

# MOBILISING THE HUMANITIES: THE DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE

AUGUST 2014







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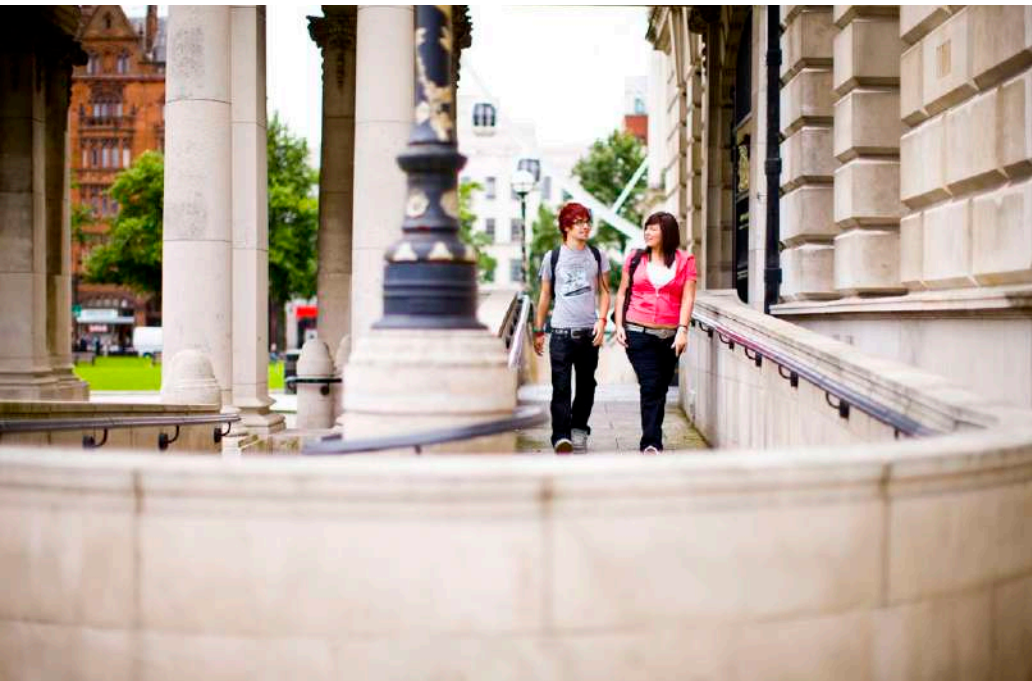
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“IN THE COMPLEX, GLOBALISED WORLD WE ARE MOVING TOWARDS, IT WILL OBVIOUSLY BENEFIT UNDERGRADUATES TO KNOW SOMETHING OF OTHER CIVILISATIONS, PAST AND PRESENT. ANY FORM OF IMMERSION IN LITERARY EXPRESSION IS HELPFUL WHEN WE ARE LEARNING TO COMMUNICATE AND DEFEND OUR THOUGHTS. AND IT SHOULD NOT BE THAT DIFFICULT TO CONCUR THAT A THOROUGH AND OBJECTIVE GROUNDING IN HISTORY IS HELPFUL AND EVEN INSPIRING WHEN APPLYING THE LESSONS OF OUR PAST TO THE FUTURE.”

PAXTON, CHRISTINA (2013)

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# BACKGROUND

## Understanding the value of the humanities

The debate about the value of an education in the humanities is not a new one. Some proponents of skills-based education have argued that a humanities education has no practical utility in the modern workplace, while many of those who support the humanities tend to put forward a ‘humanities for humanities sake’ argument for their value rather than an ‘instrumental’ perspective.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, there are real and tangible benefits of an education in the humanities that go beyond just the academic knowledge gained from studying these disciplines. In the world of intelligence and foreign policy, for example, historical, political, and cultural experts are frequently called upon to help world leaders understand unfolding geopolitical situations, the actions available to them, and the possible outcomes or consequences of those actions.

In business, there is evidence that ‘intercultural skills’—those skills that enable individuals to communicate across cultural contexts and consider multiple perspectives—are extremely

valuable to employers in helping them grow their businesses and mitigate risks in an increasingly globalised economy.<sup>2</sup>

Fields such as political science, applied anthropology, and psychology contain valuable analytical tools and knowledge that can be adapted to other fields to help practitioners better understand human relationships, systems, and processes. In addition, many supporters of the humanities argue that diversity is essential, and that humanities specialists contribute significantly to our culture and society in ways that technocrats alone cannot.<sup>3</sup>

The goal of this study is to understand the value of the humanities in the context of meeting global development challenges. This study engaged policy makers, practitioners and human resource managers at development organisations globally to look at how the humanities contribute to the design and delivery of international development solutions. This research was commissioned by the British Council and conducted by Ipsos Public Affairs.

<sup>1</sup> National Humanities Alliance (2014), Arguments for the Value of the Humanities, Available online at <http://www.nhalliance.org/advocacy/arguments-for-the-value-of-the-humanities/>

<sup>2</sup> British Council, Booz Allen Hamilton, and Ipsos (2013), Culture at Work, available online at [http://www.britishcouncil.org/culture-at-work-research\\_march\\_2013.pdf](http://www.britishcouncil.org/culture-at-work-research_march_2013.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> National Humanities Alliance (2014), Arguments for the Value of the Humanities, Available online at <http://www.nhalliance.org/advocacy/arguments-for-the-value-of-the-humanities/>

# The evolution of international development

Approaches to international development have evolved considerably since World War II. Development, in its contemporary form, has become increasingly a priority for governments as world leaders realise the importance of alleviating extreme poverty and increasing production in developing countries to achieving geopolitical goals.

A vast number of charities, foundations, non-governmental organisations, and corporate organisations, as well as government donors and transnational entities like the United Nations, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and the European Union have taken on these global development challenges. As part of this effort, the field of international development has cycled through numerous economic development policy models over the past few decades.

From the 1960s to the 1990s, generic economic restructuring models, known as ‘structural adjustment,’ were imposed on developing countries with little attention paid to the historical, political, and cultural context of the recipient economy. Many believe that the limited success of this period in international development is a result of this inability to understand the specific economic context in the pursuit of creating a free market.<sup>4</sup>

New models of economic developments started to surface once the donor requirements for structural adjustment began to shift towards softer approaches rather than those strict requirements of the past. Participatory and ‘empowerment’ approaches led to a ‘bottom-up’ approach to the design and delivery of

development programmes, emphasising the participation of local citizens, rather than only the guidelines of donor nations.

However, these approaches have been criticised for neglecting the importance of political actors and systems to development success, leading to programmes designed without much thought to the actual contexts in which they would be implemented.<sup>5</sup> Politics, systems, and historical and cultural context have recently become an important focus of the development debate. If the context is not well understood, it is impossible to design an effective programme and obtain the cooperation and support of local political and administrative actors, as well as the general population.<sup>6</sup>

The knowledge and skills gained in humanities degrees are linked with international development in several ways. Development organisations like the World Bank and bilateral donor governments rely on the expertise of area experts and researchers for a foundation of knowledge upon which to build their policy and programming approaches. Development organisations actively seek to employ staff with training in the humanities because of the adaptability of that experience to the field. The research methodologies and tools developed in the humanities are adapted by the same organisations for use in their international development programming.

<sup>4</sup> Dollar, David & Svensson, Jakob (2000). What explains the success or failure of structural adjustment programmes? *The Economic Journal*, 110, 894-917.

<sup>5</sup> De Gramont, Diane (2013). Rethinking participatory development: From critique to better practice, DAI Global Developments. Available online at <http://dai-global-developments.com/articles/rethinking-participatory-development-from-critique-to-better-practice.html>

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Development Programme (2012). Institutional context analysis guidance note, Available online at [http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Democratic%20Governance/OGC/UNDP\\_Institutional%20and%20Context%20Analysis.pdf](http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Democratic%20Governance/OGC/UNDP_Institutional%20and%20Context%20Analysis.pdf)



Many of the tools that are now common in international development programming have been adapted from humanities research approaches. Needs assessments are now a key part of early-stage development programme design. In fragile and conflict-affected regions, conflict analyses are becoming the first step in programme design, due to their focus on the causes and dynamics of local, national, and regional conflicts that may deeply impact all aspects of the programme. Conflict analysis helps policy makers and practitioners design programmes that incorporate understanding of local contexts, the interaction between the proposed programme and that context, and the ways in which positive programme impacts can be maximised and negative programme impacts avoided.<sup>7</sup>

The current focus of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is fostering ‘sustainability’ and ‘learning’ in the delivery of programmes. USAID wants to ensure that the programme benefits are sustained beyond the life of the programme and that lessons – good and bad – are transferred to other programmes and contexts. For a programme to be sustainable it must be embedded in the realities of the context, and for learning to be achieved, there needs to be a thorough understanding of why a programme has succeeded or failed. In addition, USAID considers strengthening local offices, private sector partners, and civil society organisations within a target country or region to be an essential component of sustainable development, as these measures allow the members to carry forward the programme themselves, after USAID involvement ends.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> (2014) Conflict Analysis. Conflict-Sensitive Approaches to Development, Humanitarian Assistance, and Peacebuilding, PFO, CECORE, CHA, FEWER, International Alert, Saferworld,

<sup>8</sup> USAID (2014). USAID Forward at a Glance, Available online at <http://www.usaid.gov/usaidforward>

There also was a need to reach a global consensus about which development goals to prioritise. In 2000, at the Millennium Summit of the United Nations, UN member nations outlined eight Millennium Development Goals and committed to help achieve them by 2014.

