

Knowledge Management Challenge

Fire Management Learning Network (CAMAFU)

Year, Country Established:

2002, Mexico

Stated Purpose: The mission of CAMAFU's parent network, IMAC, is: "To improve biodiversity conservation efforts in Mexico through strengthening the performance of conservation organizations and practitioners."

Organization Type: Civil Society Organization, registered under Mexican Natural Conservation Fund (Fondo Mexicano para la Conservacion de la Naturaleza, A.C.—FMCN)

Annual Budget 2006: US\$63K for network operations (part of Fire Management Program at FMCN which has budget of ~\$250,000 per year).

Paid Fulltime Staff: 20-22 at FMCN; 6 at IMAC; and ~2-2.5 FTEs working on CAMAFU network

Executive Director ("CAMAFU Community Manager"): Jennifer Morfin

Members: 32 organizations involved at organizational level; over 236 individuals registered and involved on CAMAFU interactive website.

Having participated as the coordinator of one of the most successful experiences of Learning Communities in Mexico has giving me the chance and opportunities to understand how networks function - within a knowledge management framework, to better knowledge map its members and stakeholders and to promote knowledge exchange amongst them.

The opportunity to participate in Learning or Communities Communities of Practice (CoPs) of networking and to search for different options of how to get a better results and thus effectiveness on the ground and in face-to face events and online has been very valuable to my personal and professional expertise.

From 2002-2008 I had the opportunity to coordinate a tipping point Learning Community for improving forest fire management in Mexico. In 1998, Mexico suffered some of the worst forest fire seasons in its history. In response,

several Mexican institutions in collaboration with the US Forest Service and USAID launched a fire management and restoration initiative. The Mexican fire management community of practice (CAMAFU)¹ was started in 2002 to strengthen the capacity of participating organizations. CAMAFU was one of several CoPs which were embedded within the broader Mexican Conservation Learning Network².

CAMAFU benefited from a clearly defined purpose within the domain of Mexican forest fire management. It evolved over the years in size and in its focus on specific practices. The CoP cultivated a diverse membership of approximately 32 organizations and 236 individuals, combining participants from national agencies, NGOs and local communities.

¹ *Learning Community for Fire Management (CAMAFU) Rating Report*. ForeignAid Ratings, LLC. 2006

<http://tinyurl.com/pe48ky>

² www.imacmexico.org

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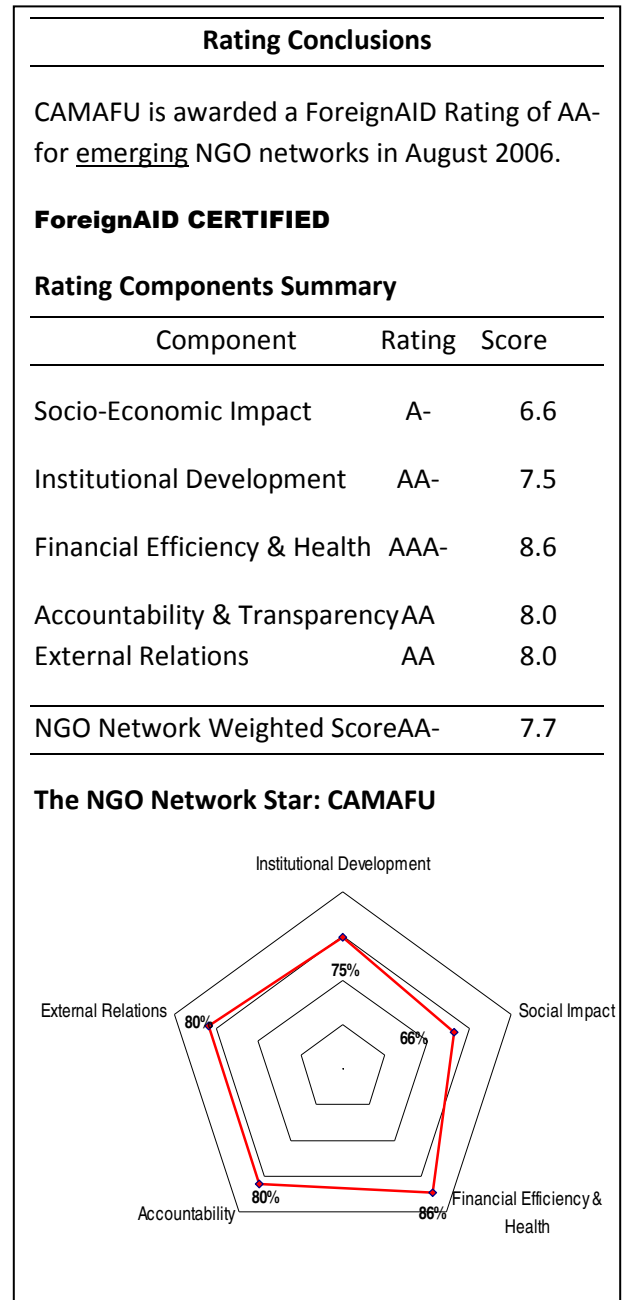
One of the big strengths of this CoP was its regional cluster strategy within Mexico that strengthened cohesion of the community, promoted familiarity and trust, and increased collaboration around shared regional activities. This approach provided clear benefits that motivated participants.

