any 'easy'. The hardest appear to be the evaluation reports database and workshops or seminars about evaluations. Of those who had seen them at all, 24% and 33% respectively found them difficult to access.

47. At the same time, WFP staff frequently complain of information overload and lack of time to read the volumes of information crossing their screen/desk. A recent evaluation found WFP staff claiming that they had insufficient time to read a 2-page newsletter intended to assist translating policy into practice[36]. Why would this be so while a 16-page document produced by ALNAP on lessons for Operational Agencies on flood response was widely read during an emergency and readers found time to give positive feed-back to the author[37]? So what determines whether a 'document' (in the broadest sense) is read or not?

48. From literature, experience of other agencies and confirmed by interviews, the key appears to lie in a good understanding of what would be most useful to the targeted user and finding the right combination of content, timing and format to meet it. The right information delivered at a moment when the user is seeking it and in a form they can use. Length is not as important as substance, form and timing.

49. Web technology also enables additional flexibility in length. By structuring a document into headlines, summary paragraphs and full paragraphs, the reader can choose (paragraph by paragraph even) whether they read just the headlines or click deeper ("read more") into summary paragraphs or the full document.

50. Survey responses on preferences for types of platform were evenly divided between web-based, paper-based (conveyed electronically) and people-based, but with a slight preference for web-based platforms on strategic and policy lessons and people-based for operational lessons. Web-based products should therefore offer an option for a printable form.

51. The majority of respondents considered that there were no priority language requirements for lessons other than English, French and Spanish. The 10% of respondents who specified another language, just over half named Arabic. It was also suggested that Country Offices should have a budget to translate important briefs into relevant languages for national staff and partners.

52. Finally, interviewees also repeatedly emphasised the importance of seeking ways to disseminate lessons from evaluations that encourage curiosity, stimulate dialogue, and are non-punitive. Seeking advice and help can be seen as a sign of weakness or even incompetence in WFP. Learning is enhanced where an organisation rewards those who admit mistakes and can

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[36] End-of-Term Evaluation of WFP's Gender Policy (2003-2007): Enhanced Commitments to Women to Ensure Food Security (2008)

[37] ALNAP reports that 50-60 readers emailed positive feedback that they had used it and found it useful. It can safely be assumed that the total readership was wider.
http://www.alnap.org/publications/pdfs/ALNAPLessonsCycloneNargis.pdf

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show how they are doing things differently afterwards and where asking for help is seen as a mature awareness that you cannot know everything.

3.5 Topics[38]

53. There was considerable diversity between functions, location and sex of survey respondents. Nevertheless, some topics were selected by a significantly higher number of respondents across most functions as shown in Table 4. Interestingly, the 'hottest' topics are also ones on which the new Strategic Plan 2008-2011 makes some new demands.

Table 4 – Hot Topics for Lessons from Experience

	Topic[39]	% of total respondents selected	Weighted ranking[40] by functions	Remarks
Hottest	**Capacity Development**	**51%**	**1st**	**1st or 2nd most commonly selected topic by 6 of 7 functions**
Hot	Local procurement & market issues	42%	5	By far the most commonly selected topic by respondents from corporate services and logistics and 37% management. Not in the top 6 topics selected by programme, programme design or management respondents.
	Cash Pilots & vouchers	37%	2	Within the 3 most commonly selected topics for 6 functions. Selected by 50% of management respondents.
	Livelihoods & food security	35%	3	Ranked in the top 7 by 5 out of 7 functions
	Nutrition	28%		Most selected topic for programme design staff and among the top 6 for other functions.
	Food-based safety nets	27%	4	Selected by large percentage of programme and management staff. Less important for other functions.
	Food for Work	26%	6	Popular amongst programme staff and corporate services
Warm	Food for Education Crisis management Disaster mitigation Climate change & environment Targeting	20-26%		
Lukewarm	Refugee's IDP's & conflict Safety nets HIV/AIDS Food for Training Food processing & fortification Urban food interventions PRSPs UNDAFs Transition relief & recovery	10-20%		This should not be interpreted as lack of interest in these topics. It may indicate that respondents consider their needs for information and access to information and sources of knowledge adequately met.
Cool	Victims of natural disasters Gender Demobilization Participation Protection issues Rations	Under 10%		As 'lukewarm'

54. Gender and HIV/AIDS were not selected by any respondents working at regional level. Food for Work was among the six most frequently selected topics at country level, but not by any

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[38] 92% of the responses to this survey question were from regional or country level staff, rather than staff located at Headquarters or Liaison Offices.

[39] Source: Programme Guidance Manual (PGMWiki)

[40] Scored according to the ranking in the top 6 topics by different functions and weighted according to the number of respondents per function.

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respondents at regional level. Where mentioned in interviews, the priority topics identified by Senior Managers are not inconsistent with the above.

3.6 Programme Cycle Activities[41]

55. The activities in the project cycle on which survey respondents would most like to see lessons from experience made available are shown in Table 5 below. In this case, there were some differences in responses between men and women, but this probably reflects different functions. For example, there was greater male interest in emergency needs assessment (39%M, 17%F) and female interest in monitoring and reporting (38%M, 46%F). Responses were predictably divided according to programme-related staff and logistics or corporate services. So, for example, "logistics" was the most selected activity by logistics respondents.