As the Millennium Development Goals campaign wraps up in 2015 and the attention of international development actors turns towards the post-2015 agenda, the knowledge, methodologies, and tools drawn from the humanities will continue to play a central role in programming design and development. humanities’ perspectives and approaches will inform contemporary and future programming, as international development actors seek value for money and long-term sustainability for development activities that address real needs in concrete, measurable ways.



## UN Millennium Development Goals

- To eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- To achieve universal primary education
- To promote gender equality and empowering women
- To reduce child mortality rates
- To improve maternal health
- To combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases
- To ensure environmental sustainability
- To develop a global partnership for development







# APPROACH TO THE STUDY

## The research questions

The primary research question for this study was: *what role do the humanities play in addressing global development challenges?*

This can be broken down into several research questions:

How are the humanities factored into needs assessment and design of development programmes?

- what are the skills most needed to help address the challenges of delivering development programmes? How do these skills address the challenges of delivering development?

- does an education in the humanities develop or demonstrate the skills required to deliver development programmes?
- does the development field have any skill gaps that can be addressed by higher education?
- how can the development field and higher education—specifically humanities education—work together to develop individuals able to contribute to addressing global development challenges?

## Overview of the approach

This research was conducted by Ipsos Public Affairs in three phases:

- phase I: a review of the relevant literature
- phase II: in-depth interviews with senior leaders of organisations in the development field
- phase III: online discussion boards with human resource managers and on-the-ground/in-country programme managers at organisations in the development field

Research participants included representatives integral to policy creation and programme implementation throughout the programme development and implementation cycle. They had extensive knowledge of the challenges of delivery, as well as the skills, training, and education needed to deliver programmes successfully. For a detailed description of the three phases of research, see Appendix A.



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“I THINK YOU NEED TO BE A PEOPLE PERSON, HAVE A HEALTHY SENSE OF CURIOSITY EVERY DAY ABOUT WHY AND HOW THINGS WORK, AND HAVE AN UNDERSTANDING THAT YOUR CULTURAL PARADIGM IS JUST THAT -- YOURS -- NOT NECESSARILY UNIVERSAL OR THEIRS, AND AN INTEREST AND ALMOST RELIEF THAT THERE ARE OTHER WAYS.”

- PROGRAMME MANAGER

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# LITERATURE REVIEW

## QUESTION I

### What are the humanities and how can their value be assessed?

The literature review allowed the research team to develop a thorough understanding of the debate about the value of a humanities education and what are the links between this and applicability in the context of international development programmes.

It was organised into two key areas for exploration:

- what are the humanities and how can their value to society and the individual be assessed?
- how can the skills and knowledge gained through an education in the humanities contribute to international development programme delivery?

#### What are the humanities?

A key starting point of the literature review was to define the humanities. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the humanities as: The branch of learning concerned with human culture; the academic subjects collectively comprising this branch of learning, as history, literature, ancient

and modern languages, law, philosophy, art, and music. Hence also in sing.: any one of these subjects.<sup>9</sup>

The humanities are typically distinguished from the natural sciences in having a significant historical element, in the use of interpretation of texts and artefacts rather than experimental and quantitative methods, and in having an idiographic rather than nomothetic character. A review of university websites revealed that the sub-disciplines associated with the humanities vary from institution to institution.

While there are variations in the application of the word ‘humanities’, there is a broad level of agreement as to the types of disciplines that fall into the humanities definition, including: ancient languages, archaeology, architecture, classics, cultural studies, design, economics, film, geography, history, international relations, law, linguistics, literature, modern languages, music, philosophy, politics, psychology, religious studies, sociology, theology, and visual arts.

<sup>9</sup> OED Online (Oxford University Press, Updated December 2013). Available at: <http://www.oed.com>.



## The debate about the value of the humanities

Based on the preliminary review of the initial research findings, it was agreed that the central issue of the debate pertinent to this analysis was: *the extent to which education in the humanities provides value—including value to individuals, nations, economies, and the world.*

Much of the debate about the value of the humanities centers around educational funding, particularly as to whether funding should be geared towards fields of study that can stimulate economic growth and provide work-ready skills, such as STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) subjects, rather than education in the humanities.

However, the debate is nuanced, particularly when the debate over sub-disciplines is considered. A recent and important voice in the debate is Helen Small, Professor of English at Oxford University in the UK. In her recent book, she advances five principal arguments in support of the value of the humanities, and uses these arguments as a central organisation scheme of the debate. Her arguments of the value of humanities study are that humanities disciplines:

- have features distinct from other fields of study, such as:
  - high tolerance for ambiguity
  - truth claims based on ‘coherence’ and ‘rightness’ rather than ‘correctness’ and ‘validity’
- are useful in a purely economic sense (contributes to the knowledge economy and the economy proper)
- contribute to individual or national happiness (can help us better understand happiness)

- contribute to a well-functioning democracy (perform a ‘gadfly’ function)
- are worth studying for their own sake.<sup>10</sup>

Martha C. Nussbaum, a professor at the University of Chicago, argues in favor of the importance of the humanities at all levels of education. She posits that excessive focus is placed on economic growth at the cost of teaching students how to think critically and become knowledgeable and empathetic citizens. Crucial abilities she attributes to the study of the humanities and the arts include the abilities to:

- think critically
- transcend local loyalties
- approach world problems as a ‘citizen of the world’
- imagine sympathetically the predicament of another person.<sup>11</sup>

## Values explored in this research

The following four values were identified by the research team as key to understanding the relevance of the humanities for international development programmes. These are:

- skills developed
- employability
- tangible application of knowledge
- economic benefits.

Each will be explored in the sections to follow.

## Skills for employability

Proponents of education in the humanities advance the opinion that students develop a variety of valuable skills as a result of studying

<sup>10</sup> \* Small, Helen (2013) *The Value of the Humanities*, Oxford University

<sup>11</sup> Nussbaum, Martha C. (2010) *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, Princeton University Press

humanities disciplines. The findings of this research also demonstrate a professional value for the international development sector.

An education in the humanities provides many of the skills that are increasingly necessary in the modern, global workforce.

The skills applicable to the international development field include:

- critical and independent thinking
- innovation
- understanding and empathy towards others, including other cultures
- knowledge of language, culture and history.

These skills that enable individuals to think critically, contextualise information and communicate across cultural contexts - intercultural skills - are extremely valuable to employers. Employers cite 'communication skills' as the most valuable skills an employee can possess, as well as writing, reading and critical thinking. Businesses that operate in a multi-cultural context benefit from understanding those cultural contexts, whether that business is selling shampoo, providing financial services or delivering economic development programmes.<sup>12</sup>

Research commissioned by the Edge Foundation concludes that employers expect graduates to have technical and discipline competences from their degrees but require graduates also to demonstrate a range of broader skills and attributes that include team-working, communication, leadership, critical thinking, problem solving, and managerial abilities.<sup>13</sup>

The results of a UK survey of employers confirm the importance of these skills and demonstrate that:

- good communications skills are considered important by a majority of employers
- 'soft' skills such as team working are also vital and even more important than most 'hard' skills
- around two-thirds of international employers indicate that having overseas professional work experience makes graduates more employable.<sup>14</sup>

## Tangible application of knowledge

Many scholars and leaders of higher education recognise the importance of knowledge gained in humanities studies as directly applicable to engaging with the world.

The National Humanities Alliance argues that the humanities ensure productive global engagement. Specifically it focuses on deep language proficiency, historical knowledge, and cultural literacy being critical to productive diplomatic and economic engagement with the world. In detail:

- humanities disciplines cultivate and maintain deep knowledge of the languages, cultures, and histories of rapidly changing areas of the world that national security, diplomatic, and business communities regularly draw upon to understand the contexts in which they work, and
- maintaining this deep capacity for all areas of the world is critical for informed diplomacy, business engagement, and national security.<sup>15</sup>

When it comes to intelligence and foreign policy, frequently historical, political and cultural experts are called-upon to offer insight to help the world's leaders understand scenarios. In fact, we do not always know the future benefits of what we study.

