

## Insight Thursday—Beyond the Headlines

By Carola Donner-Reichle and Maria Christina S. Dueñas

- **Knowledge development thrives in a rich web of social contact among individuals, groups, and organizations.**
- ***Insight Thursday* is a weekly, 30-minute seminar open to all ADB staff. Stimulating discussions are par for the course.**
- **The events bring together different groups of people and promote understanding of, organize, and manage information that is worth paying attention to—from global or regional debates to institutional challenges and more.**

Tacit knowledge resides in the minds of individuals but knowledge development thrives in a rich web of social contact among individuals, groups, and organizations. *Insight Thursday* provides such a context.

### Setting

In the Asian Development Bank, conferences, workshops, and brown bag events generally target peers in a particular field. This approach can build staff's capacity in their respective fields but fails to provide them with knowledge that cuts across sector or thematic silos to add impetus to their development work.

In 2010, ADB launched a quick on the uptake, non-intrusive approach to capacity building and knowledge sharing. *Insight Thursday*, a weekly, 30-minute seminar where presenters adopt individual styles to share what they know, was inaugurated by ADB President Haruhiko Kuroda on 24 June. He conversed on “*Global Financial Development, including the Euro Zone.*”

### Approach

**Conceptualization.** The idea of a weekly seminar was fleshed out in consultation with diverse audiences, including ADB's Vice-President for Knowledge Management and Regional Development, who gave views on what the series should offer. *Insight Thursday* was envisioned as a seminar series where intellectually stimulating talks, not just tête-à-têtes over coffee, happen each week. Speakers would focus on key messages and participants would comment on content.

For a multicultural organization like ADB, words take on added meanings. Finding the right title for the series was a challenge. “Face to Face” had no appeal: some find the notion confrontational, and reminiscent of BBC's “Hard Talk.” The logo, ads, lineup of topics and



ADB President Haruhiko Kuroda launches *Insight Thursday*.

speakers, both internal and external to ADB, and other logistics had to be organized next.

**Momentum.** In the early days of the series, speakers had to be invited to share their knowledge. Three months down the line, people were volunteering topics they wanted to present. *Insight Thursday's* roster of speakers now includes ADB's President, Board members, Vice-Presidents, directors, international and national staff, and visiting experts. And, not one of them has ever been financially compensated to speak.

Participants have gotten used to—and indeed appreciate—the strictly 30-minute time limit, where one can look forward to sharp insights, quick firing of questions, and more complex ideas for the audience to mull over.

Interesting exchange has won over a critical mass of experts who take part regularly. Staff from resident missions and regional offices participate via video or audio technology.

**Engagement.** The seminars bring together different groups of people and promote understanding of, organize, and manage information that is worth paying attention to—from global or regional debates to institutional challenges and more. The topics covered to date provide an overview of ADB's work and comprise a good mix of innovative ideas and forward-looking strategies. Among these are “From G8 to G20: New Architecture, New Rules, New Players”; “Justice and Development”; “Can Social Enterprises save the

World?,” and “Sex, Drugs and Rock and Roll: HIV and Infrastructure in GMS Corridor.”

Before each session, advertisements on the week’s topic are published in ADB’s internal e-newsletter, intranet site, and plasma screens located in strategic locations within the ADB building.

During the sessions, speakers are free to present and engage with audiences in any way they want. Powerpoint presentations, free speech, and video clips have been used thus far.

In 2011, *Insight Thursday* engaged a video cameraman to introduce a new style for summing up the session’s highlights. Sharply edited video clips now preserve the essence of the discussions and share them with those who missed the seminar. Staff on mission are known to watch these clips upon their return. The video clips, together with the speakers’ biodata and presentation materials, are published and archived in the *Insight Thursday* website.

### Upshots

In ADB, *Insight Thursday* has become a familiar fixture. Every Thursday, staff gather in ADB’s knowledge hub/ library in expectation of another lively discussion.



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One positive impact is the mainstreaming of a regular forum for exploring new strategies and development trends in Asia and the Pacific. Another is the continuing enthusiasm of speakers to share their knowledge. When the topics covered have significant bearing on ADB’s work, for example, the results of the Economic Forum in Davos or the latest negotiations on replenishment of the Asian Development Fund, staff have also been known to track the discussions even after the seminar. And various presenters have been asked to explore possible cooperation after their stint with the series.

*Insight Thursday* continues to seek ways to further improve the series. For instance, gender balance and speaker diversity are issues of primary consideration. The series to date has had over 50 sessions under its name, with a roughly 67%–33% breakdown in favor of male speakers and 71%–29% breakdown in favor of internal staff speakers. This already shows a big jump from 2010 records, where only 27% of the speakers were women and 8% came from organizations other than ADB.

Efforts are now under way to further improve the balance in both, and ensure that *Insight Thursday* remains a platform to quickly and easily showcase out-of-the box knowledge and expertise.



*Insight Thursday* presents a diverse mix of speakers and topics.

### For further information, contact

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