Table 5 – Programme Cycle Activities for Lessons from Experience

	Top 4 activities on which you would most like to see lessons from experience made available	% of total respondents selected	Remarks
Hottest	**Monitoring & Reporting**	**41%**	Most selected activity for all functions except logistics & corporate services
Hot	Emergency Needs Assessment	32%	
	Results Based Management & Risk	30%	
	Coordination & Partnerships	29%	The most selected activity by management respondents equally with monitoring & reporting.
	Contingency & Operations Planning	28%	
	Early Warning & Preparedness	26%	
Warm	VAM Logistics New Business Model Advocacy & public information Resourcing opportunities Food distribution |Beneficiaries & registration	15-22%	
Lukewarm	Food ration management Security Commodity Management/ COMPAS	Under 10%	

56. Again, the expression of interest in lessons on 'monitoring and reporting' may reflect the new demands and challenges facing regional and country level staff and indicates a willingness to engage.

3.7 Sources Used

57. In these times of information overload and fiercely competing demands on staff time, it is important to know where staff go (internally and externally) when they are seeking information on what works well and what does not. These are the places that OEDE should seek to link into, where possible, and promote the lessons it has to offer in order to make it easier for the user to find the information.

3.7.1 Internal Websites

58. ICT is not currently able to offer statistics on numbers visiting the 78 WFP intranet sites, so the following information from the Project survey coupled with information from interviews, is the best indication we have.

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[41] Source: Programme Guidance Manual (PGMWiki)

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59. **Docustore** is visited for lessons from experience by 75% of 240 survey respondents on a weekly or monthly basis and by others less frequently. Only 10% said they never used it. 68% of respondents use 'other' internal websites on a weekly or monthly basis. These appear to be mainly **function-related** or specialist websites, such as on emergency needs assessment, ICT, logistics or the transport manual. The **PGM site** is also visited by 57% of respondents on a weekly or monthly basis for lessons from experience and by others less frequently. 17% of respondents stated they never use it - at least for this purpose. The EPWeb was used by about half of survey respondents monthly or annually and 62% of users found it useful or very useful, as was the Communications and Public Policy site.

60. Currently, PGM Wiki rarely refers to relevant evaluations under 'Key Documents', 'Lessons Learned' or 'Related Docs'. Links through to evaluation briefs of strategic evaluations and other products would be an obvious aid to users. In the longer term, there may also be scope for incorporating key, specific lessons from evaluations in the PGM Wiki text (in separate boxes or in the text itself).

61. The EPWeb offers an example of how such links might be set up and developed further, though the established links with evaluation do not appear to be well maintained. Under 'Response' there is a specific page on Monitoring & Evaluation[42]. This contains (apparently incomplete) lists of evaluation reports in various languages with links to the full document. There is no guidance on what they contain. It also has a search function (by date range, country and bureau only) and a link to the M&E Knowledge Base, where a full text search can be done (though this is not advertised here). Under 'Contingency Planning' there is a page called 'EMOP Lessons Learnt Documents'[43]. This contains documents from various agencies (including FAO and CARE) and the RTE of the Response to the Indian Ocean Tsunami, but few other evaluations.

62. Ironically, the websites considered least useful for lessons from experience were the OEDE internet page[44] and PASS-it-on[45]. 49% and 44% of respondents respectively had never visited them, although there were slightly more users at regional and country level than at headquarters. These two were also rated the least useful (by all respondents) for lessons from experience. Of those that did use them, however, 75% found the OEDE website useful or very useful. Only 57% found the PASS-it-on site useful or very useful. In both cases, the percentage finding them very useful was lower than for other sites. The only search function for the evaluation reports on the OEDE external website is by year.

63. Survey responses concerning the Evaluation Memory System (EMS)[46] were surprising. While 41% of respondents had never visited it, 44% responded that they visited it monthly or yearly and 77% of users found it useful/very useful. The percentage of users rises to just over half of respondents at country or regional level. This is extraordinary given that OEDE has considered it disused since 2006 and approximately half the OEDE staff do not know that it or the M&E Knowledge Base exist or how to find them[47]! It is possible that there is some confusion over whether the user is actually in the EMS, M&E Knowledge Base or Docustore, since they are closely linked.

64. The most frequent users are programme and programme design staff. Although just under half of respondents in these functions had never used the evaluation reports database, of those who had

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[42] http://epweb.wfp.org/ep/Monitoring_Evaluation
[43] http://epweb.wfp.org/ep/contingency_planning
[44] An external site in fact, but OEDE has considered it its main site for the last 2 years.
[45] PASS-it-on has not been updated for more than one year and is not currently active. This is highly likely to have affected the responses.
[46] EMS (blue & green) is in fact an obsolete database lodged within the intranet site M&E Knowledge Base (red & black), which is OEDE's (jointly owned) intranet site in WFPGo - see further in Section 4.
[47] Also found by the Peer Review (2007)

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used it, 92% and 80% respectively had found it useful or very useful. At the opposite end of the spectrum, only 15-22% users were from logistics and management found it useful or very useful. Satisfaction rates were higher at country level (79%) than headquarters (65%).

65. Interviews confirmed this picture. It supports the principle that OEDE needs to take a proactive approach to making knowledge generated from evaluations relevant and accessible. It also implies that a shift is needed from organising by source (i.e. evaluation) to organising by topic and targeting specific users directly and by links to the websites that each category of user uses most. In addition, OEDE needs to do considerable work to make its own site relevant and useful for those who come directly in via that path.

66. In addition to the sites above, the new site being developed by OEDAM called 'Implementing WFP Strategy' (or the "User Guide") is likely to be a crucial link point for OEDE (see above).

3.7.2 External

67. Overall, 'other UN agencies' were considered by survey respondents to be by far the most useful external sources for information about lessons from experience. 72% of respondents used them and 86% of users found them useful or very useful. These were followed by 'NGO's (various)' and the World Bank - both used by about 68% of respondents and found useful or very useful by 78% of them. These sites are significantly more commonly used than websites of research institutions.