<sup>12</sup> British Council, Booz Allen Hamilton, and Ipsos (2013), *Culture at Work*. Available at: [http://www.britishcouncil.org/culture-at-work-research\\_march\\_2013.pdf](http://www.britishcouncil.org/culture-at-work-research_march_2013.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Lowden, K., Hall, S., Elliot, D., & Lewin, J (2011), *Employers' Perceptions of the Employability Skills of New Graduates*. Research commissioned by the Edge Foundation, University of Glasgow, SCRE Centre

<sup>14</sup> Archer, W and Davison, J. (2010) Graduate Employability: What do Employers Think and Want? Council for Industry and Higher Education.

<sup>15</sup> National Humanities Alliance Arguments for the Value of the Humanities. Available at: <http://www.nhalliance.org/advocacy/arguments-for-the-value-of-the-humanities/>.

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“AFTER SEPTEMBER 11, EXPERTS IN ARABIC AND THE HISTORY OF ISLAM WERE SUDDENLY IN HIGH DEMAND—THEIR YEARS OF RESEARCH COULD NOT SIMPLY BE INVENTED OVERNIGHT. SIMILARLY, WE KNOW THAT REGIONAL LEADERS LIKE BRAZIL, INDONESIA, AND SOUTH AFRICA WILL RISE IN RELEVANCE AND CONNECTIVITY TO THE UNITED STATES OVER THE NEXT FEW DECADES, JUST AS CHINA AND INDIA ALREADY HAVE. TO BE READY FOR THOSE RELATIONSHIPS, AND TO ADVANCE THEM, WE NEED OUR HUMANISTS FULLY ENGAGED.”

PAXTON, CHRISTINA (2013)

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### Economic benefits

To demonstrate the economic value of the humanities, many scholars point to the employment rates and earning potential of graduates and post-graduates of humanities programmes, as discussed in the previous section on skills for employability.

Employment rates and earning potential of graduates and post-graduates of humanities programmes are clear indications of employability. Statistics published by the Center on Education and the Workforce at Georgetown University demonstrate that unemployment rates for those with humanities degrees are similar to those with non-humanities degrees, and that the average income of a college graduate in the humanities considerably exceeds that of the average income of a high school graduate.<sup>16,17</sup>

A pilot study from the University of Oxford assessed the long-term career patterns of humanities graduates to examine the value of the field beyond academia. The researchers concluded that graduates of the humanities are actively engaged in and provide value to the British economy, particularly through their participation in the management, media, legal, and finance sectors.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Carnevale, Anthony P, Cheah, Ban (2013) *Hard Times: College Majors, Unemployment and Earnings*, Georgetown University, Georgetown Public Policy Institute, Center on Education and the Workforce.

<sup>17</sup> LeBossiere, Mike (2013) *Defending the Humanities: Practical Value*, The Creativity Post (Blog). Available at: [http://www.creativitypost.com/education/defending\\_the\\_humanities\\_practical\\_value](http://www.creativitypost.com/education/defending_the_humanities_practical_value).

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<sup>18</sup> Kreager, Philip. (2013) "Humanities Graduates and the British Economy: The Hidden Impact," University of Oxford. Available at: <http://torch.ox.ac.uk/sites/torch/files/publications/Humanities%20Graduates%20and%20the%20British%20Economy%20-%20University%20of%20Oxford.pdf>.



## QUESTION II

# What is the value of the humanities in international development programme delivery?

The question posed by the second area of study is quite broad in its scope. The study team narrowed its focus to examine a specific relationship between the humanities and development programming: understanding context. Because it is understood that a significant contribution of the humanities is the knowledge of and appreciation for other cultures, it was determined that this aspect of the humanities was key to measuring the impact of studying humanities disciplines on the work of international development organisations.

To be more precise, the review asked: *What evidence is there of the importance of understanding context for the design and delivery of development programmes?*

The literature that addressed this question can be grouped into four categories:

- academic literature: articles that were published in peer-reviewed journals, academic research presented at conferences, and summaries of research.
- policy documents: documents published by bilateral donors like the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) and the US Agency for International Development, international organisations like the UN, World Bank, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to name a few. These documents ranged from reports from commissioned research to general policy and best practice manuals and tools. The significant portion of the literature fit into this category.

- individual programme documents: Typically published by the same bilateral donors or international organisations, these documents offered perspectives about how international development programmes incorporate contextual analyses.
- conflict analysis: a subset of contextual analysis, this growing body of literature is important because a significant amount of international development assistance is provided in fragile and conflict-affected states.

## Applied anthropology: The foundation of understanding context

The literature review revealed that the most direct impact of the humanities on international development with regards to 'understanding context' comes from the applied anthropology' field of study. Applied anthropology, which seeks to solve "...contemporary human problems by drawing from a body of knowledge rooted in anthropology,"<sup>19</sup> provides the academic or theoretical foundation for the idea that understanding context will positively impact the success and long-term sustainability of development projects.

Applied anthropology is a field of activism—it directly seeks to change and improve social, economic, and political problems in any context, from a developing country to a fully-industrialised one. A review of the websites of universities<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Reed, A. (1998) *Applied Anthropology*, University of Indiana. Available at: [http://www.indiana.edu/~wanthro/theory\\_pages/Applied.htm](http://www.indiana.edu/~wanthro/theory_pages/Applied.htm).

<sup>20</sup> See Boston University (<http://www.bu.edu/anthrop/graduate/ma/>), Durham University (<https://www.dur.ac.uk/anthropology/postgraduatestudy/taughtprogrammes/sustainability/>), and Australian National University (<http://programsandcourses.anu.edu.au/program/7101XMAAPD>).

offering applied anthropology courses and degrees highlights the versatility of this field of study—graduates go into a variety of sectors ranging from health, to education, to international development,<sup>21</sup> acting as consultants, project managers, evaluators, sector specialists, and research directors.<sup>22</sup>

International development organisations that employ applied anthropologists benefit from their cross-cultural perspectives and knowledge.

### Evidence that context matters

While many general international development policy and programme documents make blanket statements like ‘context is crucial’, or ‘understanding context is fundamental to good programming,’ generally speaking there appears to be very little engagement in this particular body of literature on the WHY: *Why is understanding context in the design and implementation of programmes important?*

To respond to this question, studies from the academic research explored more thoroughly the impact of culture and context on a number of international development programmes. Most of these studies focused on programmes whose outcomes can be easily quantifiable, like health, education, and economics.

For example, in the health sector, one study examined the impact of culture on the use of condoms in Africa, while another highlighted how culture and context plays a role in the spread of HIV in the Pacific.<sup>23</sup> In economics, one researcher outlined the impact of indigenous political norms on international development programmes in

India.<sup>24</sup> A desk review by researchers from the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) examined the political economy of water and sanitation service delivery in developing states and how programmes are impacted by context.<sup>25</sup> The review highlighted that gender disparity in water delivery programmes sometimes resulted in underlying service provision challenges remaining unaddressed, when the views of women, who were responsible for gathering water, were not included in programme design and delivery due to social norms. This gave men a leadership role in the community consultation activities. The dynamic had ripple effects beyond the water and sanitation sector: women were forced to spend time gathering water—time that could have been spent in income-generating activities in the informal economic sector.<sup>26</sup>

Other studies are more theoretical in nature and explore fields that are not easily quantified, like social accountability.<sup>27</sup> Still others use case studies to demonstrate the importance of context, particularly understanding the ways that social and political economy dynamics worked in the communities in which international development programmes were implemented, regardless the sector.<sup>28</sup> The wide array of studies across contexts and sectors concluded that context matters and it has deep impacts on programme implementation success, long-term sustainability, and value for money.

<sup>21</sup> Wulff, R. and Fiske, S. (1987) Eds. *Anthropological Praxis: Translating Knowledge Into Action*. Boulder: Westview Press.

<sup>22</sup> van Willigen, J. (1993) *Applied Anthropology: An Introduction*. South Hadley: Bergin & Garvey.

<sup>23</sup> Asian Development Bank (2007). *Cultures and Contexts Matter: Understanding and Preventing HIV in the Pacific*.

<sup>24</sup> Jenkins, R. (2003). *International development institutions and national-economic contexts: neo-liberalism encounters India's indigenous political traditions*. *Economy and Society*.

<sup>25</sup> Harris, D., Kooy, M., and Jones, L. (2011). *Analysing the governance and political economy of water and sanitation service delivery*. London: ODI.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Joshi, A. (2013). *Context Matters: A Causal Chain Approach to Unpacking Social Accountability Interventions*. (Working Paper). Institute of Development Studies.

<sup>28</sup> Ware, A. (2010). *Contextualisation of International Development Principles to Difficult Contexts: A Case Study of Myanmar*. The Centre for Citizenship and Globalisation, Deakin University, Australia.

## Programme management practices and context

As the centrality of understanding local context in the design and delivery of international development programmes became clear, so too did the importance of best practices in project management that would incorporate context.

