

Area Department Survey of Staff

In a self-evaluation of what went wrong, one of the area departments whose countries were most affected by the crisis conducted a survey of staff in October 2009. The following highlights the staff's views on some of the issues most relevant to this evaluation.

On the substance of country work, just under half the staff members thought that the area department was strong or very strong in assessing vulnerabilities. The toolkit for macro-financial analysis was often cited as an analytical impediment.

On where the area department should place the priority in country work, a staggering 98 percent of staff thought it important or very important to prioritize work on vulnerabilities and crisis risks, more so than even fiscal or monetary policy. Write-in responses to the question of priorities repeatedly stressed the need to do more work on cross-country linkages, spillovers, and integration of regional with country-specific perspectives.

On the main problems in the area department's surveillance work and ways to fix them:

- “relations with the authorities. We do not have the incentives to be too critical, especially publicly and to differ substantially. More support from the front office/management, less pressure to make authorities happy, more consistent ‘ruthless truth telling’ across all countries, not just a few.”
- “more formal and informal communication with functional departments, mainly MCM ...” “The main problem is how to bring value added to large economies, which have large staffs of highly trained economists. The solution is to focus on the Fund’s comparative advantages, namely cross-country work, spillovers, and global consistency.”
- “no courage to take on countries, especially G7. For years we praised [a large systemic country] for its policy framework and now we have egg on our face.”

On leadership and communication, just under half the economists agreed with the statement “your ideas and opinions are considered and listened to.”

On incentives, fewer than a third agreed that the area department gets its voice heard in the interdepartmental review process for policy papers, the *WEO*, the *GFSR*, etc. As for why this is the case, almost half believed that incentives (e.g., one gets little credit for good comments) were a serious hurdle. Meanwhile, almost three-quarters of respondents agreed with the statement that “cross-country work faces several constraints, including managerial complexity, incentives, resources, and priority of bilateral relations.” Incentives, for example, were cited by about 85 percent of respondents as a hurdle to producing cross-country work.

On the silo nature of the Fund, only one-fifth of survey respondents agreed that there was sufficient learning from peers across country teams (and this lack of collaboration within a department bodes poorly for across-department collaboration).

On intellectual leadership, well over half the respondents felt that department managers had not provided the intellectual leadership to get the job done to a high standard. Some respondents felt that the Fund’s downsizing exercise had impeded the ability to provide intellectual leadership. For example, one respondent wrote that “the [conjuncture] of the restructuring and the crisis has had disastrous consequences on the leadership provided by the department.”