68. The ODI Humanitarian Practice Network, ODI Humanitarian Policy Group and IFPRI were used by just over half the survey respondents. All three were rated as useful or very useful by 70-75% of those users. By contrast, more than 65% of survey respondents had never used IDRC and ALNAP, let alone the less widely known ones like 'Groupe Urgence Réhabilitation et Développement'.   However, there are indications that well-timed, high quality products even from the lesser known sources (e.g. ALNAP), pulling together state-of-the-art lessons from experience and Best Practice on given topics within the humanitarian sector may be considered very useful by WFP staff, when distributed proactively by other means. OEDE evaluations can be fed into these wider research processes and OEDE could continue to play a relatively informal role in disseminating the wider lessons produced in certain circumstances, as it has already.

69. 40% of survey respondents also found 'other' sites useful or very useful. These included many different function-related or specialist sites (e.g. Transport Manual, Logistics Web ICT Web Page), technical unit sites (e.g. school feeding) and various other more general ones, such as Tufts University Relief web, Feinstein International Centre as well as USAID and the European Commission.

3.7.3 Divisions & Bureaux

70. From interviews, it is clear that the first port of call for advice and lessons from experience on any given topic are the Regional Advisers and the technical units. If they were not already involved in an evaluation directly, OEDE needs to make sure that they are alerted when new information in their field of expertise has been generated by an evaluation. They are both key **users** of new knowledge/lessons from evaluations and also key **disseminators.**

71. The Regional Advisers are also key knowledge **gatherers**. In at least one region, harvesting lessons from evaluations within the region that apply to other countries within the region is intended to be part of the terms of reference for the Regional M&E Adviser, but it is also practised

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by others. This opens up possibilities for a deeper collaboration with OEDE in creating "knowledge assets". [48]

3.8   Enablers & Inhibitors to Applying Lessons

72. Even when a lessons is clear, it may not always be easy to apply it in practice. Below are staff perceptions of the most important factors enabling, and then inhibiting, the allocation of lessons.

3.8.1 Strategic & Policy Lessons

73. For **strategic or policy lessons**, a clear majority of survey respondents (64%-71%) considered **strong leadership**, **support from managers** and **staff understanding** as among the four most important factors that help lessons to be applied – in other words to change the way things are done. 'Flexibility in programming' also ranked among the four most commonly selected by about half of all respondents, rising to around 60% of both programme and management staff respondents.

74. There were some divergences from this perspective between different functions. Management staff selected 'a conducive political context' as frequently as 'staff understanding'. These were closely followed by 'strong leadership'. 'Support from managers' was selected by slightly fewer management staff (52%).

75. However, there were clear differences in perspective between staff working at different locations. Fully 92% and 86% of regional and headquarters staff respectively considered '**strong leadership**' a key enabler. The three factors in para.73 above were also the three most commonly selected at country level too, but not by such clear majorities (selected by between 61% & 65% of respondents each). Flexibility in programme, financial support and a conducive political context were cited almost as frequently (selected by 50-54%). [49]

76. Around half the survey respondents selected the following as the four most important inhibitors to applying lessons: 'lack of clarity over who is responsible to act' (59%), 'insufficient management support', 'insufficient finance' and 'pressure of immediate demands' (in that order).
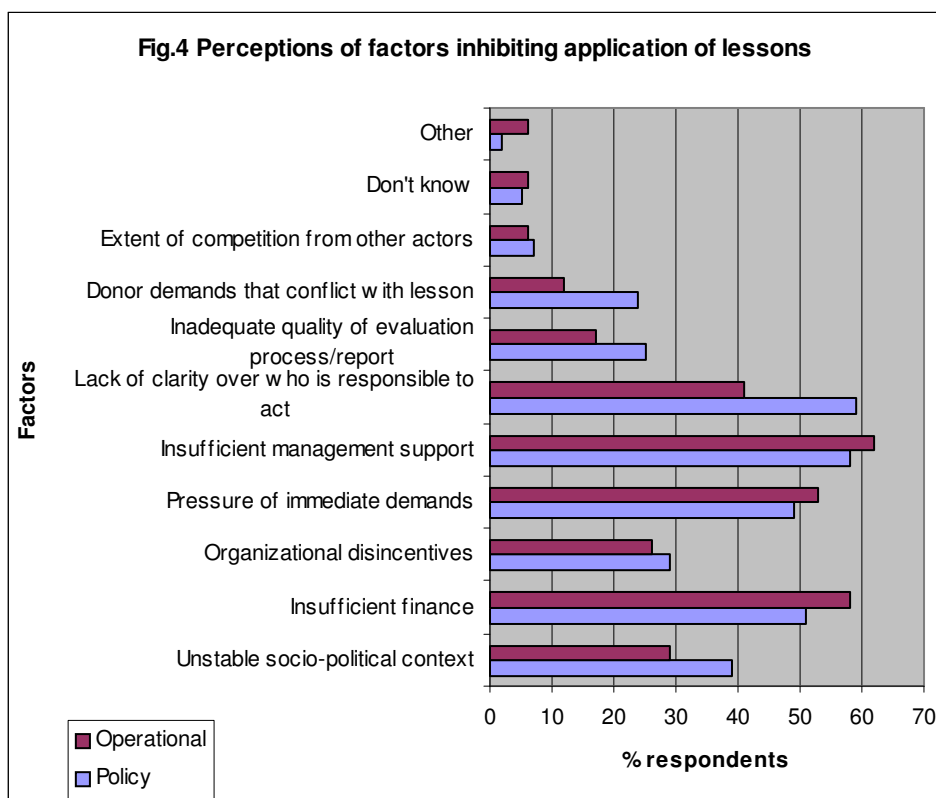
77. However, as Figure 4 (below) shows, other factors were selected among the top four most important inhibitors of applying policy lessons by a significant percentage of respondents. These included: donor demands that conflict with the lesson; inadequate quality of the evaluation process/report and an unstable socio-political context. These are cited much less frequently for operational lessons.