In addition to understanding context as a mechanism drawn from the humanities, business management practices have made their way into the context discussion and impact international development programme design and implementation as well. For example, many organisations are now relying upon the ‘Theories of Change’ model. Programme managers chart the changes they seek to make and the course they expect their programme to take to facilitate that change.

One of the starting points in this process is a comprehensive understanding of the context so that the manager can clearly identify areas where change might be difficult or where their intended outcome could be challenged. In this way, understanding context is the first step in effective and sustainable international development programming.

Similarly, sectoral impact studies seek to answer questions of effectiveness and behavioural change in project beneficiaries—goals that both best management practices and applied anthropology share. In this way, the management field reinforces the current discussion about the importance of context and programme effectiveness that was initiated by the humanities.

## Analytical tools

A significant contribution to international development programming are the analytical tools and evaluation frameworks that are directly rooted in the research methodologies developed in the humanities—in particular applied anthropology, sociology, and politics, to name only a few.

The literature highlighted the wide variety of tools and different types of context analyses available to international development staff:

- situation or context analysis
- political economy analysis
- stakeholder analysis
- institution analysis
- political and social analysis
- social network analysis
- power analysis
- conflict analysis.

These tools are meant to aid programme design and can be selected based on the context or sector. Moreover, they are highly adaptive and can be easily revised to meet specific requirements of organisations or programme strategies. Ideally, the analysis results should inform decisions on programme objectives, inputs, and expected outcomes to enhance its long-term sustainability.



## Understanding context in fragile and conflict-affected states

An important subset of the analytical tools is conflict analysis. This area is one of growing importance in the direct impact that it has on development programming in fragile and conflict affected states, which receive a large proportion of donor support.

It is considered a best practice to conduct a conflict analysis to further understand the context before any implementation in a country experiencing or emerging from conflict. It is essential because it can ensure that aid provision and development programming are 'conflict neutral' and are not further contributing to conflict or reinforcing dependence on aid or fragility.

The OECD is particularly active in this area, and has published several guides and multiple tools on conflict analysis and general engagement in

fragile states,<sup>29</sup> as are the World Bank,<sup>30</sup> United Nations,<sup>31</sup> and several bilateral donor countries, particularly the United Kingdom. Academics are also exploring the various methods of conflict analysis and how they can be utilised in development programming.

With the large amount of aid and development funding going to countries that are currently experiencing or emerging from conflict, conflict analysis as a key to effective programming will continue to dominate the 'understanding context' discourse.

<sup>29</sup> See OECD (2011) *Choosing tools for analysis and monitoring* and (2012) *Evaluating Peacebuilding Activities in Settings of Conflict and Fragility: Improving Learning for Results*. Paris: OECD. Also see the OECD's website: <http://www.oecd.org/dac/incaf/principlesforgoodinternationalengagementinfragilestates.htm>.

<sup>30</sup> World Bank (2002) *The Conflict Analysis Framework (CAF): Identifying Conflict-related Obstacles to Development*. Washington DC: World Bank.

<sup>31</sup> United Nations Development Programme (2004) *Review and Analysis: Needs Assessments in Post-Conflict Situations*. New York: UNDP.



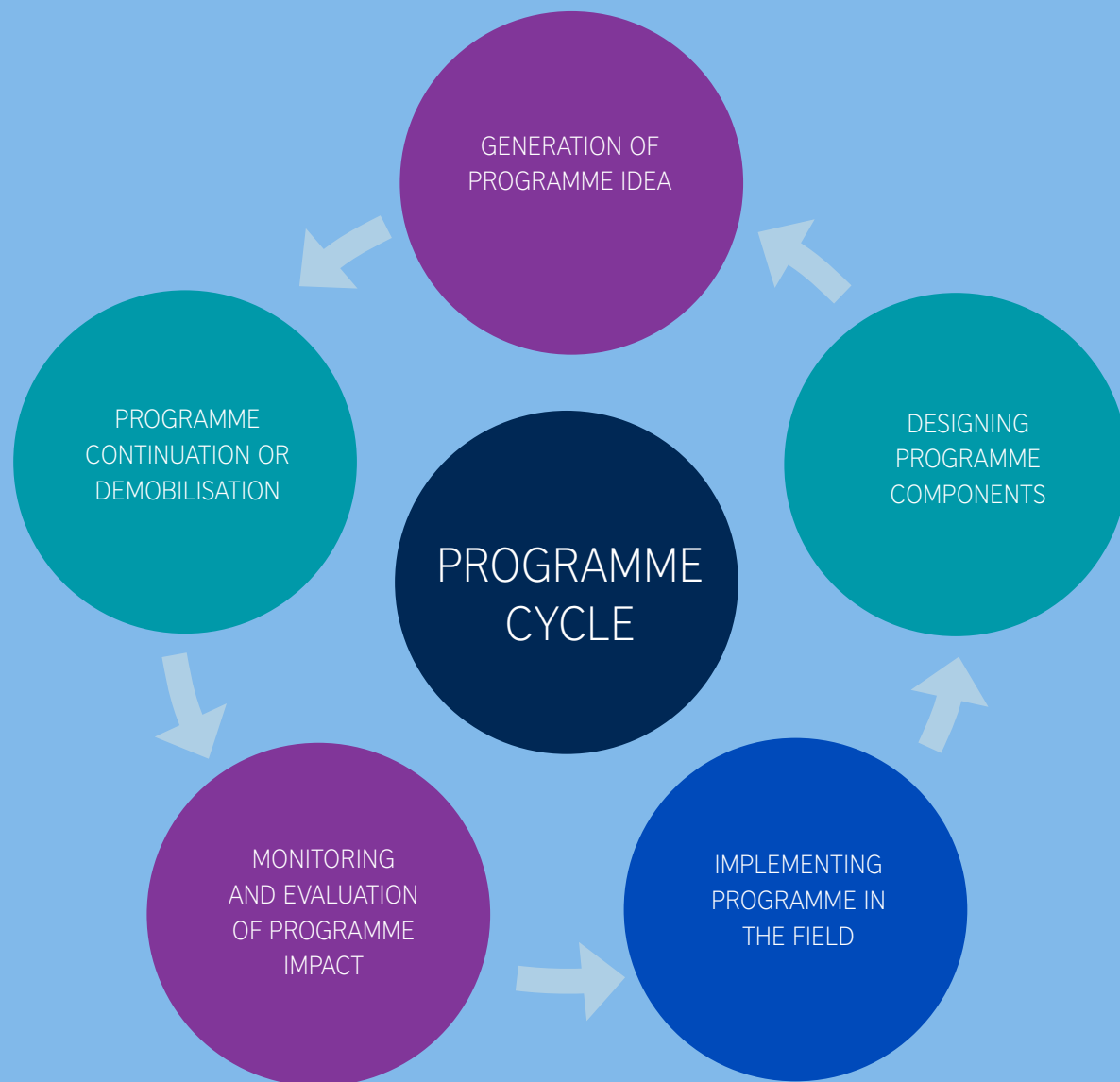
## Literature review synthesis

The findings of the desk review, which synthesised research on the value of an education in the humanities and the importance of understanding culture and context in the delivery of international development, highlighted three critical ways in which the humanities add value to international development.

1. There are many synergies between the perceived value of the humanities and the idea that context matters for effective programme design and delivery.
2. The key values of an education in the humanities can be found in the tangible application of skills to the corporate or public sector, which increase the employability and economic livelihood opportunities of the individual.
3. The most direct benefit is the wide array of skills and specialist knowledge that the study of the humanities provides to international development practitioners. For example, international development organisations and bilateral donors seek to employ country or regional specialists for their knowledge of history and languages and the research methodology skills of applied anthropologists are put to use in programme monitoring and evaluation.

It is through these indirect and direct avenues that the study of the humanities impacts the field of international development. The next phase of the research—in-depth interviews with senior leaders, project managers, and HR managers of organisations in the development sector – takes a deeper look into these impacts.





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“THE MAIN SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED HERE ARE INTERPERSONAL SKILLS, CULTURAL AWARENESS (SINCE AN EFFECTIVE TEAM WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY BE CROSS-CULTURAL), AND A SPECIALISATION IN AT LEAST ONE FUNCTIONAL AREA OF DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT, SUCH AS TECHNICAL SUPPORT, RESEARCH, FINANCE, AND ADMINISTRATION.”

- PROGRAMME MANAGER

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# ANALYSIS OF PRIMARY DATA

## FINDING 1

### Even the most technical programmes need ‘humanising’

The first major finding of the research is that while development programmes typically require a significant amount of technical comprehension, this is not enough to execute programmes effectively: local knowledge, relationship building and cultural understanding are critical. To understand how the humanities contribute to the effective delivery of international development programmes, it is essential to establish a comprehensive picture of the activities taking place throughout the programme cycle.

#### What skills are needed throughout the programme cycle?

Though programmes within the development field vary greatly by their objectives, the region or country of implementation, the approach to delivery, and many other factors, most generally consist of a similar programme cycle, as outlined in the graphic to the left.