Methodology

Since the beginning, in 2002, CAMAFU was created with the participatory tool design with Pact's methodology of Organizational Capacity Assessment (OCA). Pact's unique methodology for organizational capacity assessment and strengthening (OCA) helps organizations anticipate and overcome the greatest barriers to organizational change and growth. Through a guided self-assessment and planning process, organizations reflect upon their performance, and select the tools and strategies they need to build capacity and broaden impact. Pact's OCA is the product of ten years of research and field practice in partnership with the Education Development Center and USAID's Office of Private & Voluntary Cooperation. Hundreds of local and international NGOs, private-sector corporations, and municipal governments around the world have used our methodology.

OCA is a four-staged process that includes:

- Participatory tool design that empowers organizations to define the critical factors that influence their performance and to identify relevant indicators for evaluating their competency.
- Guided self-assessment that leads employees, board members, and constituents through structured discussions followed by individual scoring on a series of rigorous performance indicators.



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- Data-guided action planning that provides organizations with an opportunity to interpret the self-assessment data and set change strategies most appropriate to their environment.
- Reassessment for continual learning that allows organizations to monitor change, track the effectiveness of their capacity-building efforts, and integrate new learning as their needs change and capabilities increase.

So the organizations that chose to would be reassessed periodically to monitor their change and their place. It was the first time that OCA's were used to measure the different capacities of heterogeneous organizations within a network.

Nowadays, I have been working as a facilitator of face-to-face and online CoPs in Mexico in different topics. While networks have always been around, a more focused practice of network effectiveness is only just emerging. It brings together a range of well established practices, like community organizing, multi-stakeholder negotiations, and organizational development,³ with evolving knowledge of social network theory and a growing base of experience in using new communications technologies to coordinate and collaborate for social impact. At present, practitioners of network effectiveness tend to ground their work within one of the above disciplines and its associated toolkit; yet, they are often working toward similar goals of network or inter-organizational effectiveness.

Knowledge mapping refers to a process that identifies knowledge residing within an organization, or among a set of organizations. It highlights and organizes knowledge assets, such as documents or subject matter experts, so that people may more quickly and comprehensively appreciate key knowledge resources that exist, learn where to find the people who can offer their expertise, and understand the gaps to bridge.

Notable tips from CAMAFU:

Invest early in participatory knowledge mapping to identify priority interests, existing relationships and potential contributions. Engage members with updates and contacts that respond to their needs and connect them with relevant peers.

Reduce costs, increase visibility and sustainability by embedding the CoP within an existing learning network or organization when possible.

Anchor the CoP with a Web site and encourage use by sending regular e-mail newsletters highlighting valuable content. CAMAFU blended its private face-to-face events with public access to Web resources resulting in more than 500,000 visits.

In terms of network effectiveness, we can say that are not widely used criteria for defining or assessing it. As with organizational effectiveness, network effectiveness is best defined

³ The longer list of practices – many of which overlap– that feed into the evolving practice of network effectiveness includes: movement building, community organizing, multistakeholder negotiations and dialogic processes, organizational development, social psychology and citizen engagement.

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in relation to the network's unique outcomes and context. That said, it is possible to outline a common set of characteristics for many healthy networks including⁴:

Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clarity of purpose• Outcomes-orientation• Delivers valued outcomes to network members
Membership & participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Trust; many and strong relationships between members• Shared values with room for disagreement / divergent opinion• Engagement strategies for formal and informal members• High levels of participant engagement
Governance, strategy, and structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Balance of top down and bottom up logic• Openness—to new ideas and new participation, as appropriate• Governing body keeps the network relevant to members• Decision making is transparent
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leadership with “network mindset” (e.g., external/systems level focus, facilitative, connector, opportunity seeking, governs through trust vs. control, pushes power to the edges, strong self knowledge, etc.)
Communications & technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Robust communications grid designed to meet members’ needs• Ample shared space—on-line and in-person
Management of resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ability to tap excess capacity – talent, access, money• Balance of members’ expectations and networks needs—a shared “bargain”
Measurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mechanisms for learning capture/storytelling• Ability to gather and act on feedback• Robust approach toward impact assessment

Therefore, a process of selecting the adequate items to measure each network's effectiveness is needed.

Recommended reading if you wish to have more details

- [Organizational Development Traits of Successful NGO Networks](#)

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⁴ PraxisNote 16 Communities of Practice: Lessons from Latin America. Interac 2005 <http://tinyurl.com/olo8mx>