78. Again, there were differences in perspectives between respondents according to their location. Fully 77% of respondents from headquarters cited 'Lack of clarity over who is responsible to act' most frequently. Respondents from the country level cited 'Insufficient management support' most frequently (59%), whereas regional level respondents were equally divided between the two! And again, respondents from liaison offices cited 'insufficient finance' most frequently and cited 'donor demands that conflict with the lesson' much more frequently than respondents from other functions.

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[48] Term coined by Collison & Parcell
[49] The last two were also the most commonly selected by the small number of respondents from liaision offices.

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Fig.4 Perceptions of factors inhibiting application of lessons

Factors (y-axis, top to bottom):
- Other
- Don't know
- Extent of competition from other actors
- Donor demands that conflict with lesson
- Inadequate quality of evaluation process/report
- Lack of clarity over who is responsible to act
- Insufficient management support
- Pressure of immediate demands
- Organizational disincentives
- Insufficient finance
- Unstable socio-political context

Legend: ■ Operational ■ Policy

X-axis: % respondents (0 to 70)

3.8.2 Operational Lessons

79. For lessons about operations, the three most frequently selected **enablers** are the same as for strategic/policy lessons, but in a different order: **'support from managers'** was the most frequently selected of all, followed by '**staff understanding**' and '**strong leadership**'. Financial support and flexibility in programme are almost as commonly selected, but 'a conducive political context' is much less important than for strategic/policy lessons (now 30%).

80. Again, there is broad similarity in choices between functions but a difference in emphasis. Only 63% of management staff consider 'support from managers' as a key enabler, while it is the most frequently selected enabler by all other functions (from 72%-90% of each function). In counter-balance, the enabler most frequently selected by management is 'staff understanding' (69%).

81. Comments emphasise the importance of encouraging local adaptations to more general lessons and investing in supporting and guiding staff in practical ways, including through the use of pilot projects and accepting that nothing is perfect.

82. The same factors were also selected most frequently as the four most important **inhibitors** to applying underlined operational lessons as for strategic/policy lessons – see Fig.4 above.
However, there were marked differences in perception according to location and function. Respondents at the country level cited 'insufficient management support' and 'insufficient finance' most frequently. Headquarters respondents also cited 'insufficient management support' most frequently, but coupled with 'pressure of immediate demands'. This was also the most frequently cited by regional staff. 'Insufficient finance' was cited by less than half of headquarters and regional respondents.

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83. 'Insufficient management support' was the most frequently cited inhibitor for operational lessons according to respondents in support functions (over 70%) and programme staff (62%). But management staff cited 'insufficient finance' most frequently.

84. 'Insufficient monitoring of whether change is being applied and why'[50] was cited for operational lessons by 38% of all respondents. However, it demonstrated the only major difference in perspective between the sexes. Almost twice as many women as men (53% to 27%) cited this as "among the top 4 most important factor inhibiting application of operational lessons". The other fairly frequently selected factor was "Force of habit creates inertia" (32%)[51]. Interestingly, lack of time was not cited as a major factor inhibiting the application of lessons.

3.8.3 In sum

85. In staff perception, the single most important factor enabling lessons to be applied is strong leadership. This needs to be backed by management support and (for operational lessons) flexibility in programming. The survey findings suggest a staff perception – predominantly at country level - that lessons requiring change to the way operations are carried out are not adequately supported, including by resources. This message is consistent with points made in interviews and evaluation findings about translation of policy into practice mentioned above. For both strategy/policy lessons and operational lessons, lack of clarity over who is responsible to act is also perceived as a common inhibitor in WFP.

86. Interviews and survey comments confirmed staff experience that WFP has an action-oriented culture (rather than reflective) – stronger on the left side of the 'wheel of learning' (Fig.5)[52], than the right. It has also been described as the "can do" mentality where pragmatic and immediate solutions are preferred over an analytical approach[53]. The negative side of this is that expressing a need to know more before action can be perceived as a weakness. When coupled with little communication between different parts of the Organization, special attention is needed to channel the positive energy of an action-oriented culture into 'doing things better'.
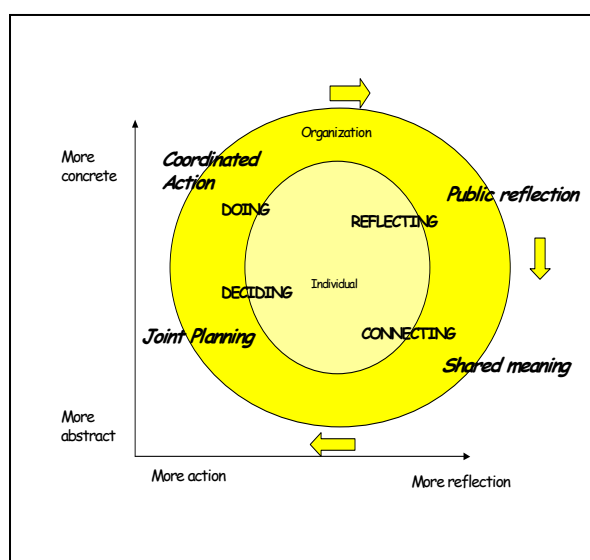

Fig.5 Senge's Wheel of Learning

87. Interestingly, for both types of lesson, 'clear incentives' and 'the degree of change implied by the lesson' were each selected by only about 15% of respondents. Women found the degree of change more important than did men (21%, compared to 13%) and 'clear incentives' is a more commonly selected enabler for operational lessons (20% overall). This is consistent with experience in other agencies too: support and removal of disincentives are needed more than incentives.

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[50] This was not an option for strategic or policy lessons.