Development programmes are often technically complex and are impossible to develop and implement without technical knowledge. They require doctors, nurses, and public health specialists to provide medical services, engineers to design and construct roads and bridges,

economists to analyse markets and industries, and teachers to educate populations. It is critical to have technically qualified team members able to fulfill these roles. These technical experts often can range from leaders in their field, possessing many years of experience and high-level qualifications, to individuals who are gaining experience in their technical field who have limited to no experience.

In addition to this obvious need for specific technical expertise, participants cited a large number of challenges encountered in the design and delivery of programmes that are not related to the technical aspects of the programme. These challenges are frequently related to interaction with administrative systems and individuals, such as managing complex relationships between stakeholders, balancing competing objectives for the programme, and situating programmes within the relevant social and cultural contexts.

#### Design phase challenges

Effective collaboration between the donor organisation, the implementing organisation, local delivery partners, and local governing and administrative agencies is vital for getting a



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“FLEXIBLE THINKING IS A CORE COMPETENCY WHICH IS KEY TO PROGRESS IN A PROFESSIONAL ENVIRONMENT – THE ABILITY TO ADAPT, UNDERSTAND, AND APPRECIATE DIFFERENT AND OPPOSING PERSPECTIVES ON AN ISSUE.”

- HR MANAGER

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programme operational. These entities are likely to have differing viewpoints in terms of the goals of the project and the method of delivery.

It is essential that those involved at the design and planning stage of a programme have good knowledge about the variety of stakeholders and their specific interests, as well as basic skills in moderating discussions and leading negotiations. These team members need to be able to plan a realistic programme with attainable goals while managing these complex relationships.

Skills in analysis and critical thinking are also necessary to conduct effective needs assessments or conflict analysis to be able to situate a programme within the local context. A programme manager needs to be able to assess a vast amount of information and make quick, educated decisions to ensure the plan for implementing a programme is aligned with the objectives that have been agreed upon. Team members need the knowledge and research skills to design project components that align with political, economic, and cultural factors in the country or region in which the programme will be implemented.

According to participants, programmes are often designed from a location that is different from where it is being implemented. Sometimes a programme is designed at the donor agency level, or has been delivered in one location and it is now being replicated in another location. A programme manager needs the ability to critically assess whether the proposed design is actually feasible in the specific context and make necessary adjustments.

Organisation and constant communication are crucial to ensuring a programme accommodates the reality of the location in which it is being implemented. A programme participant gave an example of steps taken while designing a project in Somalia, in which the participant arranged several conversations with local administrative bodies and NGOs about programme implementation, and maintained constant communication with these local actors to ensure the design was finalised with the local context in mind.

The design phase of a programme also requires an understanding of how to develop long-term and short-term budgets. This not only requires the technical skills to be able to create complex spreadsheets and budgetary documents, but also the ability to account for and incorporate multiple funding streams and individual programme areas. For example, one overall programme budget may have to incorporate budgets at a central office and multiple local offices. Therefore, the skills required at this phase of the programme include critical thinking, prioritising, and organisation.

## Implementation phase challenges

Like with the design phase of a programme, team members involved in the implementation of a programme must work together with a diverse array of partners at the central and local levels to ensure the many moving parts of a programme are working effectively. This requires an ability to manage interpersonal relationships and negotiate competing interests.

Implementation requires achieving tangible results at the local level. Participants stated that the most effective team members during the implementation of a programme are those who have the ability to align objectives and overcome barriers to mutual understanding. In addition to the communication and negotiation skills mentioned above, team members need to have good multicultural, or intercultural, skills to be able to operate effectively at this level.

Participants felt that for effective programme implementation, an individual must be able to drive forward the delivery of the programme with adherence to the agreed objectives of the programme and its budget. This can often be difficult due to unexpected delays in programme

implementation, shifting programme goals, and other unforeseen factors such as local events or extreme weather.

Perhaps most importantly, individuals involved in programme implementation need to demonstrate adaptability and creative thinking in the face of unforeseen challenges and changing circumstances. During implementation, issues that were not initially planned for can often arise suddenly. Team members need to be able to adapt quickly, think through complex problems, and propose appropriate solutions that they are able to implement and enforce quickly and successfully.

## Monitoring and evaluation challenges

The final phase of the programme cycle—monitoring programme outputs and evaluating programme impact—similarly requires many non-technical skills in addition to technical skills (such as designing an impact evaluation).

Team members must have extensive analytical skills to assess whether a particular project has met or exceeded its goals, as well as to understand the reasons why some project components were successful, while others did not meet expectations.

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“TO DEVELOP A PROGRAMME, YOU MUST FIRST HAVE A VERY GOOD UNDERSTANDING OF THE REALITY OF THE SOCIETY IN WHICH THE PROBLEM(S) EXIST, OR YOU MUST HAVE A GOOD UNDERSTANDING OF THE SITUATION. LET’S REMEMBER THAT EVERY SOCIETY IS DIFFERENT AND WHAT WORKS IN ONE MAY NOT NECESSARILY WORK IN ANOTHER.”

- PROGRAMME MANAGER

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Individuals need to be able to communicate learning about the programme to internal teams as well as multiple stakeholders. The ability to successfully understand and share this information will help to determine if a programme should be continued—and if so how it should be continued—or ended. This requires the analytical skills to determine the types of improvements and adaptations needed to continue the programme.

Successfully responding to the array of challenges a programme might encounter requires programme managers and administrators to gain skills and experience beyond the technical or scientific expertise that forms the core of programme delivery.

The next section goes on to discuss in more detail the categories of ‘human’ and ‘soft’ skills that were cited as critical to addressing the non-technical challenges of programme delivery by participants in the research. In addition, the chapter will explore how participants in the study expected individuals to acquire and develop these skills, touching on the relevance of an education in the humanities.

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“IT’S THE ANALYTICAL, THE CREATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING, BUT IT’S ALSO THE ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE. YOU CAN BE THE MOST BRILLIANT ANALYST AND GET IT, BUT IF YOU CANNOT COMMUNICATE IN A WAY THAT PEOPLE CAN UNDERSTAND AND IF YOU CAN’T LISTEN AND HEAR REALLY WHAT THE PROBLEM IS IT’S ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO BE AN EFFECTIVE EMPLOYEE AT ANY OF THESE INSTITUTIONS.”

- PROGRAMME DIRECTOR

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## FINDING 2

# Key skills and attributes for successful programme delivery

Development programmes occur in complex, challenging, and ever-shifting environments, requiring a team with a detailed and diverse collection of skills and attributes to ensure programme success. Understanding the types of non-technical skills that development organisations view as most essential to programme success serves as a basis for assessing how the humanities—and the skills and knowledge they provide—contribute to the delivery of international development programmes.

This chapter discusses the second major finding of the research. The most commonly required skills and attributes could be placed within the following four categories: critical and analytical thinking, flexibility and tolerance for ambiguity, communication and negotiation, and local knowledge.

### Critical and analytical thinking

As described in the previous chapter, complexity is a key feature of development programmes, which often take place in difficult locations, with constantly shifting priorities and goals, unforeseen political, bureaucratic, and financial challenges, and multiple perspectives that must be taken into account. Effective programme delivery therefore requires a detailed understanding of these different factors and the ways in which they may help or hinder the programme.

Multiple parties with competing interests may not always support or prioritise the organisation's goals, and results may often be impacted by a variety of political, social, cultural, and economic factors. In such circumstances, team members must be able to critically assess and analyse the situation so that they are able to propose realistic and effective solutions.

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“WITHOUT CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS, WE WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO DISCERN THE EFFECTIVE FROM THE INEFFECTIVE, THE IMPORTANT FROM THE NOT IMPORTANT. CRITICAL THINKING PERMITS US TO ANALYSE AND UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT, THE DEVELOPMENT PROBLEM THAT IS BEING CONSIDERED, AS WELL AS TO PROPOSE AND PRIORITISE A RANGE OF OPTIONS THAT COULD CONTRIBUTE TO THE SOLUTION.”

- PROGRAMME MANAGER



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“ONCE A DEVELOPMENT PROBLEM IS IDENTIFIED, ANALYTICAL SKILLS ARE NEEDED TO ASSESS THE SITUATION AND ARRIVE AT A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF THE PROBLEM. IT’S IMPORTANT TO THEN THINK THROUGH HOW THE PROBLEM COULD BE ADDRESSED. WHAT HAS ALREADY BEEN TRIED AND DIDN’T WORK? WHY DIDN’T IT WORK? IS THERE SOMETHING THAT IS ALREADY WORKING THAT COULD BE SCALED UP? HOW COULD WE GO ABOUT SCALING IT UP?”