[51] Also not an option for strategic or policy lessons.

[52] Adapted from P.Senge et al, 1994, *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*, p.60-62

[53] Evaluation of Capacity Development, 2008, para. 58

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4. What OEDE can offer (Supply)

4.1 Base resource

88. There are 97 OEDE evaluation reports, completed between 1995 and 2008, of which 63 are from 2000 onwards. Approximately 10 OEDE-managed evaluations are carried out each year. These are all stored in Docustore – full reports. This is the main base material from which wider lessons may be harvested. Past decentralized evaluations are of very variable quality and appear to have been be stored on the hard disk of an OEDE officer, where OEDE had a copy. The same applies to those self-evaluations of which OEDE has copies (exact percentage unknown). As and when quality standards of the latter two types of evaluation improve under the new Evaluation Policy and EQAS, these may become a more useful resource.

Type of evaluation	1995-1999	2000-2008
Thematic	16	24
PRO-PRROs	7	21
EMOPs/SOs	6	12
External/joint evaluations	5	6
Totals	**34**	**63**

89. On the M&E Knowledge Base intranet site, a search can be made by year or by keyword of various types of documents, including evaluation reports specifically[54]. ICT/HQ confirms that this search function is a powerful full text search in each document itself in Docustore. This means that it only applies to OEDE managed evaluations. But it opens up considerable potential for drawing out lessons from these evaluations by topic **without** the need for tagging by keyword at the moment they are uploaded into Docustore. Although not a specific search option, a search can also be made by project title or number by inserting the title as the key word. However it is not possible to search by date range, region, country, project type, programming type, or evaluation type (e.g. all thematic evaluations). This is a significant limitation.

90. On the M&E Knowledge Base site, there is also the disused database called the Evaluation Memory System (EMS). This may have been important at the time it was created, but has not been maintained and now adds nothing to what is available through the direct link from the M&E Knowledge Base site to Docustore. Moreover, it relies on maintenance by OEDE to keep it updated and for tagging of reports.

91. Many development-related agencies (and commercial companies too) have attempted to capture individual lessons from evaluations in passive databases. This has been a surprisingly common, but ultimately inadequate, approach. One-liner 'lessons' standing on their own are meaningless – as illustrated in Table 2 (above). A second reason that it is inadequate is that it does not take account of the full range of knowledge and the way people learn. It is very difficult for a user to get the answer from a database of single paragraphs to the question: "what are the 20 things I need to know about local procurement for school feeding as I start a project?" The alternative is to wade through far too much information.

92. Increasingly, agencies are beginning to try to create something more: short, focused, syntheses of knowledge generated from several evaluations on particular topics. This is a form of "knowledge asset", capturing fairly practical knowledge that may also have strategic implications. See for example, IFAD's Insight series and ADB's Lessons Learned, aimed at a wide audience. ALNAP takes them further, aimed specifically at people in operations.

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[54] http://home.wfp.org/meknowledgebase/index.asp?Page=Evaluation_Reports

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93. From a preliminary scan of OEDE evaluations[55] concerning some of the "hottest topics" mentioned above, the major limitation to creating this kind of product are the following:
- It is dependent on the existence of valuable substance in evaluation reports, which is variable.
- In some cases the depth of analysis in reports is also limited. The report may capture the extent to which goals were or were not achieved and some major reasons behind levels of performance, but does not purse the question 'why is it so' much deeper. That limits the opportunity to distil useful lessons.

The potential will have to be tested through developing prototypes in the following phase.

94. Reports done since the introduction of EQAS appear to be of higher quality. EQAS has also introduced standards, which should aid future comparison and synthesis. The new standard rubric 'issues for the future' in evaluation reports should help identification of systemic lessons.

4.2 Current Input to Corporate Processes

95. At the moment, OEDE has formal input to the PRC (see above). Beyond that there is no formal proactive strategy for disseminating reports to stakeholders at moments when they might most need the information. Recent proactive initiatives to draw senior management attention to key points that might be of interest to them seem to be regarded as a step in the right direction. Audit has been doing something similar for some time in a slightly different form. It seems to be perceived as facilitating and useful.

96. There are more opportunities to take a more proactive line: to package information in forms that could be useful to a number of users and both deliver it to intended users at a moment when they are likely to find it most relevant and applicable and to make it more accessible for others (see Recommendations below).

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 General Conclusions

Lessons learnt can save lives (*Survey respondent)*

97. The combination of WFP's action-oriented culture, the relatively low level of current corporate attention to knowledge management, rapid and constant change in the external environment and the fact that the evaluation function is still working on building its credibility and reputation in certain quarters, creates an environment of both potential and also challenge to harvesting wider lessons from evaluations in ways that are useful to potential users.

98. In this context, Phase 1 focuses on what can be done to serve and stimulate the Organization's immediate internal needs for knowledge generated from WFP's experience. Once a system has been established, this can be extended and adapted to respond to external stakeholders specific needs where these are not met by improved accessibility to existing evaluations and from new products developed for internal needs that are also appropriate for external use (see further below).

99. OEDE needs to take an approach based on two principles:
- Shift from organisation by source (i.e. with evaluation stored very separately from policy documents etc) to organisation by topic and by user. This is also in line with the organising principles of the new 'wfp.org'.

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[55] During this process, the search engine of Docustore in M&E Knowledge Base developed a fault, which is being looked into.

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- A client-service orientation, to raise the experience of evaluation as of practical use and reduce a perceived marginalisation in some quarters. This entails taking opportunities for greater integration of evaluation into other corporate processes as well as making lessons available under OEDE's own banner, while maintaining independence of content. Greater integration will enhance both sustainability and effectiveness.

100.   The reasons behind these principles are various. First, evaluations are just one means of generating and capturing knowledge on a host of topics that cut across the whole Organization. They contribute to larger bodies of knowledge on any given topic, both internal to WFP and external. From a user's perspective, learning is usually addressed by topic (not by source). For this reason too, OEDE needs to make links (virtual and actual) to high-use websites and sources of larger bodies of knowledge.

101.   Secondly, lessons from evaluation have a much greater chance of being heard and acted upon where they contribute to wider corporate efforts to improve the quality and effectiveness of the Organization's work – for example, through the Strategic Plan. This also helps focus energy and increases chances of sustainability. It is about "getting the hooks right".

102.   Thirdly, harvesting lessons from evaluations in ways that are useful to stakeholders is **as much about process as product.**   This is emphasised in the literature and the interviews and survey respondents' comments made it clear that WFP is no exception. In this case, 'process' refers to both the evaluation process itself and to wider corporate processes, which affect the extent to which lessons from evaluations are heard and then acted upon.

103.   In sum, the challenge for dissemination of lessons from evaluations is to ensure the right **content** in the right **place** at the right **moment** in the right **form** (including language). The diversity of users demands a range of approaches and products. It also means that the strategy for communication and follow-up to each evaluation must be tailor-made on a case-by-case basis. The strategy for disseminating an evaluation on capacity development (say) may be similar but not the same as that for an evaluation on School Feeding. However, web technology offers scope for presenting flexible forms for the same base product. The diversity of the resource base (existing evaluations) also means that not all desired products can be produced for each occasion.

104.   The recommendations below have been distilled from interviews, survey comments and experiences of peers and others documented in literature, adapted to WFP's context. They encompass a range of approaches from proactive to reactive to passive/facilitating access to information. They are organised into three categories:
- Direct recommendations that OEDE can implement (alone and with others). These comprise the "start with what you can" element (see para.12 above). As implementation progresses, opportunities to use the materials in interactive exchange should be expanded.
- Suggestions to enhance learning potential during the evaluation process. These are relevant to this Project, but go beyond its scope.
- Suggestions to increase corporate potential for knowledge sharing (also formally beyond the scope of this immediate Project).

5.2 OEDE Actions

105.   **Recommendation 1 - short term (requires piloting):   Base Syntheses of Lessons**
Synthesise lessons from clusters of programme, single operations and strategic evaluations. Clusters may be by topic (see criteria below) or by country. The key purpose would be to capture and harvest lessons as a base for internal learning to improve the quality of programmes, whether during implementation or at design stage. The synthesis would aim to draw out lessons at all levels (policy, operational and systemic). The precise content will depend on the content of the relevant

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evaluations: some may have more strategic messages than others; some more practical. A generic conceptual framework will be developed in Phase 2 of this Project, building on relevant parts of EQAS.

106.   This synthesis will provide an important base resource for other tailor-made products – see the other recommendations below. In the pilot phase, it is suggested that it be internal and relatively informal in order to enable greater levels of honesty about what did not work.

107.   The main challenge is to add value over what is produced by the technical units and Policy Division and to complement it. This can probably be achieved by focusing tightly on WFP experience. While others focus on broader policy and Best Practice, past experience from evaluations can focus on drawing out specific successes, pitfalls/mistakes made by other WFP operations in the course of learning by doing, what they changed (if known), systemic challenges (by definition peculiar to WFP) and ways to deal with them.

108.   Suggested criteria for topic selection:
   - High demand for lessons from experience indicated by staff (see above)
   - Widespread practice in WFP and/or a "core programme competence"
   - High risk if WFP does not perform well & gather its knowledge together
     (e.g. politically sensitive and/or external expectations of knowledge sharing already created, e.g. P4P)
   - Topic on which the new Strategic Objectives imply some change in the way WFP operates, so it becomes more important to gather 'what we know already'
   - There is information in past evaluations to supply
     (If all criteria are fulfilled except for this one, then the topic should be considered for future evaluation as soon as possible instead.)

Applying these criteria, the candidates for 3 to 5 prototypes would be: capacity development, local procurement, cash versus food aid, targeting and possibly food for work.

109.   Relevant evaluations will be identified by research in Docustore, using relevant key words (via M&E Knowledge Base). An initial test for a synthesis on 'cash versus food aid' revealed 67 reports of which an estimated 20 are likely to be relevant[56]. The current search modality (full text only) is time-consuming. A pilot would require work by one research assistant to make a first identification of reports. Drafting of the synthesis would be done by a fairly senior professional with experience of WFP and/or the topic concerned, excellent analytical and synthesizing skills and who can communicate simply and clearly in writing.
Estimated cost: c. US$10,000 per synthesis. Total preparation time: 5-8 weeks.

110.   **Recommendation 2 - short term (pilot): Lessons 'Papers'**
A lessons 'paper' could be developed for each of the topics synthesised under Recommendation The primary target audience would be **country and regional staff**. Regional advisers (in particular) should be involved in their development. The 'paper' would focus on the combination of 'know-how' and 'know-why' and aim to provide short, focused and applicable lessons and a historical perspective, showing where WFP has come from. A catchy generic format should be used – e.g. the top 12 things you need to know from WFP experience – to be developed in Phase 2.

111.   The exact length of a 'Lessons Paper' would depend on the subject matter and amount of material available, but should aim to remain under 10 pages and preferably nearer 2 pages. Using the flexibility of web technology, one base document can be presented in such a way as to meet the needs and interests of different users, seeking different levels of specificity by dividing it into 3 tiers. Each level is linked by "learn more". The reader clicks deeper on whichever headline

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[56] The search function developed a malfunction before the test could be extended to other topics. It has been reported to ICT Service Desk.