- PROGRAMME MANAGER

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Team members need to be able to assess the situation at hand to ensure that the programme is successfully responding to local needs. Additionally, they need to be able to understand and respond to obstacles in a timely manner to avoid or mitigate delays in the programme delivery cycle. Team members also need to display resourcefulness in the face of limited budgets and a shortage of essential staff members.

If team members are not able to think critically and analyse situations effectively, their ability to implement programmes and propose solutions to problems may be hindered.

In addition to being resourceful, team members need to have the ability to apply logic and reasoning to solve complex problems. Challenges can arise quickly, making the ability to assess a situation immediately, fully analyse all of its aspects, and discern a viable solution crucial to the success of a programme. Study participants emphasised the importance of being able to implement programmes swiftly even when there is lack of clarity in key areas.

Critical and analytical thinking skills also come into play in learning from the past successes and failures of programme implementation. These skills are central to analysing the benefits or deficiencies of a particular programme, evaluating the overall impact of programme components, and determining whether a particular programme is sustainable in its current form or requires further modification to be truly effective.

Finally, the ability to use critical and analytical thinking to apply what one has learned to improve a programme is vital to the sustainability of a programme. Although this skill is necessary throughout the programme cycle, the capacity to evaluate a programme critically and adapt it for future iterations is crucial. For development programmes to succeed, their designers need to be able to look back on each problem and success throughout the programme cycle, analyse those situations carefully, and recommend improvements.

One participant mentioned the importance of being able to examine all facets of a situation thoroughly. Without a deep understanding of each problem that arises within the programme cycle, that problem can critically alter the success of a programme.

## Flexibility and tolerance for ambiguity

In addition to thinking critically and solving complex problems quickly, team members need to be able to react to situations that are unfamiliar and sometimes unclear. Because of the number of stakeholders, competing objectives, complex local and political contexts, and challenges associated with intercultural communication, successful implementation of development programmes requires individuals who can navigate this multi-faceted environment successfully. This includes the ability to be flexible and adapt as new information becomes available or situations change on the ground.

Constantly moving programmes forward is part of how international development works, and in some cases, the process cannot be stopped even if there is a lack of clarity. This requires a high tolerance for ambiguity, due to the lack of information about local dynamics that can only be assessed once a programme is being implemented.

The ability to think quickly and effectively in ambiguous situations is a crucial factor in the success of a programme. For example, shifting political or economic contexts in the country where the programme is being implemented requires the person in charge to often navigate through new, previously unfamiliar territory. Programme components may need to be added

in response to these challenges, requiring programme managers to be prepared to change their focus.

Study participants noted that individuals who are adept at navigating ambiguous situations often have a high level of passion for the project they are implementing, which in turn results from having high levels of curiosity and drive.

## Communication and negotiation

Another very important skill for development programme delivery is being able to communicate. Successful communication takes many different forms during the programme cycle. For example, there are different skills required when communicating with multiple stakeholders at the onset of a programme compared with the skills required when speaking to local actors during programme implementation.

Development programmes typically have a range of stakeholders – funders, governments, local communities, the implementing organisation, and many more. Good programme delivery requires the ability to navigate these relationships and achieve a high level of consensus. The ability to successfully maintain an open dialogue with various interest groups at the beginning of a programme can help foster an open environment where all opinions are considered.

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“GOOD COMMUNICATION SKILLS ARE ESSENTIAL BOTH TO EXPLAIN IDEAS CLEARLY AND CONCISELY TO OTHER STAFF AND TO BENEFICIARIES AT A LEVEL THEY CAN UNDERSTAND, AS WELL AS RECEIVING AND REACTING APPROPRIATELY TO FEEDBACK FROM OTHERS.”

- PROGRAMME MANAGER

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Additionally, the ability to communicate in a multi-cultural context is critical, and goes beyond technical ability with languages to being sensitive to local cultural norms. Participants often cited difficulties in programmes due to team members' struggle with successfully communicating with people from different cultures.

### Local knowledge

Local knowledge is also fundamental to the successful delivery of development programmes. The abilities to think critically, be flexible, and communicate effectively are each enhanced when team members have an in-depth understanding of the context in which they are working.

Knowledge related to political and administrative systems, economics, law, history, sociology, language, religion, and culture are essential to good situational analyses and needs assessments, programme design, and ultimately the successful delivery of programmes.

At the design phase of a project, needs assessments and conflict analyses are conducted to ensure a programme is relevant to the area where it will be implemented. This step was incorporated into the programme design process because it is essential to understand that programmes cannot be implemented in a vacuum and must meet the needs of the local context.

Local knowledge must be applied at each stage of the programme cycle. However, participants felt that it was most crucial at the implementation stage. Those responsible at this stage need to be able to analyse and adapt programme components based on good judgement and knowledge about the local context.

A thorough understanding of the local context can facilitate the design of programme components that are specifically tailored to the needs and interests of the target population, reducing the risk of a mismatch between programme goals and local reality. For example, one programme manager stated that local knowledge can help develop a nutrition programme that takes into account the foods that are locally available, and the ways in which the local population is familiar with preparing them.

Participants felt that to some extent, these important skills and areas of knowledge can be gained through academic study, including in humanities disciplines. In addition, participants felt that having practical experience of working in local contexts was extremely beneficial for the successful delivery of development programmes. This is explored further in the next chapter.

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“I HAVE SEEN GOOD TECHNICAL PROFESSIONALS FAIL BECAUSE OF THE LACK OF SENSITIVITY OR AWARENESS OF LOCAL LANGUAGES, CULTURES, HISTORY, PHILOSOPHY, OR RELIGION.”

- HR MANAGER

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## FINDING 3

# Humanities education develops needed knowledge and skills

Previous chapters highlighted the challenges inherent in designing and delivering development programmes, and the skills and knowledge that are required for team members to do so successfully. This chapter explores the ways in which individuals can gain these skills and knowledge, and the extent to which the humanities play a role in that process.

### Value of a humanities education

Development organisations' employees are required to achieve a high level of education: participants stated that almost all programme directors and managers have a Master's degree, and many employees also have PhDs, especially

at organisations that work intensively with data or carry out other specialised or technical functions. In terms of the field areas of employees' degrees, participants explained that most employees filling non-specialised roles in the delivery of programmes tend to have a background in the humanities, rather than in a technical or scientific subject area.

Fields such as anthropology, economics, law, and political science were perceived by many study participants to provide the types of knowledge and analytical abilities necessary to operate in the field. For example, participants felt that studying economics provided the tools to conduct

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“THERE ARE NUMEROUS WAYS IN WHICH ‘CULTURAL SENSITIVITY’ ENRICHES OUR WORK IN DEVELOPMENT. IT ENABLES US TO:

- 1) BETTER UNDERSTAND THE NUANCES AND SUBTLE MESSAGES DURING PROJECT DESIGN, NEGOTIATION AND IMPLEMENTATION
- 2) UNDERSTAND THE SOCIO-CULTURAL CONSTRAINTS IN THE ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH WE ARE WORKING
- 3) DESIGN INSTRUMENTS AND METHODS FOR OUR DIFFERENT PROJECTS THAT ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE SOCIALLY ACCEPTABLE.

IF WE ARE DESIGNING AN INTERVENTION IN NUTRITION, IT IS IMPORTANT TO REFER TO FOODS THAT ARE LOCALLY AVAILABLE, AND LOCALLY APPROPRIATE WAYS TO PREPARE THEM. ”

- PROGRAMME MANAGER

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a comprehensive analysis of any issue, and that economists could provide practical assistance in delivering economic growth to a developing country.

Participants also noted knowledge of international law is helpful, as it often formed the basis for many international development programmes. political science was valued for its ability to couple large-scale political or regional analysis with an understanding of local contexts, while anthropology was valued for providing knowledge on different cultures.

Participants felt that fields such as the arts, history, literature, and religion also have value, but more so for the skills and attributes they developed in the individuals who studied those disciplines. They thought that studying religion, for example, could improve the ability to understand and respect different perspectives.

Participants noted that knowledge of national or regional history provides individuals with a deeper and more nuanced understanding of present conflicts. Literature and the arts were seen as providing the basis for cross-cultural

communication, as well as inculcating a sense of creativity and curiosity in those who studied those disciplines.

It is important to differentiate the explicit and implicit links that study participants made between humanities disciplines and their value to programme design and delivery. Some disciplines were perceived to contribute explicitly to effective programme delivery, while others added value due to the skills and knowledge they were associated with, which in turn would be essential to the programme delivery process.

Subjects such as anthropology, economics, law, and political science appeared to have more direct relevance to organisations' work, and were more likely to be explicitly linked by study participants to the successful delivery of programme components in the field. There appeared to be a specific need for people with legal training to provide legal assistance in developing countries, as well as to fully understand the nuances of international treaties that often formed the basis of humanitarian or economic development programmes.

The need to communicate in different languages to deliver particular programmes often led participants to consider the study of languages to be essential. In addition, economists were thought to be able to provide practical, on-the-ground analyses of economic conditions and trends, as well as the ability to improve systems to maximise profitability.