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interests him/her most and to whatever level interests him/her (the structure already being used in the new 'wfp.org'). But the full version must also be printable (hence a 'paper').
Tier 1: headlines of the Top 12 Lessons - half to 1 page (max) of bullets.
Tier 2: headline plus 1 paragraph each of explanation – max.2 pages
Tier 3: key operational implications - can be longer, e.g.7-10 pages for operational lessons.

112.   **Recommendation 3 – short term (pilot): Tailor-made briefs for key audiences**
In collaboration with OEDAM and OMXD identify three (say) Country Offices due to prepare in 2009 Country Strategies under the new Strategic Framework. In consultation with the relevant Regional Bureau, OEDE would prepare a background resource package of key lessons from past evaluations on the main substantive topics that are expected to feature (exact length less important than substance, though it should be under 7 pages). Besides any evaluations within the last 5 years of previous programmes in the country concerned[57], this could include thematic evaluations of topics which are known to be likely to constitute a major part of the forthcoming country strategy. To maintain OEDE's independence, this is offered as a resource to **programme designers** at an early stage without further involvement of OEDE in programme design.

113. **Recommendation 4** - **short term (pilot): OEDE input to Programme Design Process**
OEDE should pick up on an earlier discussion with OMXD to consider the feasibility of a similar approach as Recommendation 2 for three (say) major forthcoming operations. On the basis of a 'concept note' from OMXD, OEDE could prepare a short briefing paper for discussion of lessons from most relevant evaluations for **programme designers.**

114. **Recommendation 5 - medium term (pilot):** Expand recent initiatives to link in to corporate-wide reflections, offering tailor-made bulleted key lessons from evaluations as a resource – for example, for presentation to Senior Management discussions on particular topics, scheduled corporate meetings, annual WFP-NGO consultation. This would require some advanced notice.

115. **Recommendation 6 - short to medium term: Proactive email dissemination of alerts to the existence of new OEDE evaluation briefs, syntheses and evaluation reports** (with links in the email to the various products) as follows:
 To relevant external learning sources, such as ODI/HPN & ALNAP for their production of Good Practice Reviews, operational guidelines and other learning-related documents[58]. The precise list of recipients will depend on the subject of the evaluation and language. Besides serving as base material for their research, it could be a contribution to engaging WFP in debates about more fundamental challenges facing the humanitarian sector concerning double-loop learning (are we doing the right thing?)[59].
Internally to:
   a) Regional Bureaux – RDs, DRDs, relevant programme advisors as well as M&E Advisors;
   b) relevant Country Offices (for evaluations specific to a particular geographic area evaluation);
   c) Technical units (as already done)

116.   Recommendation 7 - short term: Request links on 'wfp.org' and on relevant intranet and extranet sites to evaluation briefs, whole reports of strategic evaluations concerning a policy or themes and Lessons Papers (as and when developed)
One existing example is the link on 'wfp.org' to the "Thematic Review of WFP supported Mother and Child Nutrition Interventions"[60]. Other potential examples include the extranet Food Security Assessment Learning Repository and technical unit intranet sites, such as EPWeb lessons section. Wherever possible, these links should also be included in the **PGM Wiki and User Guide**,

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[57] Over time, as the new Country Evaluations are introduced, they are likely to be principal sources.
[58] Also recommended by the Peer Review, 2007, p.82
[59] See Peer Review findings, p.61
[60] http://beta.wfp.org/nutrition

according to topic. In the PGM, this would be under the rubric 'Key Documents' or 'Lessons Learned'. The existence of links to evaluations as a standard feature will help stimulate a habit of thinking of lessons from past experience.

117. **Long term:** Where a thematic/policy evaluation has been well received, OEDE should explore the potential for "codification" of the learning through including boxes of key lessons at appropriate places in the relevant text of PGM Wiki or in the 'Lessons learned' section.

118. Arranging the above should be part of the closure process of managing an evaluation, because the choice of key recipients is best known to the OEDE officer who managed the evaluation, based on the contents of the report.

119. **Recommendation 8: Evaluation briefs**:
a) Continue to prepare these 2-page briefs.   In the **short term**, they should be adapted to include electronic links to the full reports and placed on the external OEDE site and the intranet site (see below).
b) In the **medium term**, a selection of key policy ones could be reproduced according to the generic outline used for Recommendation 1 above as part of the web content with "read more" links to more detail on key messages.

120. **Recommendation 9 – short to medium term: Re-vamp the OEDE web platforms to improve accessibility and usefulness by:**
a) establishing an improved common OEDE platforms
b) establishing an intranet website to replace the jointly owned M&E Knowledge Base
c) updating the OEDE pages on wfp.org

121.   Ultimately, OEDE should aim for a series as follows:

U-drive or Docustore Stellent Desktop **OEDE only**	Intranet site **WFP staff only**	Public OEDE site on wfp.org **Open**

(a) would require follow-up to Lo Cicero's recommendations
On (b), an OEDE intranet site should be established, adopting the new Content Management System being introduced in WFP during 2009. Some of the content will be taken from the M&E Knowledge Base. The new intranet site might include: a map of the world (similar to EPWeb) where the user can search: 'EMOPs from flooding in Asia' and 4 flags appear. Click on a flag, the 5 main common lessons from evaluations on that subject in Asia appear (sortable by level of specificity: strategic only, operational) with a "learn more" links to short syntheses (see above), which in turn has a "learn more" link to full reports and/or other references. It would also include links to evaluation reports by category (according to the new wfp.org categories of 'competencies' under 'Our Work') and a 'new' sign for each new evaluation.

122.   In addition to the existing 'full text search' and 'by year' option, search options should include by: country (via map above), region, language, type of programme, type of evaluation and date range. ICT advises that potentially this could be done by Summer 2009. Cost to be determined. After development, one person in OEDE (and alternative) should be assigned responsibility for maintenance.
As much as possible of the content should also be on the external OEDE site – (c) above.
However, the intranet enables access to full reports (rather than summary) and enables a greater degree of honesty for learning purposes.