Indeed, many programme managers themselves had degrees in disciplines such as economics, international relations, law, political science, and public policy, while human resources managers similarly cited political science, law, and economics as the disciplines they most looked for when hiring programme managers.

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“STUDY OF RELIGIONS EXPANDS OUR KNOWLEDGE OF DIFFERENT BELIEF SYSTEMS AND WORLD VIEWS, AND THEREFORE MAKES US MORE OPEN TO UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENCES AND PREPARES US BETTER TO WORK WITH PEOPLE COMING FROM DIFFERENT RELIGIOUS BACKGROUNDS.”

- HR MANAGER

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Studies such as literature, languages and religion also were explicitly valued. For example, studying religion was thought to provide the knowledge necessary to understand conflicts and develop effective partnerships in locations where religion plays a central role in society.

While participants had views on specific disciplines related to the humanities, they also linked certain skills and attributes needed for successful delivery of an international development solution—as identified in the previous section—to humanities graduates. Participants implicitly recognise the value of the humanities to international development.

Study participants described critical and analytical thinking as a core competency expected of humanities graduates. They felt that the broad-based learning inherent in humanities disciplines gave individuals the ability to understand and analyse the different factors

impacting any particular situation, as well as to consider multiple perspectives originating from diverse experiences. Students of the humanities often study the political, economic, historical, social, and religious influences on a particular country, enabling them to develop a more comprehensive analysis of that country's current problems than those who had a more specialised technical background. This ability to grasp complexity and integrate multiple perspectives also enables humanities graduates to approach the implementation of development programmes with a critical lens.

Participants felt that humanities graduates often develop a high level of flexibility and tolerance for ambiguity which is seen as a needed skill to achieve successful project delivery. Because they are often exposed to a multitude of opinions and perspectives through their studies, it is likely that humanities graduates will be able to navigate unfamiliar cultural environments and

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“UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENT RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHIES HELPS US TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THE CONFLICTS THAT HAVE BEEN TRIGGERED BY RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES OR INTOLERANCE, AND PREPARES US TO USE FAITH-BASED INSTITUTIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT WORK WHICH ARE PART OF THE LOCAL CULTURAL FABRIC. IT ALSO HELPS US TO DO A DEEPER ANALYSIS OF HOW RELIGIOUS BELIEFS CAN BE POLITICISED TO PROMOTE CONFLICTS THAT HAMPER DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE. DEVELOPMENT SOLUTIONS BASED ON SUCH TYPES OF ANALYSES ARE MORE LIKELY TO IDENTIFY SOLUTIONS THAT ARE IMPLEMENTABLE AND EFFECTIVE IN THE LOCAL CONTEXT.”

- HR MANAGER

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“WHEN I WAS WORKING ON OUR RUSSIA PROGRAMME, THE FACT THAT I WAS FAMILIAR WITH THE COUNTRY’S LITERATURE ALLOWED ME TO UNDERSTAND A LITTLE BIT BETTER SOME OF THE REFERENCES AND SOME OF THE DEEPER THINGS THAT ARE GOING ON. THE POETRY AND NOVELS INFORM PEOPLE’S CULTURAL CONTEXT AND IT COMES UP IN DISCUSSIONS.”

- PROGRAMME DIRECTOR

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be prepared and aware if events on the ground unfold unpredictably due to political, societal, and cultural impacts. For example, studying anthropology was thought to provide insights into the cultural factors behind human behaviour, thus enabling a more comprehensive approach to addressing and perhaps changing that behaviour.

Communication and negotiation skills were also expected of humanities graduates, particularly the ability to write, present, and speak in a manner sensitive of the local context and cognisant of on-the-ground realities, and the ability to synthesise a great deal of information. While studying languages was thought to directly impact the ability to communicate with local partners and programme recipients, it was also indirectly connected to understanding nuances, and facilitating greater understanding of the local situation.

Finally, the humanities are valued for providing contextualised knowledge about politics, geography, history, language, religion, culture, and general ethical principles that can lead to insight into the current challenges facing any particular region or country of interest, and allow individuals to display cultural understanding and sensitivity in their local interactions. For example, participants stated that studying literature could provide an

important understanding of local cultural contexts and lead to positive communications with partners and programme recipients on the basis of shared knowledge.

Study participants also noted positively that those individuals who were drawn to the humanities had a more general inclination to want to understand the varieties of the human experience as a whole. Additionally, they were often passionate about the causes they were serving. These qualities further reflected a general intellectual curiosity and openness to the world around them.

### **Interaction between education and experience is important**

Despite the clear value that participants placed on different humanities disciplines, they also consistently emphasised that education was not the most important factor in assessing potential project team members. For them, the skills and knowledge that they cited as important were only fully realised when complemented with practical experience, where people had adapted and shown flexibility and understanding in real-life situations.

Participants were clear that a humanities education is not necessarily about a self-contained body of academic knowledge, but about the special skills that are acquired through study, which can then be put to use through experience.

Two types of practical experience were emphasised most of all, with neither necessarily being specific to the particular programme an organisation is recruiting a team for. The first was on-the-job experience, where candidates had managed projects in similar frameworks for relevant client types and had demonstrated that they had the four key skills types and attributes to deliver a programme successfully. Past experience in successful project management was considered essential, as it could help ensure a team member's reliability in implementing future projects.

The second, and more important, type of experience cited was international experience. For recent graduates who might not have on-the-job experience, close attention would be paid to any of their international experience.

Participants felt that having lived and/or worked in another country demonstrated a significant level of interaction with different cultures and engagement in problem-solving. For more recent graduates, this type of experience might include studying abroad or internships in other countries, while previous experience managing international development programmes was expected from more senior team members.

Participants generally perceived education and experience to be complementary and reinforcing attributes, although they were aware that individuals may not acquire these attributes simultaneously. For example, when presented with a hypothetical situation where they had to choose between two candidates for a position in India – one with project management experience in other countries and the other with an extensive academic background in Indian/South Asian issues – participants emphasised the importance of both skill sets, provided that they can quickly fill in gaps in knowledge or experience.

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“STUDY OF THE HUMANITIES INVOLVES AN UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN VALUES AND HOW THOSE VALUES TRANSLATE INTO KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES, AND BEHAVIOUR. TO UNDERSTAND VALUES, IT IS VITAL TO KNOW LOCAL LANGUAGES AND CULTURES, WHICH INCLUDE PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION. KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THESE AREAS ENABLE US TO HAVE AN IDEA OF WHAT DRIVES DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES, WHAT DISTINGUISHES THEM FROM OTHERS, AND WHAT MAKES THEM SIMILAR TO OTHERS.”

- PROGRAMME MANAGER

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Organisations delivering programmes in the development sector require a very diverse and complex skill-set in their team members. Participants in the study were clear that individuals educated in the humanities tend to possess many of the skills and attributes required and can contribute significantly to the

delivery of development programmes. However, organisations also expressed challenges in finding the right mix of skills and experience to resource their projects. These challenges, and potential solutions to them, are discussed in detail in the next chapter of this report.



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“THINK ABOUT [CHINUA] ACHEBE’S ‘THINGS FALL APART’ AS AN EXAMPLE OF THE POWER OF LITERATURE TO REFLECT POLITICAL AND SOCIAL TRAUMA, EVOLUTION AND CHANGE. THE WRITING IS STILL A FORCE IN EXPLAINING POST-COLONIAL THINKING IN AFRICA. A PROJECT MANAGER NEEDS TO READ - HISTORY, NOVELS, BIOGRAPHIES, ETC. TO GET A FEEL FOR LANGUAGE, EXPRESSION, SENTIMENT, DEEP ROOTED ATTITUDES AND SO ON THAT WILL INFLUENCE AND SHAPE COMMUNICATIONS.”

-PROGRAMME MANAGER

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## FINDING 4

# Challenges in finding the right people

The final key finding of this research is that development organisations face significant challenges in recruiting team members to deliver their projects. Study participants noted a challenge in finding available individuals who fit all of the requirements for an open position, have the necessary technical and non-technical skills needed to be successful, and have the experience to prove they are able to apply their knowledge to real-life situations.

According to development organisations, this challenge may compromise the sustainability of development programmes. As humanities disciplines have been linked to some of the most urgently-needed skills and attributes in the international development field, closer attention to candidates with a background in those disciplines, and working with institutions of higher education to get students workplace-ready through international experience, may provide one means of mitigating this challenge.

### The recruitment challenge

While organisations typically maintain a core staff, recruitment also occurs on a project-by-project basis. The main reason for this is that projects last for a limited duration, and each project is different and requires a unique combination of skills.

As discussed in previous chapters of this report, the spectrum of international development programmes is wide and team members are required to have knowledge in specific field areas, for example education, gender, democracy and governance, health and family planning, environment, economic and business development, and infrastructure.

In addition, team members are likely to be required to have language skills and some knowledge of the country or region in which the project is taking place, as well as the core skills that have been discussed in earlier chapters of this report: critical and analytical thinking, flexibility and tolerance for ambiguity, and communication and negotiation.

The selection of an individual to work on a development project is frequently constrained by donor requirements for a certain number of years of experience, high education requirements, and familiarity with the specific programme or donor approach to development delivery. In addition, development organisations are in competition with the private sector, which can often pay more for good candidates.

HR managers mentioned how difficult it is to find a candidate who meets all criteria, making it very rare to find a candidate with the proper education and experience, *and* who will work for the set salary. This makes it very difficult to prioritise the skill sets that are the most important for each position on a project team.

The combination of intense workplace challenges and less-competitive compensation can result in high turnover for development organisations. Many individuals will spend a few years gaining experience at a development organisation, and then leave for another type of job.

## How organisations respond to the challenge

The way organisations tend to respond to this challenge is to recruit from a small pool of individuals through networking and pre-existing contacts. They might have worked with an individual before on a similar project or have been given a recommendation. They may search for candidates on websites and online communities of development practitioners. All the candidates that they recruit to projects have prior experience in the development sector on similar projects.

A number of participants pointed out that, as the development sector has grown rapidly, this networked approach to recruiting to project teams may have led to there being the appearance of an available smaller pool of candidates than is needed to meet the demands of the projects being delivered. Since organisations are not looking outside of this pool, they are basing their employee searches only past on experience rather than seeking individuals with the skills that they have identified as critical for the successful delivery of programmes.

Individuals seeking to move into the development sector, either directly from college or from another sector, experience high barriers to entry. They may have knowledge and skills that would be beneficial for the delivery of development programmes, albeit skills not developed in the development sector, and therefore appropriate for work in the field. However, they may struggle to gain access if they are outside of the network.

## Higher education can work with the development sector

This study has demonstrated that organisations working in the development sector are very clear about the skills that are needed to deliver development programmes successfully. In addition, they have explicitly linked the core skills needed for the successful delivery of development programmes—critical and analytical thinking, flexibility and tolerance for ambiguity, communication and negotiation, and local knowledge—with an education in the humanities.

However, organisations in the development sector need team members who can hit the ground running when it comes to delivering programmes. For them, this typically means having had on-

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“I’D ASK CANDIDATE A HOW COMFORTABLE HE/SHE IS IN NEW CULTURES AND WHETHER HE/SHE COULD SEE HIMSELF LIVING THERE FOR A WHILE AS THIS IS WHAT IT WOULD TAKE TO GET UP TO SPEED. I’D ASK CANDIDATE B TO SHOW ME HOW HIS/HER BACKGROUND COULD HELP IN DESIGNING INNOVATIVE PROGRAMMING.”

- PROGRAMME MANAGER

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the-ground experiences in a similar environment—the field area in question and typically also the country or region in question. At the very least they require that candidates have demonstrated their skills via an international experience.

As a way to expand the pool of qualified candidates, a number of participants suggested that higher education institutions could work closely with the development sector to give interested students the opportunity to gain experience. They can do this by offering individuals interested in working in the development sector international experiences such as study abroad, or work in partnership with

development organisations themselves to offer internships and placements on development projects on the ground.

A partnership approach would enable educators to ensure that their students are workplace-ready, and expand the pool of candidates available to development organisations for the delivery of development projects.





## APPENDIX A

# RESEARCH METHODS

### PHASE I

## Literature review

For the first phase of the study, Ipsos Public Affairs, in collaboration with Kathryn Rzeszut from the University of York (UK) Post-war Reconstruction and Development Unit, conducted a literature review focusing on two key issues:

- The debate about the value of an education in the humanities
- The importance of understanding culture and context in the delivery of international development programmes, and the relevance of a humanities education in achieving that understanding.

To identify relevant literature, searches were conducted on more than 19 databases and search engines, ranging from academic databases available through the University of York and

Ottawa University, to donor and international development agencies' resources databases, such as the Department for International Development's (DFID) R4D database, JOLIS from the World Bank/the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Google Scholar and Google's general search engine were used to capture documents such as think tank reports, policy briefings, and blog posts that may not have been available on the academic or organisation databases.



The search terms used for each research area were:

HUMANITIES AND THE ASSESSMENT OF ITS VALUE	VALUE OF HUMANITIES IN PROGRAMME DELIVERY
VALUE OF THE HUMANITIES	APPLIED ANTHROPOLOGY
HUMANITIES AND VALUE	CONTEXT AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
HUMANITIES AND ECONOMIC VALUE	CONTEXT AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND DESIGN
HUMANITIES AND PRACTICAL VALUE	CONTEXT ANALYSIS
LIBERAL ARTS AND VALUE	CONTEXT ANALYSIS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
LIBERAL ARTS AND ECONOMIC VALUE	CONFLICT ANALYSIS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
LIBERAL ARTS AND PRACTICAL VALUE	INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
HUMANITIES AND DEFINITION	SITUATION ANALYSIS
LIBERAL ARTS AND DEFINITION	UNDERSTANDING CONTEXT

The document search and review process resulted in a final data set that included 15 key documents relevant to the first area and 91 documents relevant to the second area.



## PHASE II

### In-depth interviews

The second phase of the study consisted of in-depth interviews with senior representatives of organisations in the development field. The research team used these interviews to gain a thorough understanding of the organisations' work and the challenges they face in delivering programmes, as well as to gauge how leaders in the development field perceive and value the humanities.

These participants were asked about the programme development cycle, from the generation of a policy or idea to the execution of a project on the ground, the challenges of delivery, and the skills, training, and education that were needed at each stage. Participants also discussed their perceptions of the value of an education in the humanities, and the contribution this education makes to successful programme implementation.

Verbatim transcripts were generated from the audio recordings of each in-depth interview.

The discussion guide for these interviews can be found in Appendix B.

## PHASE III

### Online discussion boards

The final phase of the study consisted of online discussion boards with human resources managers and on-the-ground programme managers (people delivering programmes in-country) at development organisations.

The findings from this phase were used to gain a thorough understanding of these organisations' needs in terms of recruiting and retaining

ORGANISATION	DIRECTOR	HR MANAGER	PROGRAMME MANAGER
U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT	X		
NORWEGIAN AGENCY FOR DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION	X		
INTER-AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK	X		X
OXFAM	X	X	X
UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME	X	X	X
WORLD BANK	X		
DEMOCRACY INTERNATIONAL	X	X	
MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS INTERNATIONAL	X	X	X
NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE	X		
INTERNATIONAL REPUBLICAN INSTITUTE	X	X	X
THE COCA-COLA FOUNDATION	X		
DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES INC.	X	X	
COFFEY INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT	X	X	X
INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANISATION	X		
RTI	X	X	X
IREX	X	X	X
MENDEZ ENGLUND AND ASSOCIATES	X	X	X
PRICEWATERHOUSECOOPERS	X		
INTERNATIONAL FINANCE CORPORATION	X		
ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT		X	X

employees while effectively managing and delivering programmes in the field. In addition, the findings also helped to understand how human resource managers and programme managers at these organisations perceived different humanities disciplines and their contribution to programme design and delivery.

Over the course of a week, participants answered questions, took polls, and contributed to group discussions about the challenges they face in their day-to-day work, the background, education, and skills most conducive to effective programme management in the field, the types of academic disciplines they are most likely to value, and the ways in which an education in various humanities disciplines could contribute to programme design and delivery.

## Analysis

This study generated a huge volume of qualitative data in the form of the transcripts from the in-depth interviews, as well as the results of polls, discussions, and answers to questions from the online boards.

The analysis of such a large and varied qualitative dataset required a process that is theoretically grounded, rigorous, highly organised, and transparent. Ipsos Public Affairs has a well-established staged process for the analysis of qualitative data.

## Analytical workshop

All key team members (the project director, research associates, and interviewers) participated in an internal analytic workshop. The workshop was moderated by the project director and covered all of the research questions for which findings from the data would be required, creating the overall framework for analysis.

## Coding

The workshop was a useful tool for understanding the overarching themes emerging from the research. Additionally, to mitigate the possibility of interviewer bias, it was supplemented with having the interview transcripts and online boards outputs coded by independent, experienced analysts.

Using all of the materials generated from the qualitative data collection, the independent coders:

- extracted evidence related to the framework themes developed during the analytical workshop, including verbatim, and
- extracted evidence directly related to the research questions that had not been previously considered within the themes of the analytical workshop.

## Final analysis

The coders presented the coded data and their refinements to the findings to the project director, project managers, and interviewers. Further discussion ensured agreement on major themes. This report has been structured around these themes. The report writers continuously returned to the notes, transcripts, and other outputs to validate or challenge the overarching structure and revise the report structure accordingly.

## APPENDIX B

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