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123.   Once the new intranet site is up and running (and not before) the EMS should be discontinued and deleted. All the documents in EMS are in Docustore and are displayed in M&E Knowledge Base and in the Library website (including pre-1996 historical Executive Board documents). Unlike the EMS itself, this system requires no additional maintenance on OEDE's part.

124.   **Recommendation 10 - medium term (pilot): Evaluation alerts**
Once OEDE is ready, offer staff across the Organization the option to sign up to be alerted whenever a new evaluation in their area of interest has been completed. Options should include the possibility to select by types of evaluation (all, strategic only, programme only), by region, by language and by topic. ICT advises that currently this is only possible as email lists. However, once the "second generation" improvements to ICT systems have been completed, it will be possible to do this via the intranet or external website.

125.   **Recommendation 11 – short term: OEDE e-mail and telephone Help-desk**
For an initial period of one year, while other recommendations are being implemented, establish an email and telephone help-desk in OEDE to give tailor-made guidance when asked for information on evaluations. This would deal with the regular requests coming to OEDE. It should be assigned to one officer, who is named on the OEDE intranet and external website, so that users know the name of the person they are contacting (not anonymous). It would include advising on:
 • how to find and use the search functions available for all evaluation reports
 • what information on the enquirer's topic OEDE knows is available and how to access it
 • who else might be able to help, both in OEDE (e.g. evaluation officer involved in a particular strategic or country evaluation) and beyond (e.g. the Library).
This service may only be required while improvements to websites and system are in development. Cost estimate: 1 OEDE officer 2 hours per week.

126.   **Recommendation 12- long term: Input to Staff Training**
In the longer term, once a body of lessons have been harvested, OEDE should explore with Human Resources the potential for incorporating OEDE input to staff training, especially orientation/induction for new staff.

127.   **Recommendation 13 - short to medium term: Proactive email dissemination of alerts about the existence of new relevant products on Lessons/Good Practice from the wider Humanitarian Sector,** as they come to the attention of OEDE (with links in the email to the various products). These products may be produced by ODI/HPN, ALNAP etc. Some of these may be partly based on material from WFP evaluations. These alerts should be sent to the same internal recipients as listed in Recommendation 5 above.

128.   **Recommendation 14 - long term: Expansion to next 'ring' of stakeholders**
Once the above recommendations have been implemented, OEDE should consult more deeply the next 'ring' of stakeholders (i.e. implementing partners - see Fig.2 above) in order to understand the extent to which they are also reached by new OEDE initiatives (under this Project and under EQAS etc) and what other requirements they have.

5.3 Evaluation Processes

129.   The importance of the quality of evaluation process and reports as a base for generating lessons is emphasised above. In addition, interviewees and survey respondents repeatedly stressed two other aspects of the evaluation process as very important and currently under-developed. These are beyond the direct scope of this Project but are offered here as one input to the ongoing development of EQAS.

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130.   First, self-evaluation is perceived as a key link in the chain from monitoring through to OEDE-managed external evaluation. Its importance in generating learning in a way that contributes to changing corporate culture and enhancing ownership of key lessons was repeatedly raised along with a call for further guidance from OEDE on how to do self-assessment well.

131.   This should extend to enhancing the use of techniques that stimulate staff reflection and dialogue during OEDE-managed and decentralized evaluations.

132.   Second, many interviewees stressed the importance of the follow-up process to evaluation. While the follow-up to recommendations is tracked to some extent, suggestions for possible further development are listed below. Some of these may be under consideration or have been discussed and rejected already:
- Monitoring whether recommendations have been implemented 1 to 2 years later. There may be good reasons for lack of follow-up in any particular case, but these should be transparent[61];
- Incorporate the results of relevant evaluations in CO planning;
- Increase the number of follow-up workshops and other interactive exchanges;
- Strengthen the process of interactive debriefings with a wider range of stakeholders or even working towards a system like IFAD's agreement on completion point.

5.4 Support to Increasing Corporate Potential for Learning

133.   Pending greater corporate attention to knowledge management and learning as a priority, one area of immediate demand and potential for enhancing knowledge exchange and learning stood out from the inputs to this Project, but go beyond its scope and indeed beyond the mandate of OEDE. OEDE is recommended to lend its support to initiatives from other parts of the Organization that may take it further and to encourage and participate in other cross-organisation learning initiatives.

134.   The area of immediate demand is the importance of creating opportunities to learn from and with peers between programmes in informal ways on very practical matters – especially through a web-based platform for informal exchange between practitioners. This would enable Communities of Practice to develop as a means of generating, capturing and disseminating operational knowledge. This is linked especially to a platform for exchange of "know-who" and "know-where". Such a platform would use social networking tools (e.g. thematic "cafés"). The PASS-it-on platform had many of the necessary characteristics and could be re-shaped and revitalised. There are several good examples in other branches of business on the internet. There may also be potential to include a list of people who are willing to be consulted by colleagues on a particular subject in PGM Wiki or the User Guide. OEDE's interest would be to use such a platform for dissemination of lessons from evaluations.[62]

135.   Such an initiative could be linked to a process for identifying existing strengths and weaknesses in the Organization on the key competencies required to implement the new Strategic Plan (2008-2011), especially in the areas posing new challenges to staff, such as capacity development.

<div align="center">END</div>

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[61] This could include establishment of an internal evaluation committee with members from fairly senior management and OEDAM, charged with monitoring follow-up of OEDE-managed evaluations. This would be a constructive way of increasing management involvement in evaluation.
[62] As also recommended by the Peer Review (2007) p.69

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